

Daily God Walk

The Christ Life

**Destroying
Strongholds**

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All Scripture quotations are taken from the New 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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Destroying Strongholds

Our theme for this devotional is Destroying Strongholds in our life through understanding who we are in Christ.

Paul, writing to the church at Corinth, realized that they had engrained habits and life styles which were hindering their spiritual growth. He called them strongholds. In 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 he writes, “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

The devotions in this book focus on destroying strongholds in our lives by using the tools God has given us in his word and through the working of Holy Spirit in us. Each week we will look at another aspect of destroying strongholds.

- ***Week One:*** Identifying the need to destroy these strongholds.
- ***Week Two:*** A blueprint for change by affirming who we are in Christ.
- ***Week Three:*** Some of the tools we will be using to destroy the arguments against God’s truth .
- ***Week Four:*** Affirming who we are in Christ
- ***Wrap Up:*** More affirmations of who we are in Christ

Our hope is that you will use this month of devotions to deal with some of the issues in your life which have been affecting your spiritual growth and walk with the Lord. I encourage you to practice reciting these passages of affirmation on a regular basis to reinforce your faith.

Day One

We All Have Strongholds

Though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. – 2 Corinthians 10:3-4

There are several points about this passage which need to be noted. The first is that we are in a war, but it is not a war as the world knows war. This war is in the realm of the spirit and is between the forces of good (God) and evil (Satan). The battle ground is our own mind, soul and spirit.

When we concede that point then the next point becomes more tenable: “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.” The mistake we so often make is that when we see someone demonstrating the spirit of the world and being influenced by Satan we tend to confront them in the way the world does. The result of that mistake is often causing an offense which is difficult to overcome.

It is said that you fight fire with fire, but I have another saying. You fight fire with grace (God’s favor). When others are angry with us we tend to respond with anger, but Jesus told us to turn the other cheek. A weapon we have is the ability, by the grace of God, to turn away from offense and return love.

A third point is that we are given divine power to tear down and demolish strongholds. That is true whether we are talking about a stronghold of Satan over a geographical area, governments, a ministry, or over individuals. Yes, Satan can have strongholds in people, even, if you can accept it, in believers.

The devotions in this book are focusing on the personal aspect of strongholds. We are looking at the strongholds which have been established in our lives over years of ingrained behaviors. Addictions are strongholds in our lives. Anger, lust or greed may be strongholds in our lives.

Whatever stronghold you may have in your life I want to assure you that you have divine power to tear down those strongholds and to be set free.

Prayer: Lord, grant us the grace to tear down our strongholds.

Message: Addictions are strongholds in our lives. Anger, lust or greed may be strongholds in our lives. Whatever stronghold you may have in your life I want to assure you that you have divine power to tear down those strongholds and to be set free.

Affirmation: Every stronghold can be broken with Holy Spirit power and consistent practice of effective principles.

Reflection: This devotion points out three cogent points about strongholds; we are in a war, we have effective weapons, and we have divine power. Consider how important it is to understand the part each of these points play in destroying strongholds.

My Thoughts:

Day Two

Power to Destroy False Beliefs

The weapons we fight with... have divine power to... demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

- 2 Corinthians 10:4-5

Paul is not talking about the power to win an argument with someone. He is talking about two sets of arguments that may, or may not be related. The first set of arguments is the ones used by Satan to keep people believing his lies so he can maintain his stronghold over them.

An example of an argument of Satan that stands against the knowledge of God is when he said to Eve in the Garden of Eden, "You will not surely die." It was that argument, along with, "God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God," which has been a stronghold in the life of every person who has lived since Adam and Eve.

Another set of arguments are the ones formed in our own mind which put limitations upon us. Those arguments are based upon our experience and knowledge. Some of these arguments are good and help keep us safe; like the one that says, "Don't jump off a high building because you will die." But, some of the arguments we hear from the voice which speaks inside us place unnecessary limitations upon us.

We tend to relive our past and project that into our future. If we were born into a dysfunctional family we tend to live out those dysfunctions in our adult life. The attitudes of our family toward money, other races, sex, and every area of our life tend to be carried over into

our present and often will greatly affect our future. It is that set of arguments we are going to address this month in our devotions.

It is time for us to realize that we have been given divine power to demolish arguments and every pretension which sets itself up against the knowledge of God. Are you ready to tear down some strongholds? Let's get after it.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to tackle the strongholds in my life by destroying the arguments of my past. Amen.

Message: We tend to relive our past and project that into our future. If we were born into a dysfunctional family we tend to live out those dysfunctions as strongholds in our adult life. It is time for us to realize that we have been given divine power to tear down strongholds and to demolish arguments and every pretension which sets itself up against the knowledge of God.

