

**Daily God Walk  
The Christ Life**

**Commands of Christ  
And His Apostles  
Volume One**

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International Version (NIV). All other translations used  
will be credited using these abbreviations:

(KJV) – King James Version

(NKJV) – New King James Version

(TLB) – The Living Bible

(TM) – The Message

(AMP) – The Amplified Bible

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Day One

## *Repent, for the Kingdom is Near*

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said, “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” – Mark 1:14-15

Jesus didn't officially begin his public ministry until John the Baptist was put into prison. When he did begin preaching he continued the same theme that John preached; repent for the kingdom of God (or heaven) is near.

The ministry of John focused on the people preparing for the kingdom of heaven to be revealed. When Jesus began preaching he was making evident what John was preaching. That is, he was demonstrating the kingdom of heaven to the people. His message was that it was time for the people to totally turn to God and humbly allow him to bring them into his kingdom.

When Jesus preached, “The time has come... Repent and believe the good news,” he was calling the people out from their tradition and from their sin. He was giving them an invitation to a new life.

We must be sure that the people we invite to receive Christ understand that they are being called to turn away from their old way of living (repentance) and turn toward Christ. The effect of coming to Christ is that we who have lived for ourselves now live for the kingdom of God.

The word “repent” carries with it a connotation of humility. We are repenting of self, self-will, self-direction and all things self; and we are turning toward

Christ. Humility is a primary component of forsaking ourselves and turning to God.

Peter instructs us, “All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble’ ” (1 Peter 5:5).

I echo the command of Christ, “Repent,” and add to it, “Turn away from serving yourself and turn toward serving the kingdom of God.”

***Prayer:*** Lord, grant me the grace to continue in repentance, turning away from self and turning toward you. Amen.

***Message:*** The word “repent” carries with it a connotation of humility. We are repenting of self, self-will, self-direction and all things self; and we are turning toward Christ. Humility is a primary component of forsaking ourselves and turning to God.

***Affirmation:*** I am committed to a lifestyle of repentance. That is, I am daily turning away from self and turning to Christ.

***Reflection:*** What does repenting have to do with participating in the kingdom of God? Give some thought to what it means to live out a repentance, or repenting, lifestyle.

***My Thoughts:***

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Day Two

## *Christ Calls: "Follow Me"*

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him. - Matthew 4:18-19

Those who would become his disciples must have been very impressed by what they saw in Jesus for when he called to them to follow him they immediately abandoned their fishing nets and boats to follow him.

Jesus was not asking them to take a vacation to follow him for a little while; he was asking them to make a life changing decision to follow him for a lifetime.

These were fishermen and they understood about the process of catching fish, but they were intrigued and challenge by the offer of Jesus to follow him. He told them that if they followed him he would change their occupation. They would still be fishermen, but now they would be fishers of men.

When I was a child I heard that call to become a fisher of men. At 13 I had a dream about the war which ended the world as we know it. I remember that the whole world was destroyed and I awoke with the thought that all those people died and didn't know Jesus.

At 16 I received a definite call to preach the gospel and responded. It was in a prayer time that God spoke to me about preaching the gospel as I prayed for hours. That call has driven my life for over 50 years.

I wonder if you have ever heard the master call, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." It is an honor to represent Christ and his kingdom, but it is also an awesome responsibility. We are given the responsibility of presenting the gospel to a world which has a dying hope and does not know him.

Can you hear him call you to follow him?

**Prayer:** Lord, call men and women to be fishers of men. Amen.

**Message:** It is an honor to represent Christ and his kingdom, but it is also an awesome responsibility. We are given the responsibility of presenting the gospel to a world which has a dying hope and does not know him.

**Affirmation:** I accept the honor and responsibility of being a messenger of the kingdom of God and I am committed to bringing the hope of this message to a world that is dying without hope.

**Reflection:** The call of Christ to "Follow me," is extended to all who will hear his voice, but following him is a different journey for all of us. Have you heard Christ call you to follow him? What does that look like to you and how has his call affected your life?

**My Thoughts:**

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Day Three

## *Rejoice and Be Glad When You Are Persecuted*

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven. - Matthew 5:11-12

I get emails from a group which monitors the persecution of Christians around the world and it is moving to read of the way believers in Christ are treated in some countries. What is most amazing about this is the attitude of the believers.

Persecuted believers are not bitter toward their persecutors but rather they pray for them and bless them. Sometimes their persecutors are even converted because of the love shown them.

Jesus told us to rejoice when we are persecuted. That is hard if we are thinking about the ones who persecute us, but when we think of our great example, Jesus himself, how he not only accepted severe persecution with grace but from the cross he cried out, "Forgive them, for they don't know what they do."

Jesus is also our example in how we should endure hardship and persecution. Hebrews 12:2 instructs us, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame." Even in his pain Jesus saw the joy.

None us have endured what Jesus endured and we should rejoice because of the joy which is before us. Those enduring circumstances in countries which persecute, torture and kill believers will tell you that persecution isn't fun and it isn't easy, but endured with grace and the hope of eternity, there is joy.

We have often heard the quote, “The joy of the Lord is my strength,” but few know the source of that quote. It comes from the book of Nehemiah when the people of God were under extreme persecution.

The enemies of the kingdom of God are deliberately trying to hinder God’s work and our attitude will have an effect on how successful they will be. I challenge you to rejoice because we’ve read the last chapter and we know how the story ends.

**Prayer:** Lord, help me to rejoice even in suffering and grant me the grace to bless those who persecute me. In Jesus name, amen.

**Message:** The enemies of the kingdom of God are deliberately trying to hinder God’s work and our attitude will have an effect on how successful they will be. I challenge you to rejoice because we’ve read the last chapter and we know how the story ends.

**Affirmation:** I know that when I live the life of faith Christ taught I will be insulted and persecuted, but I am prepared to accept that in order to be the person God has called me to be.

**Reflection:** Here in America we know little of persecution for our faith. We may be insulted, or denied certain positions, but we will probably not be tortured or killed. Carefully examine your commitment to Christ and the kingdom of God to see if you are prepared to sacrifice all to follow him.

**My Thoughts:**

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Day Four

## *Let Your Light Shine*

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. - Matthew 5:14-16

God has placed a light inside each one of us and that light is to influence the world for Christ. John writes, "In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it" (John 1:4-5).

It is the life of Christ, which is the light to the world, which the world needs to see through us. How does the light shine through us? Jesus is telling us that our light shines through the good deeds we do.

Jesus speaks of a city on a hill whose light shines in all directions. He also speaks of a lamp being set on a stand so it will cast light on all who are near. Then he tells us that our light is shining in all directions when we are doing good deeds.

It is no accident that most of the hospitals in impoverished nations were built by Christian organizations. It is also true that most of the wells dug in rural areas of impoverished nations are dug by Christian organizations. Good deeds are the light of the Christian faith.

What about yourself. Are you actively involved in letting the light within you shine through being involved in community projects? We have a man in our ministry who was a drug addict for 35 years, then the light was ignited inside him. Now he volunteers at the

senior center several days a week and he goes out evangelizing in the community, and does his light shine bright!

There are more opportunities for your light to shine than you will ever be able to take advantage of. I suggest you take your light out from under the bowl and let it shine. Shine for Jesus and you will get an inner glow that will warm your soul.

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, forgive me for hiding my light and give me the grace to let it shine through good works. In your name, amen.

**Message:** Are you actively involved in letting the light within you shine through being involved in community projects? There are more opportunities for your light to shine than you will ever be able to take advantage of. I suggest you take your light out from under the bowl and let it shine. Shine for Jesus and you will get an inner glow that will warm your soul.