Affirmation: God has given me power to demolish every argument and every pretension which sets itself up against the knowledge of God.

Reflection: Give some thought what effect your family of origin and the environment in which you were raised have had on you.

My Thoughts:

Day Three

We Are Not What We Used to Be

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation. - Colossians 1:21-22

It was when Adam and Eve believed the lying arguments of Satan and acted upon them that man became alienated from God. Paul tells us that alienation has made us enemies with God in our minds. What made us enemies of God? He says, "Because of your evil behavior."

That's the bad news. The good news is that we who have believed upon Christ have been reconciled to God. What man lost in the fall has been returned to him in Christ. Now we stand before God as his friend (James 2:23), but we are more: We are now called the sons of God (John 1:12).

We who were once enemies with God are now made holy before God, without blemish and free from accusation. God has freed us from the bondage of sin imposed upon man from the time Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit.

God no longer accuses us, but there is still an accuser of the brethren. Satan is described as being an accuser of the brethren in Revelation (Revelation 12:10).

There is yet another accuser we must face. That is the voice which speaks inside us telling us that we are not worthy of God's grace. That voice will tell us that God can't love us because we have done too much. It will tell us that we have failed God so many times he

can never forgive us. Those arguments, born from our past and reinforcing our doubts and fears, have become strongholds in our lives.

We must continually confess I once was a sinner, alienated from God and enemies with God, but now I have been reconciled to God through faith in the shed blood of Christ. Because of what Christ has done for me I am now blameless and holy. Hallelujah.

Prayer: Thank you Lord. I now have a truth I can use to tear down the argument of blame and unworthiness. Amen.

Message: We must continually confess I once was a sinner, alienated from God and enemies with God, but now I have been reconciled to God through faith in the shed blood of Christ. Because of what Christ has done for me I am now blameless and holy.

Affirmation: I am now at peace with God because through faith in Christ I have been reconciled to him.

Reflection: There are two accusers we all face. Can you name those accusers? What is the source of the voice which tells us that God can't love us because we have done too much? How are we to deal with that voice?

My Thoughts:

Day Four

Sinners by Nature

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

- Romans 3:24

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. - Isaiah 53:6

We were created in the image of God, to be like God, but not to be a god. Mankind was created innocent with the purpose of being all that God had intended him to be. However, he also was given free will so he could choose his own way if he desired.

We are all too familiar with the events which led to the loss of innocence which caused the corruption of man. Mankind, created to be in the image of God, had now become the antithesis of all that God is. God was ever-loving and all that he did was for the benefit others; man became self-serving and all that he did was for his own benefit.

That is the very nature of sin. It is to preempt God by getting what we want before God has a chance to bring blessing into our life. One definition of sin is trying to get in our own way what God was going to give us in his way. That may not fit every sin, but it does fit every one of us. We have all gotten things that we shouldn't have had yet and in a way that thwarted God's plan.

Paul follows our verse in Romans with, "... and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." Our natural state is corrupted by sin, but through faith in Christ we are redeemed from that bondage. However, we still have freedom of will,

and all too often we choose to do life our way and do not wait on God to guide us in his way.

All of this tells us that we who have been redeemed through faith in Christ must still be freed from the tendency to continue to do things in the way we have done them before. We must break the strongholds of past patterns of behavior in order to be fully restored to the person God has intended us to become.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the grace to trust you and not to depend upon my own ways. In Jesus Name, amen.

Message: We who have been redeemed through faith in Christ must still be freed from the tendency to continue to do things in the way we have done them before. We must break the strongholds of past patterns of behavior in order to be fully restored to the person God has intended us to become.

Affirmation: I am being freed from the tendency to continue doing things my way because I am a new creation in Christ and I am renewing my mind daily.

Reflection: Give some thought to the nature of sin as presented in this devotion. How has trying to do things our way and in our own ability affected our relationship with God?

My Thoughts:

Day Five

Why Do I do These Things?

I do not understand what I do... For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing, - Romans 7:15-19

Have you ever felt that way? I think just about all of us have. Paul is describing the plight of all humanity. We know what is right, and we think we would like to do right, but we keep being distracted by things we know we should not be involved with.

In this passage Paul is not only describing our condition, but he is also giving us hope for a solution.

This entire chapter is addressing the nature of mankind which draws us toward sin. Nearly everyone I have ever met, even the ones that society might call bad, desires to do good, but something keeps holding them back from achieving the good they would do.

That something which holds us back from doing good is what we call our sinful nature. Sin is actually in our nature and that means no one needs to teach us to sin, it just comes naturally. Can you remember the first conscious sin you committed? I can, and it was a sin which troubled me for years.

I have led many people in the sinners prayer and I seldom use the word sinner when I am witnessing to them. Why? Because we all know we are sinners. The law of God tells us just how we have sinned. If you don't know the law of God he has written a basic moral code on our hearts and we know when we have sinned because our conscience tells us.

Is there a remedy? Yes there is and we will talk about it tomorrow. But, for now let's just focus on the fact that our sinful nature works to keep us from doing good

and we must ask ourselves the question: Am I going to allow my tendency to sin to rule my life, or am I going to find a solution to the problem?

Tomorrow we will talk about the solution to our problem of continuing to return to sin.

Prayer: Lord, I know that in my natural self I cannot do the good you have me to do. Deliver me from myself. In Jesus name.

Message: Our sinful nature works to keep us from doing good and we must ask ourselves the question: Am I going to allow my tendency to sin to rule my life, or am I going to find a solution to the problem?

Affirmation: In my own strength I cannot do the things I know I should do and I cannot resist the things I shouldn't do, but, I also know that in Christ and with the power of Holy Spirit, I can be free.

Reflection: Have you ever become discouraged because the good you would do you don't seem to be able to get around to and the bad you shouldn't do seems to always be alluring you? How do you deal with that?

My Thoughts:

Day Six

Is There An Answer to My Sin Nature?

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God O through Jesus Christ our Lord! - Romans 7:24-25

In this chapter Paul is not only talking about the natural state of mankind, he is also talking about the condition of believers who have not learned to live consistently in Christ.

I have known a lot of people who have used the issue we addressed yesterday to say something like, "You see, just like it says here; I can't live a righteous life." And it is true we can't, at least not on our own. But there is an answer.

In his frustration Paul cries out, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me?" But he didn't stay in that state of frustration. Feeling defeated, a failure and lost, he came to the realization that he could be rescued from the driving force of sin and the rescuer is Jesus Christ our Lord.

I've done a lot of work with people in recovery from drugs and alcohol and I have found one thing in common. In order for them to be freed from their addiction they must come to the realization that they cannot get free alone. Then they must realize that there is a power greater than themselves which can set them free.

Not all of us have such an outwardly obvious addiction, but we are all addicted to sin. The only way we will ever be victorious over sin is to realize that we can't do it alone and that we must turn to Christ who alone is the way to the freedom we desire.

Realizing that his only answer is Jesus Christ, Paul goes on to say in the next verse, “So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 7:26-8:1).

The solution to our sin nature is to keep our mind filled with God’s law and our hearts filled with the Spirit of Christ. I can promise you if you do that you will live a victorious life in Christ.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the grace to fill my mind with your word and my heart with the Spirit of Christ. In Jesus name. Amen.

Message: The solution to our sin nature is to keep our mind filled with God’s law and our hearts filled with the Spirit of Christ. I can promise you if you do that you will live a victorious life in Christ.

Affirmation: I daily fill my mind with God thoughts and I am protected from being influenced by thoughts of the world and the flesh.

Reflection: Do you understand the struggle Paul is describing in Romans 7? How do you deal with the tension between what the flesh desires and what God desires in us?

My Thoughts:

Day Seven

Can I Really Become Something Different?

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. - John 1:10-12

“The right to become children of God.” What a promise! Since Adam and Eve failed in the garden man had been striving to become a god, one who would rule his own destiny. Now Jesus comes declaring that through him we have the right to become children of God.

When we become believers in Jesus, the Christ, the Savior of the world, we do not become gods, but we are given the right to be as children of God with full access to all that heaven offers. It is this right to become that has captured my attention.

If you are like me, and countless millions of others, we have been negatively influenced by our environment. My parents were wonderful people, but they did not understand how to instill in their children a sense of confidence in who they are and what God has called them to be.

I carried on the same mistake with my children. I failed to instill in them a sense of confidence in who God has created them to be. Instead I would compare them with others and point out how they fell short. Oh yes, I would couch those barbs in phrases like, “See what you could become,” but what they heard was, “I’m not good enough to be like them.”

Then I discovered this passage. God was actually giving me the power to become one of his children simply through faith in Christ and trusting his work in me. It has been a long journey for me, but I am convinced of this: Inwardly I am being renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16) and I know that I am being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18).

I am becoming: I am not what I was, I have become a new creation; and I am not yet what I will become.

Prayer: Lord, I live in the hope of becoming like Christ. Amen.

Message: I am becoming: I am not what I was, I have become a new creation; and I am not yet what I will become. Inwardly I am being renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16) and I know that I am being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Affirmation: By the grace of God I am becoming the person God intended me to be.

Reflection: I call this "the becoming principle." When we come to Christ he gives us the *exousia* (Greek for freedom to, or right to) to become. Think about what this means to you.