**Affirmation:** I have been given a light that is to bring light into a dark world. I will light my light shine.

**Reflection:** If our light shines by doing good deeds I ask, "How bright is your light shining?" Think of some ways that you can let your light shine in the community where you live.

**My Thoughts:**

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Day Five

## *How is the Law Fulfilled in Me?*

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished

- Matthew 5:17-18

It is true that we are in the age of grace and we are not under bondage to the law; but it is also true that the law is still a standard by which we can measure our walk of faith. Jesus affirms that in this passage.

Jesus goes on to say, “Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven” (v19).

Is there then a contradiction between law and grace? Not necessarily. If we are still trying to obey the law to become righteous then the law has become a bondage to us; but if we are basking in the favor (grace) of God by faith in Christ then the nature of Christ is in us and by our new Christ nature the righteousness of Christ (the law) lives through us.

In grace we are not freed from the principles of the law but God’s law has now been written on our hearts. God’s grace has freed us from the bondage of the law by imprinting his will (or law) in our new nature.

In the next verse of this passage Jesus warns the people that their righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees or they will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven (v20). The Pharisees were

“clean” on the outside for everyone to see, but on the inside they were filled with greed, avarice, pride and a whole host of sins.

The only way we can be more righteous than the Pharisees is by the grace of God released to us through faith in Christ. We are made righteous and live righteously through Christ.

**Prayer:** Father God, grant me the grace to surrender to your will and allow Holy Spirit to be my life guide. Amen.

**Message:** If we are still trying to obey the law to become righteous then the law has become a bondage to us; but if we are basking in the favor (grace) of God by faith in Christ then the nature of Christ is in us and by our new Christ nature the righteousness of Christ (the law) lives through us.

**Affirmation:** When my focus is on living out the law it becomes a burden I cannot carry; but, when I focus on walking with Christ his righteousness in me fulfills the law.

**Reflection:** Do you understand the difference between living to fulfill the law and living in the grace of God? Does being under grace exempt you from living a righteous life?

**My Thoughts:**

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Day Six

## *Be Reconciled to Your Brother (and Sister)*

If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother then come and offer your gift. - Matthew 5:23-24

Among the sins most often experienced in the body of Christ are the sins against one another. We are all too quick to require others to live by our standard while being more tolerant with our own inconsistencies.

In this passage Jesus is giving as a command the instruction, "Go and be reconciled to your brother." The problem so many of us have with that is we have taken an offense against our brother for what we perceive to be an egregious deed. If he will come to us we would gladly forgive him (maybe), but go to him? Not on your life. So the offense becomes an obstacle to God's grace to us.

Jesus gives us this command in the context of teaching about dealing with our anger toward others. This section of the Sermon on the Mount begins with, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca' [or fool... will be in danger of the fire of hell."

Something we should notice about this passage is that our peace does not depend upon how the offender receives our attempt to reconcile; it is about our attitude to him. If we carry the offense then it is only

hurting ourselves. Our faith will not be complete if we carry an offense toward another and the favor of God is hindered by our own unforgiveness.

I had carried an offense for a person once that was affecting every aspect of my life. It was a burden to me until I contacted the person and confessed my offense to him. When I did that I was released from the heaviness that had come over me.

I give you this challenge today: If you have any offence against anyone go to them, confess and ask forgiveness for carrying the offence. Try it - you will like the results.

**Prayer:** Lord, grant me grace to forgive others their offences.

**Message:** Our peace does not depend upon how the offender receives our attempt to reconcile; it is about our attitude to him. If we carry the offense then it is only hurting ourselves. Our faith will not be complete if we carry an offense toward another and the favor of God is hindered by our own unforgiveness.

**Affirmation:** My concern is not how, or even whether, the other person accepts my forgiveness. My concern is having my own conscience cleared and my relationship with God made right.

**Reflection:** One of the fears we have in asking forgiveness, or of giving forgiveness, is that our efforts will be rejected and we will be embarrassed. Have you asked forgiveness in the past and been rebuffed or rejected? How did you handle that?

**My Thoughts:**

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## Day Seven

### *It's the Thought That Counts*

You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. - Matthew 5:27-29

Jesus had been teaching on the spirit of the law and not just the letter. To begin this portion of his message on the hillside he chose to give the Pharisees as an example. They were looked at as being the holiest of the holy because of their rigid adherence to the law. Jesus seemed to make the way even harder by declaring that a person must be more righteous than the Pharisees if they were going to enter the kingdom of heaven.

The people were probably asking among themselves how they could ever be that righteous. Then Jesus began to explain what he meant. He spoke of murder and told them if they had murder in their heart they weren't worthy of the kingdom. He followed that with our passage for today which virtually said that if you have adultery in your heart you are just as guilty as the one who commits the act.

When they heard that teaching they were probably more distressed than ever for they all had had things in their heart that would keep them out of the kingdom. How often have we been so angry with someone that we wished bad things to happen to them. And how many of us have looked at a beautiful woman and wondered what it would be like to be with her. Jesus was asking

something of his followers that is impossible in our own abilities.

Remember, Jesus wasn't just giving a new law, he was getting his followers ready for a new relationship with God. He was preparing them to be born again; born into a new world, a new kingdom, the kingdom of God. The only way we can live up to the standard Jesus taught is by allowing him into our heart and spend time with him keeping our thoughts right and our hearts right.

***Prayer:*** Lord, my thoughts aren't always pure and I need your grace to keep my heart from sinning against you. Amen.

***Message:*** Jesus wasn't just giving a new law, he was getting his followers ready for a new relationship with God. He was preparing them to be born again; born into a new world, a new kingdom, the kingdom of God. The only way we can live up to the standard Jesus taught is to allowing him into our heart and spend time with him keeping our thoughts right and our hearts right.

***Affirmation:*** I am committed to keeping my thoughts right and to keeping my heart right.

***Reflection:*** Give some thought to the idea that we are not only held accountable for our actions but for the intent of our heart as well.

***My Thoughts:***

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Day Eight

## *Yes's and No's That Mean What They Say*

Do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes', and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one. – Matthew 5:36-37

Don't you usually get just a little suspicious when someone often says, "It's the truth I swear it"? Another cause for concern is the person who says, "I want to be honest with you." When we hear that we tend to wonder whether they were being honest before.

Jesus is trying to tell us in this passage that our word should be our bond. There used to be a time when two people came to agreement over an issue and a simple handshake sealed the deal. Today there are many unscrupulous people who will think, "No one saw us shake hands and it will be my word against his."

I was once in a business deal with a very wise man. He told me that contracts are just words for people to fight over in court. We entered a pretty complicated business deal with a simple one page statement of what we expected from each other. That deal extended over a period of about three years and each of us modified it a few times with the other persons' agreement. When the deal was done we were both happy that the other proved to be a person of integrity.

Jesus is calling us to live in such a way that we don't have to couch our yes's and our no's in a bunch of language which will give us an out at some point. If we always mean what we say then in a time of questioning those who know us will know that we are telling the truth.

I have had friends, some of them have been believers, that you could not trust. When they made you a promise you just accepted it with a “wait and see” attitude. Jesus is giving us a warning that it is better not to enter into an agreement than to come to agreement then later change your mind.

Don't equivocate or vacillate. If you aren't ready to say “yes” or “no” then don't say anything at all. Then your yes will truly mean yes and your no will truly mean no.

***Prayer:*** Lord, help me that my yes's and no's will just that. Amen.

***Message:*** Jesus is calling us to live in such a way that we don't have to couch our yes's and our no's in a bunch of language which will give us an out at some point. If we always mean what we say then in a time of questioning those who know us will know that we are telling the truth.