My Thoughts:

Day Eight

I Am Forgiven of All Sin

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away nailing it to the cross. – Colossians 2:13-14

Can you remember when you were dead to spiritual things and sin reigned in your life? People would mention God, or Jesus, to you and you would either smile benignly, or you might just turn away because nothing they said reached you. You might say, or just think, “I’m quite fine just the way I am thank you.” But you knew you weren’t fine. You were fighting a losing battle trying to find lasting peace and joy, but you weren’t about to admit it.

Then one day, the light came on. As the word about Christ was shared Holy Spirit began to open your spiritual eyes and you began to see. Suddenly you realized that the light you thought you had was so dim that you couldn’t even call it light, and when the light of Christ was shined upon it you could clearly see that it was not light at all but the darkness of sin.

Faith was born in your heart as you heard the word of God with your inner person. Holy Spirit came in and showed you the sin and darkness inside you and you were given the opportunity to receive the everlasting light with is everlasting life.

At that moment we who were dead in sin became alive in Christ. He forgave us our sins and canceled the debt we owed him because of our sin.

Apostle Paul writes to the church at Ephesus, “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding” (Ephesians 1:7-8).

Forgiveness of our sins, all of our sins, is given to us by the riches of God’s grace. And he didn’t give us grace stingily, or in sparse portions; no, he gave us grace lavishly because he knew we would need it throughout our journey of faith. Hallelujah!

Prayer: Thank you Lord for the grace of forgiveness. Amen.

Message: Forgiveness of our sins, all of our sins, is given to us by the riches of God’s grace. And he didn’t give us grace stingily, or in sparse portions; no, he gave us grace lavishly because he knew we would need it throughout our journey of faith.

Affirmation: It is because of the abundant grace of God that all of my sins have been forgiven.

Reflection: What can you remember about your attitude toward Christ before your conversion? Were you blind to spiritual things? How has that changed now that you have received Christ as your Lord and Savior?

My Thoughts:

Day Nine

For God So Loved... Me

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. - John 3:16-17

This is the most wonderful, and probably most quoted, passage in the entire Bible. It is the central theme of Scripture. It is both the center and the circumference. This idea was in the mind of God from before creation and it remains his plan today.

I have modified this verse to read, "For God so loved (insert your name) that he gave his one and only Son, that [when] (insert your name) believes in him [he/she] shall not perish but have eternal life." I have found that something powerful happens when we make this verse personal by inserting our own name.

It has been my blessing to lead many people in what is commonly called the sinners prayer. I call it the commitment prayer because it is a prayer of committing our life to Christ. As part of leading people to this prayer I will often quote this verse, then I will share the verse with their name inserted. It is a wonderful thing to watch them as they suddenly realize that God really does love them enough to give his best for them.

Some people do not understand the God of love. They may see him as a god of vengeance who angrily punishes those who do not give him unwavering service. Some see him as the celestial fire escape and only call on him when their life is going up in flames. Others see him as the law giver who has so many rules to follow that they could never please him.

It grieves God when people have these misperceptions about him. Verse 17 tells us, “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” God’s hope is that the entire world would believe in Christ and be saved, but the greatest source of grief for him is that many will not receive the gift he gave in Jesus, the Christ, his only begotten son.

Be thankful that God has shown his love to mankind through the offering his Son so that we might have eternal life.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for the gift you gave to the world. Amen.

Message: I have modified this verse to read, “For God so loved (insert your name) that he gave his one and only Son, that [when] (insert your name) believes in him [he/she] shall not perish but have eternal life.” Something powerful happens when we make this verse personal by inserting our own name.

Affirmation: Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth to give me the opportunity to be born into God's family. I have embraced him and all he stands for; now I have passed from death to life.

Reflection: God is serious about seeing mankind saved from sin and its consequences. So serious that he sent his only son to give man the opportunity to be born into his family. Think about it.

My Thoughts:

Day Ten

We Are Accepted Into the Beloved

Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will. To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. – Ephesians 1:5-6 (KJV)

The church was in the mind of God from before creation (verse 4). He had a plan because he knew that when he created man he would be created with the potential to succumb to the temptation of the evil one. I find it amusing that Satan thought he got the best of God when he enticed Adam and Eve to sin, but he didn't know that he was playing right into God's plan.

From the beginning God had predetermined a way by which man could be restored to the person he had originally intended him to be. When mankind fell from grace in the garden he became a man of the earth. That was his condition until Christ came as the ultimate sacrifice to atone for the sins of man.

Now, because of what God has done through Christ, we have the opportunity to be adopted into the family of God. We literally, at least in the Spirit realm, become children of God when we receive Christ into our lives. This is the good pleasure of God.

We who have received Christ become as the returned prodigal. Our sonship is affirmed and we are fully accepted into the beloved (which is Christ). What this means to us is that what we *were* does not affect what we *are* in Christ. When we received Christ we were received by God and we literally became a part of the body of Christ who is the beloved of the Father. That means we are now the beloved of God.

Whatever you and I might have been in the past is totally wiped away and now all that God sees in us is that we are his

beloved. I have a friend who is plagued with self doubts and fear that he will do something wrong and go to hell. I constantly encourage him that he is the beloved of God and that God's only intention for him is for him to have eternal life.

My friend, I want to encourage you that you are accepted into the beloved, you are accepted into Christ. God looks past what we have been and looks to what we are becoming in the beloved.

Prayer: Lord, I thank you for accepting me into the beloved.

Message: Be encouraged! You are accepted into the beloved, you are accepted into Christ. God looks past what you have been and looks to what you are becoming in the beloved.

Affirmation: I am comforted to know that I am, through faith in Christ, in the Beloved of God.

Reflection: If the church was in the mind of God from before the creation, then what was the purpose of putting man in the garden where God already knew man would fail? We who were born into sin are now being restored through faith in Christ.

My Thoughts:

Day Eleven

I Am Pleasing to God

We pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way; bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father.

- Colossians 1:10-12

Paul was a faithful father to all of the churches established under his leadership and he continually prayed for them. The subject of his prayers is found in this passage as well as Ephesians 1:15-23, 3:14-19 and Philippians 1:3-6.

In summary his prayers were that the churches would 1) realize who they were in Christ; 2) that they would pursue a more complete knowledge of God and his kingdom; 3) and above all that the love of God, the body of believers and the lost world, would be dominant factors in their faith walk.

He consistently tells the churches that if they will pursue those things their life would be enthused with spiritual power and they would live exemplary lives. In this passage he gives a short, but very good list of ways to live pleasing to God.

First he speaks of fruitfulness. We are pleasing to God when our life is bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). If we examine our lives and discover that we are coming short of manifesting the fruit of the Spirit we must seek him for the grace to submit to Holy Spirit so that we will bear good fruit.

The second piece to pleasing God is growing in the knowledge of God. I am discovering that the faith of far

too many people is based on hearsay and not on a personal knowledge of God. We are given an encyclopedia of knowledge of God, the kingdom and who we are in the kingdom; it is called the Bible.

Being in a maturing relationship with God with fruit of the Spirit being manifest and a growing understanding of God, then we will be, “strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father.”

Prayer: Grant me the grace of living in a manner pleasing to you.

Message: Being in a maturing relationship with God with fruit of the Spirit being manifest and a growing understanding of God, then we will be, “strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father.”

Affirmation: I am pleasing to God because I am becoming fruitful and I am growing in the knowledge of God.

Reflection: How many times have we said something like, "I just want to be pleasing to God," but do we understand what that means? This devotion gives two things that are important to being pleasing to God. Give those things some careful thought.

My Thoughts:

Day Twelve

I Am Perfect and Complete in Christ

We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ... and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.

- Colossians 1:28, 2:10

It took a few years at the beginning of the church for the apostles to get a full understanding of the meaning of their faith. At first they thought receiving Jesus as the Christ was just an “add-on” to the Jewish faith, then God began reveal his intention to include all who believed in Christ into his kingdom.

When the apostles began accepting Gentiles into the faith they still had some things to learn about what God was doing. For a good while they felt that the Gentile believers would have to come under the law, observe its ordinances and its holy days. Then, after the council mentioned in Acts 15, they were led by the Holy Spirit to only require Gentile believers to do four things. They sent out a letter which in part read:

“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality” (Acts15).

Slowly the early church leaders began to turn loose of the laws and traditions of the past and embrace a new covenant of faith. In the new covenant we are taught that we are given salvation and acceptance from God based upon his grace and not based upon our performance.

Paul is writing to the church at Colossae several decades after the church began and much understanding has been gained on the relationship with God granted those who have believed in Christ. Now he understands that believers are made perfect by their faith in Christ and in Christ they are complete.

Now we know that we are made perfect, and complete in Christ. We are now the fullness of the representation of Christ on earth.

Prayer: Thank you Lord that I am complete in Christ.

Message: In the new covenant we are taught that we are given salvation and acceptance from God based upon his grace and not based upon our performance. Now we know that we are made perfect, and complete in Christ. We are now the fullness of the representation of Christ on earth.

Affirmation: Because of what he has done for me and my faith in him, I am perfect and complete in Christ

Reflection: This devotion addresses the transition made by the first century church from the legalism of Judaism to the position of grace through faith in the new covenant era. What do you understand about the difference between legalism and grace?

My Thoughts:

Day Thirteen

I Am Sanctified By His Truth

They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. - John 17:16-19

In John 14-16 Jesus was giving his farewell address to the disciples just before he was taken and crucified. In chapter 17 he is praying to the Father that his disciples would remain faithful and carry out their call to preach the kingdom of God.