***Affirmation:*** I think before I speak and only speak what I know to be true so that when I say "Yes" or "No" others know it to be true.

***Reflection:*** Speaking the truth every time you speak will give others confidence in what you say even when they don't agree with you.

***My Thoughts:***

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Day Nine

## *Carry the Load One More Mile*

You have heard that it was said, “Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.” But I tell you, “Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. - Matthew 5:38-42

This is one of the most challenging passages in the New Testament. It goes against everything we know in the natural realm in which we live. We are taught to defend ourselves against the evil person and don't give them a chance to take advantage of you. Jesus blows those ideas away when he tells us to turn the other cheek, give more than is asked for and carry a load further than is expected.

All of us tend to agree with this from the position of, “Yeah, but...” Usually “Yeah but” is followed with, “What do you do when...” And another one is, “But you don't know what they did to me.” All of those statements are leading up to the conclusion that those rules don't always apply to me, and besides that, who could ever live that way.

Our problem with these verses is the same problem we have in all of the commands of Christ. To follow each one means that we must lay our own ego down, realize that our lives are hid in Christ and take the high road for him.

The reference Jesus made to someone forcing a believer to go with a mile he was addressing the

authority of a Roman soldier. In that day soldier could conscript a civilian to carry his armor and other things for a mile, but no more. Jesus was saying that when your enemy requires something of you give him more than he is asking. That is certainly a hard thing.

The only way we can do what Jesus asked is to be born again. We must be born of his Spirit and walk in his Spirit to fulfill these most difficult tasks.

**Prayer:** Lord, give me the grace to lay my own ego down and take upon myself the nature of Christ. In Jesus name, amen.

**Message:** Our problem with these verses is the same problem we have in all of the commands of Christ. To follow each one means that we must lay our own ego down, realize that our lives are hid in Christ and take the high road for him. The only way we can do what Jesus asked is to be born again.

**Affirmation:** The only way I can turn the other cheek and walk the extra mile is if I am living and walking in the Spirit as a born again follower of Christ.

**Reflection:** These commands of Christ go against our ego and our natural man. Give some thought to how you can live out this passage.

**My Thoughts:**

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Day Ten

## *Are They Your Enemies if You Love Them?*

You have heard that it was said “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.

- Matthew 5:43-45

I think Jesus was presenting a greater truth here than just to love our enemies. O, yes, we are being told to love our enemies, but just what does that mean? If we are praying for them and we love them, even as we are to love our neighbor, can they really be our enemy?

Jesus gave what he called a new command when he told the disciples to love one another. He told them to love one another as he had loved them and that love would be the mark by which the world would know that they were true disciples of Christ (John 13:34-35).

If we are to love one another as Christ loves us, and we are to love our neighbor as ourselves, and we are to love our enemies and those who persecute us, then where is there room to despise or hate anyone?

The overriding principle here is that we are to have a heart of love for all people at all times. How can we do that? We can't! At least we can't in our natural person, but we are not called to be like the natural people around us. We are called to live in the supernatural realm of the Spirit of God. We are called to love the world even as Christ loved the world.

Jesus seemed to be making this a litmus test for being a son of the Father. He said, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be sons of your father.” Could it really be true that the Father is saying we must love our enemies, and those

who persecute us if we are to be his sons? It certainly looks that way.

How do we love our enemies? We start by praying a lot. There is a term we used in years gone by that is applicable here. It is simply this; we need to pray through over it. What does that mean? It means we pray over the issue until we have the peace of God about it and we can then live it.

You have been misused and persecuted by others and so have I, but we don't have the right to carry hard feelings about that if we are going to be a child of God. We've got to take it to the cross and pray through over it so we can once again love our enemy.

***Prayer:*** Lord, immerse me in your love so I can love my enemies.

***Message:*** We are to have a heart of love for all people at all times. How can we do that? We can only do that by God's grace. We are called to love the world as Christ loved the world.

***Affirmation:*** I can only love the world of people around me as Christ loves them by submitting my will to the lordship of Christ.

***Reflection:*** Give some thought to the question of how you love your enemy and if you can love your enemy will he still be your enemy?

***My Thoughts:***

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Day Eleven

## *Be Perfect As Your Father is Perfect*

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. - Matthew 5:48

You, therefore, must be perfect [growing into complete maturity of godliness in mind and character, having reached the proper height of virtue and integrity], as your heavenly Father is perfect. - Matthew 5:48 (AMP)

It can be a bit intimidating to look at the concept of being perfect, knowing that God expects perfection from us, and feeling so inadequate to reach that objective. I can remember reading this passage as a young man and becoming discouraged because I knew that I could never measure up to the standard of perfection.

Have you felt that way? If so you are in good company. I think most of us have had that feeling. That is why I added the Amplified Bible rendering of this text. This translation sheds a little more light on the word “perfect.”

The Greek word translated “perfect” here is *telios*. *Telios* refers to mind and character and applies to one who has reached the proper height of virtue and integrity. *Telios* is not about whatever human flaws we may have; it is about whether we have allowed Holy Spirit to build godly character in us. Perfection in God’s eyes isn’t about performance but about what is in our heart.

The paragraph which concludes with this verse is teaching about how we should respond to those who would normally be looked at as our enemy. As long as we think of others as our enemy we are thinking like

the world thinks and we are not thinking as a perfect (mature in virtue and integrity) man would think.

Jesus is raising the bar to a very high standard for those who would be considered the children of God. I for one find the bar too high to reach in my natural man; I must have Holy Spirit filling me constantly to be able to reach that standard. I suspect it may be the same with you so I challenge you to seek God until he gives you that level of spiritual mature so that you will be perfect.

**Prayer:** Lord, help me to become mature in virtue and integrity. Amen.

**Message:** *Telios* [perfect] is not about whatever human flaws we may have; it is about whether we have allowed Holy Spirit to build godly character in us. Perfection in God's eyes isn't about performance but about what is in our heart.

**Affirmation:** I know I am flawed humanity, but my heart is made pure by the grace of God and sees my heart.

**Reflection:** Does having an understanding of grace and the meaning of perfect as explained in this devotion give us the right to live as we choose and still be "perfect" in the eyes of God? If we are perfect in our heart how will that be shown in our life?

**My Thoughts:**

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## *Secret Acts of Righteousness*

Be careful not to do your “acts of righteousness” before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

- Matthew 6:1

It is easy for spiritual pride to drive us to do good deeds so others can see how spiritual we are, and that is what Jesus is warning about in this passage. This verse paints with a broad brush, but the succeeding verse narrows the picture a bit.

Jesus follows this verse with teaching on 1)giving, 2)praying, and 3)fasting. In these three disciplines, and I'm sure the principle applies to other areas as well, Jesus is warning us that we must be careful that we don't do these things to be seen by others. In fact they should be done, if possible, without others even knowing you did them.

It would be good to read this entire chapter down through verse 18 to get a good picture of how we should do these things. Here is a summary:

- On Giving: When you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do... But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing (v2-3).
- On Praying: When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men... But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your

Father who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (v5-7)

- On Fasting: When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do... But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting (v16-18).

**Prayer:** Lord, Help me to do good works because it is the right thing to do and not to be seen by others. In Jesus name. Amen.

**Message:** Jesus follows this verse with teaching on 1)giving, 2)praying, and 3)fasting. In these three disciplines, and I'm sure the principle applies to other areas as well, Jesus is warning us that we must be careful that we don't do these things to be seen by others. In fact they should be done, if possible, without others even knowing you did them.

**Affirmation:** When I am doing acts of devotion I do them unto the Lord and not to be seen or heard by others.

**Reflection:** It would be good to carefully consider the message that Jesus is trying to convey in these verses we examine in this devotion. What is the application you should make for yourself?

**My Thoughts:**

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Day Thirteen

## *Store Up Heavenly Treasures*

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

- Matthew 6:19-21

At first glance this passage would seem to indicate that we should not accumulate money or things, and that may be the primary message here. But, it appears that the conclusion of the passage puts it all in perspective: “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

It doesn't appear that Jesus is talking about having money, or things, but he is talking about things which have us. If making and accumulating money is king in our life then Jesus is not king because Jesus followed this passage with, “No one 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” (v24).

Notice that between verse 21 and 24 Jesus inserted a short teaching on light and dark. He is saying that our eyes are the gateway to our heart, but if our eyes are darkened then our heart cannot see the light. Isn't it interesting that he inserted these verses into a teaching on our attitude toward wealth?

In Matthew 13 Jesus told the story of four types of ground in which the farmer sowed seeds. In verse 22 he says, “The one who received the seed that fell among

the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.”

It may be time to examine ourselves to see whether we have been storing up treasures in heaven or if we are using our time, talent and resources to store up a wealth of things that are doomed to decay. It is certainly something to think about - and to pray about too!

***Prayer:*** Lord, help me to be careful that I do not allow my heart to become entangled with the things of this world. Amen.

***Message:*** It may be time to examine ourselves to see whether we have been storing up treasures in heaven or if we are using our time, talent and resources to store up a wealth of things that are doomed to decay. It is certainly something to think about - and to pray about too!

***Affirmation:*** I work daily to keep my eyes on the prize lest I become distracted by the treasures of this world which are passing away.

***Reflection:*** Why do you think Jesus inserted a teaching on light and dark sandwiched between treasures of the heart and who you are serving?

***My Thoughts:***

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Day Fourteen

## *Seek the Kingdom of God First*

Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. - Matthew 6:33-34

There is a lot a person could worry about today. The economy is in trouble; unemployment is at a high point; government seems to be unable to change the course of things; the world seems about to go up in flames as whole regions are at war. And besides all of that we are using up our natural resources at an incredible rate with little concern for future generations. Add to that the threat of global warming and we have plenty to worry about.

In the middle of all that Jesus said, “Do not worry saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear.’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them” (v31-32). He goes on to tell us that when we seek his kingdom first we will not only see the kingdom of heaven being manifest but he gives us the rest also.

My wife and I have been in the group of people who live from paycheck to paycheck so long that it seems to be a normal way of life. We do not begrudge that at all because it is the lifestyle we have chosen. When we were first married we promised each other that the kingdom of God would come first in our lives and anything we did to make money would be considered the provision of God for food, clothing, housing and other necessities of life. It hasn't always been easy, but it has always been blessed.

The danger of living this way is that if we aren't truly living by faith then any misstep could be disastrous. The blessing is that as we live by faith God always provides. I would much rather live not knowing what I would do if we didn't get the next paycheck and trusting God to provide than to live in abundance and lose my sense of dependence upon God for provision.

Are you seeking God's kingdom first? Or does trusting God come after you have secured your food, clothing, etc.? It might be time to give that some prayerful consideration.

**Prayer:** Lord, grant me the grace to trust you I all things. Amen.

**Message:** Are you seeking God's kingdom first? Or does trusting God come after you have secured your food, clothing, etc.? It might be time to give that some prayerful consideration.

**Affirmation:** Trusting God begins with the prayer, "Give me this day my daily bread." Even when I have food in my pantry I still must give God praise and depend upon him for provision.

**Reflection:** Many of us struggle with the fine line between trusting God for our resources and being irresponsible with the abilities God has given us. Each of us must determine what that means to us. What does that mean to you?

**My Thoughts:**

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Day Fifteen

## *Here Comes the Judge – And He’s Not You!*

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

- Matthew 7:1-2

In my early years of ministry I was in a very judgmental group. Oh, they claimed not to be. In fact they would say something like, “I’m not judging, I’m just inspecting the fruit” (from Matthew 7:16, “By their fruit you will recognize them.”). Then from there they would begin to point out all the flaws in the “fruit” they were inspecting.

Don’t get me wrong. I do believe in living a separated life and I do believe in holiness, but as long as I am not violating the scripture, don’t judge me. And, if I am violating scripture, don’t judge me but pray for me and encourage me.

Jesus gave us a very good reason not to judge others. He said, “In the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. I take that to mean if, for example, our standard is the 10 commandments and we judge another for their failure in any one of those, then we must expect to be judged by that same standard. However, Jesus adds another dimension to the process.

Just a few verses before our text, in chapter five, Jesus adds another dimension to the law. He teaches us that if we have it in our heart we are just as guilty as the one who does it. When you judge another for anger and rage, remember, if you have hatred in your heart you are just as guilty, even though you haven’t said a word. Don’t judge others unless you are ready to be judged.

I have noticed that judging others has two motivators. One is to justify ourselves. If someone else is guilty of something then that makes us feel better about our own sin. The other is that judging assumes the motive of another is not just. If I judge you because you don't look like me, or dress like me, or talk like me then I am also judging that your motive is wrong which makes your heart wrong. Think about it the next time you are tempted to judge another.

**Prayer:** Lord, grant me the grace to judge myself and not others.

**Message:** Judging others has two motivators. One is to justify ourselves. If someone else is guilty of something then that makes us feel better about our own sin. The other is that judging assumes the motive of another is not just. If I judge you because you don't look like me, or dress like me, or talk like me then I am also judging that your motive is wrong which makes your heart wrong.

**Affirmation:** I do not attempt to justify myself by judging you and I do not judge you by assigning motives to your actions. I will pray for you and I ask that you pray for me.

**Reflection:** Think about it: we are spared from the responsibility of having to judge others. We are simply called to love and encourage one another praying for those who are weak in the faith.

**My Thoughts:**

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Day Sixteen

## *Be Aware of Where You Invest Yourself*

Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.

- Matthew 7:6

Wisdom is more than knowing what to say but it is knowing when and to whom it is to be said. Unfortunately there are some people who don't know when to stop casting their pearls of wisdom before those who don't really care.

Wisdom is also knowing how to use your resources in a way which produces the most benefit. Studies have shown that most people who win large amounts of money in the lottery wind up in a few years right back where they came from, and sometimes worse.

Why is that? Because when given a chance at wealth they wind up becoming victims to dogs and pigs.

That happens so often to us in life. As we move from childhood into adolescence we are in essence given a winning lottery ticket. At that point most of us have another 60+ years ahead of us to use the resources handed to us at that point in life.

Some are saying, "What resources? I wasn't given anything when I was young." Oh, but yes you were given something. God has given you a sacred trust. You were given a mind. Your mind has the power to imagine and to dream. Your mind can develop plans which have the potential to make you as rich as your wildest dreams.

But, what happens to most of us? We get sidetracked. There are dogs of life which appeal to us

to give them that sacred trust and they will give you multiple returns in pleasure and worldly wealth. Then there are those indulgences which one by one trample on the pearls of our youth.

I challenge you, wherever you are in your life, and whatever you have left of your treasured trust, to submit it to God and trust his wisdom to guide you. He will lead you to invest your treasure in worthy projects which will produce the promised rewards of lasting peace and happiness in this life and in the life to come.

**Prayer:** Lord, grant me the grace of wisdom so that I will invest my treasure in things which will produce an eternal reward. Amen.

**Message:** Submit your hopes and dreams to God and trust his wisdom to guide you. He will lead you to invest your treasure in worthy projects which will produce the promised rewards of lasting peace and happiness in this life and in the life to come.