Our verses today convey a very great truth which is central to the Christian message. It is the message of sanctification. The Greek word translated sanctify is also translated “holy,” and sometimes “pure.” The word is *hagiazo* and means to purify, or consecrate. To hallow, be holy, or sanctify.

We understand sanctification to be the work of the Holy Spirit in us as we grow in understanding of the word of truth and as our faith and confidence in the ministry of the Holy Spirit in us matures.

In his prayer Jesus is saying that believers are sanctified by the truth, which is the word of God. An interesting aspect of that is Jesus himself because he is the Word of God (John 1:1). We are being sanctified as we read and hear the word of God, and that process is enhanced by the indwelling Christ, the Word of God.

Many see sanctification as an instantaneous event which is sometimes called a second work of grace. Others see it simply as the process of being called deeper and deeper into the life of Christ. I think there is truth in both of those camps.

There are times of intense experience with Holy Spirit which produces a radical change within us and that feels like a second work of grace. And there is also that growing sense of drawing closer to God, and getting further from the world as we spend time with the written word and time with the indwelling word and we mature in our walk with God.

However you view it we are being sanctified by his Word.

Prayer: Give me grace to continue growing in sanctification.

Message: There are times of intense experience with Holy Spirit which produces a radical change within us and that feels like a second work of grace. And there is also that growing sense of drawing closer to God, and getting further from the world as we spend time with the written word and time with the indwelling word and we mature in our walk with God.

Affirmation: I am sanctified by His truth; the truth of the written word and the truth of the indwelling word.

Reflection: Give some careful thought to the idea of sanctification. Are you sanctified? Are you becoming sanctified? Is it your hope to be sanctified?

My Thoughts:

Day Fourteen

I Am Victorious Over Sin

Sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace...Thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. - Romans 6:14-18

Paul seems to have come to a surprising conclusion about the effect of the law. Consider this statement, "Sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace." It is almost as if he sees a connection between the law and our inability to live free of sin.

Can it be true that the law itself sets us up to be drawn into and mastered by sin? It isn't quite that simple, but there is truth in that. In Chapter seven he writes, "When we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death" (v5).

He seems to be saying it is the law itself which reminds us of our human, worldly passions. Living under the law with its rules is continually reminding us of what we are as humans and that we fall far short of pleasing God; under grace we are constantly reminded of what God is enabling us to become through faith in Christ. The law tells us what we will never be and grace tells us what we can become.

As long as we are serving the law we are always trying to measure up and always being reminded that we come up short. When we are serving God by grace we are given a hope of peace in this life and redemption to eternal life.

A freeing power of grace is that we are no longer being reminded of what we are not, but we are given hope of becoming. At the point of our conversion we no longer need the law with its demands and condemnation. Now, under grace we have been given the nature of Christ and our desire is to serve God fully.

Under grace we do by nature what the law showed us we could not do. Under grace we no longer need the law.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for your sanctifying grace which enables me to live free of the mastery of sin. Amen.

Message: Living under the law with its rules is continually reminding us of what we are as humans and that we fall far short of pleasing God; under grace we are constantly reminded of what God is enabling us to become through faith in Christ. The law tells us what we will never be and grace tells us what we can become.

Affirmation: I am no longer under the law but I am living in grace that enables me to do what the law showed me I should do.

Reflection: The law tells how to live in a manner that is consistent with respecting God and his creation. The law also is a reminder that we fall short of God's plan for us. Grace on the other hand enables us to live righteously before God.

My Thoughts:

Day Fifteen

Destroying Arguments and Pretentions

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. - 2 Corinthians 10:4-5

A fact which is often missed by believers is that we are in a war. It is not the kind of war the world wages, but it is a war in the spirit realm. It is the war of the Spirit of God against the spirit of evil (the Devil) and the spirit of the world (man's soulish nature). Paul tells us in this passage that we have divine power to wage this war and we can demolish strongholds of evil by demolishing arguments against the nature and truth of God.

From the time we are infants we hear arguments against the truth of God and that keeps us from pursuing the knowledge of God. Those God defying arguments are pretentiously set up as the rule and the knowledge of God is denied.

The Greek word translated in the NIV as "arguments" is an interesting word. It is *logismos* and has the same base meaning as our word "logic." It is reasoning or thought which becomes "argument," or position of belief. The world in which we live today is filled with God denying thought processes.

These God denying thought processes are set up as the truth and are juxtaposed against the knowledge of God. *Hupsoma* is the Greek word used here and means an elevated place or thing, a barrier and by implication

a high thing which cannot be crossed, or at least is very difficult to be crossed over.