**Affirmation:** I am careful not to squander the resources with which I have been entrusted.

**Reflection:** What does it mean to give what is sacred to dogs and to throw our pearls to the pigs? This devotion teaches that God has given a sacred trust to each of us. What is that sacred trust and how can we best use it?

***My Thoughts:***

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Day Seventeen

## *Ask, Seek and Knock*

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

- Matthew 7:7-8

This passage has given hope to many, and to some who don't understand the full meaning it has been a discouragement. I say that because I have heard people say, "I asked, but I did not receive." What would be a proper application of this passage?

Let's look at some of the other passages where Jesus talks about prayer. In Luke 18:1-3 he implies that the answer to prayer must be diligently pursued. In the Luke 11 version of this event he prefaces the promise with the story of a man who received what he asked from a friend because of his persistent asking (5-8). Luke then gives the "ask, seek knock" narrative.

The message seems to be that the asking is more than just including a request when blessing our food at meal time. It appears that the message is ask first for the thing you need or desire, then seek until you find the door to your answer then knock until the door is opened. When the door is opened walk through it to receive your answer.

James captured this concept when he writes, "The earnest (heartfelt, continued) prayer of a righteous man makes tremendous power available [dynamic in its working]" (James 4:16 AMP). We can rest assured that God has our best interest at heart and that he will answer our heartfelt prayers when it is the best time and in the best way.

There are three major components to answered prayer. The first is the question, "Is this according to God's plan for my life?" The second is obedience to God. The third is a commitment to earnestly pursue the answer. When these components are lined up we can have the confidence that God will answer. John writes, "We have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands" (1 John 3:21-22).

**Prayer:** Lord, help me to be earnest and diligent in my praying so that I will ask, seek and knock until the answer comes. Amen.

**Message:** The message seems to be that the asking is more than just including a request when blessing our food at meal time. It appears that the message is ask first for the thing you need or desire, then seek until you find the door to your answer then knock until the door is opened. When the door is opened walk through it to receive your answer.

**Affirmation:** I have learned to ask God then seek him until he reveals the door to the answer then knock on the door until it is opened and the answer is given to me.

**Reflection:** Give some thought to the three components to answered prayer given in this devotion. First is the question, "Is this according to God's plan for my life?" The second consideration is obedience to God and the third is a commitment to earnestly pursue the answer.

**My Thoughts:**

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Day Eighteen

## *Do Good For Others*

Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

- Luke 6:31-32

In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.  
- Matthew 6:12

Our Scripture passage today records The Golden Rule as a command of Jesus. In our human nature we want others to treat us the way we want, in the nature of Christ we are commanded to treat others in the way we want to be treated.

Notice that Jesus said that if we can follow this command we will have fulfilled all of the law and the prophets.

Here are some practical suggestions to help us do that:

- ✓ Recognize how important others are. Every person has been created in the image of God and we are to respect them.
- ✓ Other people have all the rights we expect for ourselves - respect their rights.
- ✓ Do not allow gossip and slander to slant your opinion of others.
- ✓ Respect and protect the right of others to have personal property - don't envy what they have and don't take from them what is rightfully theirs.

- ✓ Protect the person and property of others when they are in crisis.
- ✓ When you see others in the way of danger warn them so they can avoid disaster.

After Cain killed his brother the Lord appeared to him and asked where his brother was. Cain responded, somewhat sarcastically, “Am I my brothers' keeper?” We know the answer to that question: A resounding yes! Jesus gave us the responsibility to look out for one another, even those we do not consider friends, because that is the way we would like to be treated.

**Prayer:** Lord, help me to treat others as you have treated me.

**Message:** The Golden Rule is a command of Jesus. In our human nature we want others to treat us the way we want; in the nature of Christ we are commanded to treat others in the way we want to be treated. Jesus gave us the responsibility to look out for one another, even those we do not consider friends, because that is the way we would like to be treated.

**Affirmation:** My attitude toward others is the same as I would hope others would have for me. I practice the Golden Rule.

**Reflection:** Consider the practical suggestions in this devotion that will help us to obey the Golden Rule. Remember the story of Cain and Able and the responsibility we have toward others.

**My Thoughts:**

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Day Nineteen

## *Two Ways – Your Choice*

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. – Matthew 7:13-14

It is easy to make the application of contrasting the sinful life with the righteous life, and that is certainly in this passage, but it is a bit more complex than that. Jesus is concluding his message we call Sermon on the Mount and he gives three comparisons from which we are to draw conclusions which will affect the way we live.

First is this idea of the broad and the narrow road. Is the broad road unrighteousness, or is it self-righteousness? A big part of this sermon is debunking the “righteousness” of the Pharisees. It looks like the narrow road he refers to is the road he has just been teaching about which concludes that the way to fulfilling the law is to treat others the way you would want to be treated.

The second comparison he makes is good fruit with bad fruit (v15-20). He is telling us that you can’t really understand who, or what kind of person one is, by their appearance. They may appear to be sheep but in fact may be wolves. The way to tell the difference is to examine the fruit of their lives. What is the effect of their life? Jesus told us that many will appear to be sold out believers, but in reality he doesn’t know them (v21-23).

The final comparison Jesus makes is between those who hear and follow his words, and those who hear and decide they can do it better their way (v24-27). Proverbs tells us that there is a way which looks good to a man, but the end of that way is disaster (Proverbs 14:12). Following Christ leads to life eternal.

Those who choose to follow the narrow road of the teachings of Jesus will be planted as trees of righteousness bearing much good fruit. They will be known of the Lord and their life's work will establish a legacy of truth which will not be destroyed by the storms of life. Which road will have you chosen?

**Prayer:** Lord, it is easy to fall into a pattern of doing things my way. Help me to follow your way. In Jesus name. Amen.

**Message:** Those who choose to follow the narrow road of the teachings of Jesus will be planted as trees of righteousness bearing much good fruit. They will be known of the Lord and their life's work will establish a legacy of truth which will not be destroyed by the storms of life.

**Affirmation:** I have chosen the narrow path because it leads to the greatest reward.

**Reflection:** Jesus spoke of a broad road and a narrow road. In your mind what does the broad road represent and what does the narrow road represent? How can we tell the difference between the broad road and the narrow road?

**My Thoughts:**

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Day Twenty

## *Beware of False Prophets*

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them.

- Matthew 7:15-16

Wolves in sheep's clothing. What an apt description of those who would come among the flock of God, looking like a sheep, sounding like a sheep, and by all appearances they are a sheep, but they are not. I have observed that some of these wolves don't even know they are wolves.

We once had a wolf among us who spread notices among all of our members that our doctrine was wrong and we weren't even qualified to be leaders. He did that, however, after he and his family had taken advantage of our kindness to the tune of several thousand dollars. He looked like a sheep but in fact he was a wolf.

Some wolves are not so obvious. They will spread malcontent by pointing out all the flaws in leadership and will say something like, "If I was the leader I would do it this way." They will take every morsel of information and spread it as truth whether it has a basis in truth or not.

The Apostle Paul speaks of such people in 2 Corinthians. He calls them false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:13). He was making reference to those who would come to the Gentile believers and tell them that they had not done enough to be saved. They told these believers that they must be converted to Judaism.

Paul saw those teachers as teaching another Jesus and another gospel. Today we have whole denominations of people who claim to be Christian yet the Jesus they speak of is not the Jesus we know from the Bible.

We must be careful unless we become deceived by some smooth talking seller of religion. Jesus also said of these deceiving wolves that regardless of the work they seem to have, on judgment day he will say, "I never knew you." Be careful not to be among them.

***Prayer:*** Lord, give me wisdom to discern between the true and the false - and give me the courage to choose the truth. Amen.

***Message:*** We must receive the words of Jesus as a warning and be careful unless we become deceived by some smooth talking seller of religion. Jesus also said of these deceiving wolves that regardless of the work they seem to have, on judgment day he will say, "I never knew you." We must be careful that we are not among them.

***Affirmation:*** I pray for discernment that I will not be deceived by wolves posing as sheep and I will guard the sheep to protect them from such posers.

***Reflection:*** Jesus declared, "Many will come in my name," and they certainly have come. There are many such false prophets on TV. Here are some things to look for in such false prophets: they promise a blessing if you give to them; their primary focus is "you will be blessed"; they often have a lavish lifestyle.

***My Thoughts:***

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Day Twenty One

## *Harvesters Needed*

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into this harvest field.” - Matthew 9:36-38

Among the frustrations of being rejected by the religious leaders and trying to break the traditions which had kept the Jews in bondage for so long, Jesus was also moved by the condition of the people. He saw that they felt harassed and helpless. He saw them as sheep without a shepherd.

The people were harassed by the Roman government which ruled over them as an occupying force. They were harassed by a religious system which put burdens of expectation upon them that no one could fulfill. And they were harassed by their own desires that drew them asway from God’s law.

In all of this they felt helpless to change. Every effort to raise themselves up to a new level of contentment and satisfaction in life left them feeling even more dejected and helpless.

Yes, they were indeed like sheep without a shepherd. Each of them wandered from one teacher to another with each one promising what they could not give and leaving the hopeful hopeless. All they needed was a shepherd, a guide.

It was in this atmosphere that Jesus cried out to his disciples, “Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” Jesus not only called his disciples to pray but he followed that prayer with an answer. In the very next verse, chapter 10 verse

1, Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. Verses 5-8 tell us that Jesus sent them out to heal the sick, cast out demons and preach that the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

We are still under the mandate to ask the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into our current harvest fields. But there is a warning: If you pray that prayer be prepared to be called to work in the harvest. If you aren't willing to go be careful what you pray.

**Prayer:** Lord, Send laborers into the fields which are now ripe for harvest and help me to be willing to be one of those laborers. In Jesus name.

**Message:** Moved by compassion Jesus cried out to his disciples, "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." We are still under the mandate to ask the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into our current harvest fields. But there is a warning: If you pray that prayer be prepared to be called to work in the harvest. If you aren't willing to go then be careful what you pray.

**Affirmation:** I too have been moved with compassion for the harassed, helpless, and lost. I have prayed for the Lord to send labors and he sent me.

**Reflection:** The world is the same today, only the names and faces have changed. There are still many who are harassed by the circumstances of life, helpless to change and wandering without a guide. Will you pray for this generation? Then will you be willing to enter the harvest fields?

**My Thoughts:**

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Day Twenty Two

## *Be Shrewd As Snakes and Innocent as Doves*

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard against men.

- Matthew 10:16-17

In this chapter of Matthew Jesus is sending his disciples out to minister throughout Judea. He is telling them to go from town to town healing, freeing people from their demons and preaching the kingdom of heaven is near.

He tells them to stay where they are welcomed, but if they are rejected they are to move on to the next place. Jesus tells them that if a house or a town rejects them that it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

Then he begins to warn them of the dangers they will face as they go preaching the message of the kingdom. Jesus warns that they are being sent as sheep among the wolves. They can expect to be turned over to the temple soldiers and be flogged (v17).

It is in this context that Jesus tells his disciples to be shrewd like snakes, but to be innocent like doves. What did he mean by being as shrewd as a snake? A characteristic of snakes is that you seldom know they are there until they strike. Snakes do not snarl and bark like a dog, or roar like a lion, but the first sign that they are near is often when their fangs sink into your flesh.

It isn't the attack of the snake Jesus is calling them to duplicate but it is the stealth of the snake. He is telling his disciples to be very wise in how they teach about the kingdom so that their preaching will have its greatest impact.

That admonition about snakes is countered by the instruction to maintain innocence even in the face of severe trial. Jesus was telling them to expect to be persecuted and questioned. He also told them that Holy Spirit would be with them and would speak through them, they must trust him in an innocent sort of way.

This passage calls us to examine the wisdom with which we speak about the kingdom and to examine whether we maintain the innocent nature of Holy Spirit when we present the gospel.

***Prayer:*** Lord, grant me the grace of wisdom coupled with innocence. In Jesus name. Amen.

***Message:*** It isn't the attack of the snake Jesus is calling them to duplicate but it is the stealth of the snake. He is telling his disciples to be very wise in how they teach about the kingdom so that their preaching will have its greatest impact.

***Affirmation:*** I practice a wise and gentle approach to presenting the gospel so people will be moved by the hope they offered through faith in Christ.

***Reflection:*** Jesus was sending his disciples to minister among the sheep and the wolves. We have the same mandate today. Think of some ways that you can be wise and stealthy as a snake, yet gentle and humble as a dove in your presentation of the gospel.

***My Thoughts:***

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Day Twenty Three

## *Fear God Rather Than Man*

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell. – Matthew 10:28

Fear can be a life controlling condition. Some people are afflicted with fear of heights and are terrified when they are in a multistoried building. Some people are afraid to go out in public and spend years behind locked doors and shuttered windows. Fear of the unknown and unseen can freeze us into inactivity.

When Jesus tells us to fear God he is not talking about that kind of fear. He is talking about having the same kind of fear of as we do of law enforcement officers. If we break the law we are afraid that we are going to get caught and have to suffer the consequences, but if we do not break the law we aren't fearful of arrest. Even though we may not break the law we consciously respect the authority of law enforcement. That is what Jesus means when he talks about fearing God.

On the other hand Jesus is telling us that we should not fear man. He has been teaching his disciples about the rejection they would encounter by those who would not receive their message. He has warned them that they would be imprisoned and beaten because of their message, but they must not allow their fear of the consequences to affect their commitment to preaching the message of the kingdom.

We can make a personal application of this passage to our own life as a believer. We cannot allow our concern for the way others perceive us to affect the way

we live as believers, unless, of course, our concern is that our life will be less than a reflection of the grace of God. I'm not talking about that fear here.

We may become involved in the office gossip because we don't want people to think we are stuck up. Or we may partake in off color conversations because we don't want others to think we are prudish. The list of ways in which we might show fear of man over fear of God is long. We would do well to examine what motivates us to do the things we do.

Our fear of God should be a healthy respect for the authority he possesses as the Lord Almighty. And that kind of healthy respect should keep our behaviors in check so we don't have to fear him as the enforcer.

***Prayer:*** Grant me the grace to trust your love and fear your judgment.

***Message:*** Our fear of God should be a healthy respect for the authority he possesses as the Lord God Almighty. And that kind of healthy respect should keep our behaviors in check so we don't have to fear him as the enforcer.

***Affirmation:*** I am submitted to the authority of the Lord God and I do not have to fear him as the enforcer.

***Reflection:*** How should we fear God? That is the question many of us have wrestled with. Give some serious thought to what it means to fear the Lord and make notes on your thoughts in the section below.

***My Thoughts:***

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Day Twenty Four

## *He Who Has Ears – Let Him Hear*

He who has ears, let him hear. “To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’” – Matthew 11:15-17

Jesus made an interesting comparison between the people of his day and children wanting to play, but they wanted to play their way. It’s almost like the proverbial child who brings the ball into the game and says, “Let me play according to my rules or I will take my ball and go home.”