These arguments, which are held in esteem above the knowledge of God, are many and they are reinforced in our lives from the time we are infants. They are strongholds which keep us from realizing God's fullness in our lives.

Just as the kings of old were commanded to tear down the high places of false worship so we must destroy every argument and pretentious thought which stands against the knowledge of God and replace them with God thoughts.

Prayer: Lord, help me to destroy the strongholds in my life.
Amen.

Message: Just as the kings of old were commanded to tear down the high places of false worship so we must destroy every argument and pretentious thought which stands against the knowledge of God and replace them with God thoughts.

Affirmation: I stand against every argument and human reasoning which stands against the knowledge of God.

Reflection: There are many paths of reason and logic which deny the truths God has revealed. Give some thought to how you can recognize and then stand against these paths of human reason.

My Thoughts:

Day Sixteen

So... What Are You Thinking?

As he thinketh in his heart, so is he. – Proverbs 23:7 (KJV)

Finally Brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. – Philippians 4:8

The process of tearing down strongholds and destroying arguments against the knowledge of God begins in our mind. Scriptures teach us that the way we think influences the way we live and instructs us to think upon the right things.

When Moses was instructing the Israelites concerning the law he told them, “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframe of your houses and on your gates” (Deut. 6:6-9).

Moses knew that if the law of God was always before the people it would be their “food for thought,” and God knew that what people think about influences their behavior.

Most of us were not raised in an environment that only exposed us to godliness. In fact, for many of us, there was no god at all in our lives, and for those of us who were raised in a Christian home far too often the word of God was not central to our life. The result is that we have been so influenced by the way the world thinks that we have literally erected strongholds of the world-way of doing things in our minds.

How are we to tear down those strongholds? First we must realize that we have strongholds and that God has given us divine power to tear down those strongholds (2 Cor. 5:4). Then we must go to work on changing the way we have been thinking so we will change our behaviors.

I would suggest that you commit Philippians 4:8 to memory and meditate upon the ideas it says to think upon.

Prayer: Lord, give me the grace to change my thoughts to God thoughts so I will think the way you think. In Jesus name, amen.

Message: We must realize that we have strongholds and that God has given us divine power to tear down those strongholds (2 Cor. 5:4). Then we must go to work on changing the way we have been thinking so we will change our behaviors. Commit Philippians 4:8 to memory and meditate upon the ideas it says to think upon.

Affirmation: I am breaking the strongholds in my life that are contrary to God's word by disciplining myself to think upon those things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy.

Reflection: Establish the practice of daily reminding yourself to think upon those things in Philippians 4:8

My Thoughts:

Day Seventeen

Put It Behind You and Think Forward

Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 3:13-14

Many years ago I found myself in a spiritual and emotional dilemma. I was frustrated with some inconsistencies in my life and was becoming discouraged at my inability to be strong. You may be able to identify with the struggle I was having.

It seemed I was always falling short of my own expectations and if I was disappointed in myself how disappointed God must be. One day in the midst of that malaise I was reading the Bible when I came upon this scripture. It immediately got my attention.

The Apostle Paul was my biblical mentor. I loved stories about him and his writings. I felt he was as close to God as anyone could be. In fact, I was actually named after him because my mom had the hope that I would become another apostle Paul.

Suddenly I realized that Paul was no super-saint. He was a man with feelings of self-doubt and self-incrimination just like me. Sitting in prison he wrote the book of Philippians and in it he questioned his worthiness to be accepted in the resurrection. I can almost see the grimace on his face as he writes, “Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it.”

Then I saw a ray of hope. He goes on to say, “But this one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind... straining forward... I press on toward the goal.” Paul saw

that he could not depend upon his yesterdays to carry him through. Whether yesterday was a success, or a failure, we still must press on today. With the goal ever before us we look heavenward to Christ Jesus.

I would encourage you to not let your yesterdays drag you down. If you feel defeated over yesterday then let it go. If you sinned repent and if you just disappointed yourself then start again today pressing ever toward the goal, fixed on the prize, looking to Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Lord, help me to stay focused on the goal. In Jesus name.

Message: I would encourage you to not let your yesterdays drag you down. If you feel defeated over yesterday then let it go. If you sinned repent and if you just disappointed yourself then start again today pressing ever toward the goal, fixed on the prize, looking to Jesus Christ.

Affirmation: I look forward toward the prize set before me. I don't look back because it is history; I don't look ahead because it is a mystery; I live in today, it is a gift and that is why we call it the present.

Reflection: A key to being perfected in any moment is to forget yesterday and press toward the prize Christ is offering.

My Thoughts:

Day Eighteen

Holy Spirit Gives Power to Overcome

You will receive power when the Spirit comes on you.