The Message gives a pretty clear picture of what Jesus was trying to say. “How can I account for this generation? The people have been like spoiled children whining to their parents, ‘We wanted to skip rope, and you were always too tired; we wanted to talk, but you were always too busy.’ John came fasting and they called him crazy. I came feasting and they called me a lush, a friend of the riff-raff. Opinion polls don’t count for much, do they? The proof of the pudding is in the eating”

Jesus prefaced this analogy with, “He who has ears, let him hear.” What was it he wanted them to hear? He had just shown the disciples of John the Baptist proof that he was the one John had been telling them would come. He concluded with, “From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. ” (v12-13).

He seems to be trying to tell them that it is past time to be playing around. Don't be children waiting for the next game to play; It is time to be people of force and power! Grab hold of the kingdom as it grows by and be prepared for the ride of your life.

This is his message today. Listen to his words; hear what he is saying and become men and women filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and with the force of committed conviction.

**Prayer:** Lord, give me the force of conviction to believe your words. In Jesus name. Amen.

**Message:** The message of Jesus and the message today is the same. Don't be children waiting for the next game to play; It is time to be people of force and power! Grab hold of the kingdom as it grows by and be prepared for the ride of your life.

**Affirmation:** I am grasping all of the kingdom truth I can and I am moving forward in kingdom service.

**Reflection:** Is there a parallel between the church of today and the people Jesus was describing in our Scripture passage for today? Are people today crying out, "Entertain me or I will go someplace where they will"? How would you compare the church as a whole today with the people Jesus described?

**My Thoughts:**

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Day Twenty Five

## *Come to Jesus All Who Are Weary*

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” - Matthew 11:28-30

When I read these words of Christ I am reminded of a poem by Emma Lazarus in 1883. She wrote “New Colossus” about the Statue of Liberty which stands on Liberty Island over looking New York Harbor. In part the poem reads, “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless tempest-tost to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door.”

For many years immigrants entering the United States were processed in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty at nearby Ellis Island. There, in the distance, they could see that world renowned symbol of liberty offering them hope for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Jesus was offering that, and so much more. He was not only offering opportunity, but he was offering rest and comfort as well. He knows the stresses of life we face and he knows that for most of us life brings burdens too heavy to be born alone. That is why he says, “Take my yoke upon you.” The idea of taking his yoke is not that a burden would be placed upon us but it is so that when we are put into the yoke with him he pulls the load so we can rest.

After inviting us to put our burdens upon him he says, “and learn from me.” What are we to learn from

him? We are to learn that he is gentle and humble. That is significant for many of us because so often when we have reached out for help from others we have been met with harsh words and judgment. But Jesus calls, "Come to me, I am gentle and humble. I will help bear your load."

Have the burdens of your life gotten heavy? Are you struggling beneath a load so big you don't feel like you can make it? Turn it over to Jesus. He is calling today, "Come to me all you who are tired, poor, homeless, and weary and I will give you rest." Can you feel his gentle hand upon you as he fastens you into his yoke?

**Prayer:** Thank you for the rest, and hope that is in your yoke.

**Message:** Jesus is calling today, "Come to me all you who are tired, poor, homeless, and weary and I will give you rest." Can you feel his gentle hand upon you as he fastens you into his yoke?

**Affirmation:** I came, stressed, weary and tired - Jesus relieved my stress, refreshed my spirit and gave me rest.

**Reflection:** Jesus identified people of need then gave instruction on how to have the need answered. What did he mean by "Take my yoke upon" and the second instruction, "and learn from me?"

**My Thoughts:**

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Day Twenty Six

## *Divine Truth is Spiritually Discerned*

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

- 1 Corinthians 2:14

I have been intrigued by the way secular media treats religious faith; particularly when they are referring to Christians. They seem to think Christians, and other religious people, live two lives in separate compartments. There is the religious life where people practice their faith in designated places and at specific times. Then there is the rest of their life that is unaffected by their faith.

The reason they approach religion that way is because man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God. Spiritual things are foolishness to them and they cannot understand them. Why is that? Because spiritual truth can only be revealed by the Spirit of God.

Some have compared discernment to wisdom and there are some similarities, but discernment is deeper than wisdom. A person who is sensitive to the Holy Spirit will discern motives of others and will be led by God to avoid the pitfalls set before them by the enemy of their soul.

Wisdom seems to be the ability to properly respond to the truth we have discerned. What I mean by that is when we have discerned something in the Holy Spirit about a person or a situation and we feel compelled to respond to it wisdom comes to play in the way we

respond to what we have seen through spiritual discernment.

In the verses which come before the verse for our devotion today Paul tells the Corinthians, “We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.” We are taught spiritual truth by spiritual words. That is what distinguishes those who stand outside and try to explain faith from those who are inside experiencing faith.

***Prayer:*** Lord, first I ask that you will give me discernment and then give me divine wisdom is applying spiritual truth. Amen.

***Message:*** Paul tells the Corinthians, “We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.” We are taught spiritual truth by spiritual words. That is what distinguishes those who stand outside and try to explain faith from those who are inside experiencing faith.

***Affirmation:*** I can understand spiritual truth because Holy Spirit speaks words of discernment to my inner man.

***Reflection:*** Give some thought to the reason secular minded people do not understand the very core of Christianity. Why do they not understand that Christianity is more than a doctrine?

***My Thoughts:***

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Day Twenty Seven

## *Be Kind and Compassionate*

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. - Ephesians 4:30-32

The Greek word translated compassionate is an interesting word. It is *eusplagchnos* and means compassionate or tenderhearted. It comes from two Greek words; “*eu*” meaning “good” and “*splagchnon*” which means “spleen” or “intestine.” Literally *eusplagchnos* means good, or healthy intestines.

The poetic, or metaphoric, application is to have good feelings and intentions toward another, or others. In other words to be compassionate or tenderhearted.

When we view this command, and it is a command (“Be kind and compassionate”), in the context of the paragraph in which it was written we can more clearly see Paul’s intention in writing it. He begins in verse 29 with, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths,” and he contrasts that with, “but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” He is talking about how we think, speak and act toward others.

In this context he tells us that our attitude toward others affects our relationship with the Holy Spirit. He makes it clear that if we have un-reconciled anger toward others we are grieving the Holy Spirit.

Have you noticed how difficult it is to enter into a worshipful spirit when your inner person, your

intestines as it were, is disturbed by emotions of anger or anxiety? To effectively be in good relationship with God we must be *eusplagchnos*, tenderhearted, compassionate to others.

Paul is specifically applying this principle to times when others have offended us and what our attitude should be toward them. He calls us to be forgiving to others just as Christ has forgiven us. That is a hard saying, but it is true: we must forgive others and be tenderhearted toward them or we will not have a freedom to worship in the Spirit and to minister with Holy Spirit anointing.

**Prayer:** God, grant me the grace to be tenderhearted toward those who have been offensive toward me. In Jesus name. Amen.

**Message:** Have you noticed how difficult it is to enter into a worshipful spirit when your inner person, your intestines as it were, is disturbed by emotions of anger or anxiety? To effectively be in good relationship with God we must be *eusplagchnos*, tenderhearted, compassionate to others.

**Affirmation:** I practice having good, compassionate feelings toward others and God gives me freedom in worship.

**Reflection:** Can you see a correlation between our attitude toward others and our ability to be in right relationship with God? Give some thought to how our attitude toward others affects our relationship with God.

**My Thoughts:**

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Day Twenty Eight

## *Taking Decisive Action*

From the time of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing and forceful men lay hold of it. - Matthew 11:12

Old Testament prophets spoke of a time when the Messiah would rule the nations with a rod of iron. The Jews looked for a Messiah who would, with great force, establish kingdom rule. Jesus was responding to that concept in this passage.

John the Baptist was in prison and he had sent his disciples to determine if Jesus was indeed the Messiah. Jesus sent them back to John with the message, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me" (v4-6).

These were all signs that would accompany the Messiah and Jesus not only wanted to comfort John that his work was done, the Messiah, or the Christ had come, but he wanted to inform the people of the same truth. He was the expected Messiah.

Then he addresses the idea of the Messiah establishing a kingdom by forcefully conquering his enemies. However, the violence, or forcefulness he referred to was the battle which raged in the spirit realm. Jesus said, "the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing," or as the KJV reads, "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence."

God was establishing his kingdom on earth through Jesus the Christ and there was in fact war raging in the

heavenlies. The forces of God for good and the forces of Satan for evil. Then Jesus concludes that forceful men enter this battle and move forward with the kingdom of God. That requires decisive action.

The kingdom of heaven is still forcefully advancing and forceful, decisive, men and women are still joining this battle. God is looking for people of character who will fully commit to this war of the spirit and move forward with his kingdom. All he asks of us is to take decisive action and join the fray. Are you up to it?

***Prayer:*** God, grant me the strength of will to take decisive action.

***Message:*** God is looking for people of character who will fully commit to this war of the spirit and move forward with his kingdom. All he asks of us is to take decisive action and join the fray. Are you up to it?

***Affirmation:*** The battles I fight are not of the flesh but I have entered the war raging in the spirit realm. I have joined the kingdom which is forcefully advancing.

***Reflection:*** It is interesting that when John sent messengers to ask Jesus if he was the one Jesus responded by referring them to the supernatural works he was doing. What should be the signs that we are the anointed of God for our generation?

***My Thoughts:***

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Day Twenty Nine

## *Let Compassion Move You to Action*

Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.” – Matthew 15:32

I have found eight times when it was said that Jesus had compassion on someone or a group of people and every time his compassion compelled him to take action.

It seems to be a characteristic of the Greek word *splagchnon* (translated compassion) that it moves a person to action. *Splagchnon* literally means that a persons bowels yearn for something. In the places where it is mentioned of Jesus, he feels compelled to take positive action on the cause of his compassion. In one case he feeds the multitude, in another he heals a leper and another he heals a blind man.

The Apostle Paul calls believers to have the same compassion as Christ had. In Philippians 2 he writes, “If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose” (v1-2).

Again Paul writes to the church at Colossae, “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (Colossians 3:12). If we are clothed with compassion we are being moved to toward helping others at their point of need.

I would encourage you to begin to develop compassion for people of less means than yourself. You might ask how you can do that. Take the first step by just observing people around you. Look into their eyes and look closely at their faces. You will begin to see people as Jesus saw them.

The next step is to speak to that homeless person, or the person down the street. Give them a smile and share yourself with them. Then begin to make a list of people you know who have great need (if you don't know any, look around there are plenty of them). Finally, pray that list until you begin to be moved with compassion as Christ was moved.

Then do something about their need.

***Prayer:*** Lord, give me compassion for people of great need. Amen.

***Message:*** Paul writes to the church at Colossae, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (Colossians 3:12). If we are clothed with compassion we are being moved to toward helping others at their point of need.

***Affirmation:*** I have clothed my inner person with godly compassion and I am compelled to respond to the needs of others with kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

***Reflection:*** A true test of being led by Holy Spirit is whether we have godly compassion toward others. When we do have godly compassion it will be evidenced in how we respond to the needs of others. How have you responded to the needs of others?

***My Thoughts:***

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Day Thirty

## *God Has Given Us Creativity*

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created... For in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.

- Colossians 1:15-16, 2:9-10

Some have said that whatever the mind of man can conceive he can achieve. I am not so sure that is totally true, but I am convinced that God has given man a creative imagination so that he is not bound by instinct and inborn behavior as the animals are. Man was created in the very image of God and has abilities which rise far above the animal kingdom.

Genesis teaches us that man was created in the image of God, but man fell from grace in the Garden and lost his god-likeness. Then Jesus, Emmanuel was born. He certainly was God with us (meaning of Emmanuel). He was that and more.

Jesus is the very image of the invisible God. One of the purposes of Christ is to restore man to being the image of God through faith in him. The fullness of God in bodily form rests in Christ, but Christ has ascended to heaven; so where is the image of God now? Look at the verse above: "In Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ."

That's right. God has given us fullness of the same Spirit which was in Christ. We are given the same creativity as Christ. We have been empowered to do the will of God on earth today. He has given us the Spirit of creativity.

Now, don't get crazy with this and go out trying to hurl worlds into existence. That's not what we're talking about. But, God has given us the creativity to accomplish his will on earth. Where God's will requires more than man can accomplish then he gives us creativity to get the job done.

Jesus told us that those who are believers will have divine power to heal, restore and yes, to raise the dead (Mark 16:17-18).

**Prayer:** Lord grant me the grace to fulfill the Spirit of Christ on earth by releasing Holy Spirit creativity. In Jesus name, amen.

**Message:** God has given man a creative imagination so that he is not bound by instinct and inborn behavior as the animals are. Man was created in the very image of God and has abilities which rise far above the animal kingdom.

**Affirmation:** The fullness of my inner man is Christ-fullness. God has invested divine power in me, and every believer, to fulfill his purposes on earth.

**Reflection:** When the creator created man he created him in his own likeness. Man lost that God-likeness in the fall, but through faith in Christ God is restoring man to the fullness of God-likeness. Meditate on what that means to you as a believer.

**My Thoughts:**

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Day Thirty One

## *Be Alert To Your Enemy*

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith.

- 1 Peter 5:8-9

I have had many friends over the years who have been set free from drug addiction, but unfortunately, some of them have fallen back into the same behaviors which led them into that bondage. They were free, but they did not remain vigilant and alert to their enemy.

Jesus warned his followers to be alert to a number of potential dangers. He warned them to beware of false prophets (Matthew 7:15); beware of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (Luke 12:1); be alert to greed (Luke 12:15). He also spoke of the enemy coming in the night and sowing weeds among the wheat. All of this adds up to warning people not to succumb to a lackadaisical attitude.

The Apostle Paul warned us to be careful lest we be taken captive by hollow and deceptive philosophies which project the traditions and principles of this world rather than the teachings of Christ (Colossians 2:8).

Some time ago I led a man in the sinners prayer and he was really touched by the Spirit of God. He was immediately changed, you could see it in his face. For about three weeks he was at every meeting and was very happy. Then he began to give more attention to the world around him than to his need to continue in his new-found relationship with Christ. Now he is not interested in going to meetings or being exposed to the Scripture.

This man was lulled into thinking that just because he had started his journey of faith he didn't need to go any further. I have known many people who have done the same thing. They start well, but they slowly drift back into the life they were earlier trying to escape.

Jesus and the writers of the New Testament warn us again and again to be alert to the deceptive philosophies of the world and of the deception of our own heart. We must be vigilant and alert to the attempts of the enemy to destroy us.

**Prayer:** Lord, Help me to be alert to the deception of my enemy.

**Message:** Jesus warned his followers to be alert to their enemy. Peter warns the church to be alert to the enemy. The Apostle Paul warned us to be careful lest we be taken captive by hollow and deceptive philosophies which project the traditions and principles of this world rather than the teachings of Christ (Colossians 2:8).

**Affirmation:** I am paying attention to the warning given by Jesus, Peter and Paul. I am careful to guard my heart and my mind against these enemies of my soul.

**Reflection:** Carefully consider the warnings about how the enemy of our soul connives and tries to manipulate us into becoming complacent and eventually being overcome by the spirit of the world. Consider how you can guard against him.

**My Thoughts:**

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