- Acts 1:8

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. - Romans 15:13

I have heard it said, and you have probably heard it said too, that we sin a little bit every day. Unfortunately, that is true for far too many believers, but it doesn't have to be true. Frankly, I do not sin every day and I do not feel that I need to sin every day.

Some may think that is a prideful or arrogant statement, but that is not the case at all. The truth is that I make that statement in the confidence that Holy Spirit is able to keep me from sin. When I sin it is because I have been trusting my flesh; when I don't sin it is because I have been trusting Holy Spirit.

Jesus told us that we would receive power when Holy Spirit comes upon us. That means when we receive Holy Spirit he comes with power and that power sets us free from sin. Paul wrote in Romans 8, "Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death" (v2). Holy Spirit power sets us free from sin and sinning.

"Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace" (Romans 8:5-7).

According to Paul the thing which makes the difference between being ruled by our sinful nature and being controlled by the Spirit nature is how we have our mind set. If our mind is caught up in thinking about the world, its comforts, its pleasures and its way of doing things, we will fulfill the desires of the sinful nature. If, however, our mind is set on pleasing the Spirit the Spirit himself will enable us to be freed from the drive to sin and will instead lead us into righteousness.

Which is your mind set on? Your life tells the story.

Prayer: Lord, help me to keep my mind stayed on you.
Amen.

Message: The thing which makes the difference between being ruled by our sinful nature and being controlled by the Spirit nature is how we have our mind set. The things we think about influences our behavior.

Affirmation: My mind is set on pleasing the Spirit and He has freed me from the drive to sin so He can lead me into righteousness.

Reflection: Examine yourself to see if you indeed are "overflowing with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." If you are not overflowing with hope then check yourself to see if you are living in the Spirit or living in the flesh.

My Thoughts:

Day Nineteen

Rejoice; Be Thankful; Make Petitions

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!... Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. - Philippians 4:4-7

This week we are talking about tools for change and these verses in Philippians are vital to spiritual transformation. In these verses Paul gives four points to consider: Rejoice; do not be anxious; prayerfully present petitions to God; do this with thankfulness in your heart. Let's briefly look at each of these.

Rejoice. Many times throughout his writings Paul admonishes the readers to rejoice. It's as if this kind of joy doesn't come naturally and we must pay attention to how we are feeling and how we are responding. This word doesn't mean to act hilariously. It simply means to have a cheerful greeting.

Do not be anxious about anything. Immediately following his admonition to rejoice he tells us to not be anxious. Do you think these two are connected? It looks to me like he is saying that there are going to be plenty of opportunities to become anxious about life but face those situations intentionally with cheerfulness.

Prayerfully present petitions to God. A key to rejoicing and not being anxious is to trust God for the outcome. It is not as hard to rejoice in a given situation when you know that God, who has our best interest at heart, is working all of those circumstances for our ultimate good.

Do this with thankfulness. We can't do those things with thankfulness if we are not trusting God, but when we are truly trusting him being thankful for otherwise stressful circumstances becomes much easier.

What happens when we follow these instructions? "The peace of God... will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." When we can believe this word we will be able to rejoice, stop worrying, trust God and have peace.

These are tools for successful spiritual transformation.

Prayer: Grant me the grace to trust you and to rejoice. Amen.

Message: Paul gives four points to consider: Rejoice; do not be anxious; prayerfully present petitions to God; do this with thankfulness in your heart. What happens when we follow these instructions?

Affirmation: I will rejoice and be anxious for nothing as I prayerfully present my petitions to God and do this with thankfulness.

Reflection: Give some thought to the effect of rejoicing in difficult situations and petitioning God with thankfulness.

My Thoughts:

Day Twenty

Count Yourself Dead to Sin

If we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him... The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. - Romans 6:8-11

Sometimes I think we don't realize the full significance of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. We see it as the package which brings us salvation, but too often we don't go any further with it than that. In this passage Paul is trying to show us how that is significant to us in our journey of faith.

He is telling us that when we begin our journey of faith in Christ we become as dead to our old life. The reality is that our old nature is still at work in us, if it wasn't we would never sin again. That is why he says in verse 11, "count yourselves dead to sin." What does that mean to us?

Paul seems to be saying that the principle is that when we are converted we have submitted our old life to Christ and when we are baptized it is a symbol of burying our old life. Now that we have new life, the Christ life, in us we are to live as if our old nature was truly dead.

I am reminded of the story of the old Indian who was explaining his own battle with good and evil. He said it was like having two dogs fighting inside of him. When asked which dog wins the fight he said, "The one I feed the most." And that is true of the two natures living in us.

If being dead to sin were an automatic and permanent state after our conversion then Paul would

not have said, “count yourselves dead to sin.” In the original language this word means to consider, to reason suppose or think.

As we are being transformed into his image we must continue to consider ourselves alive in him and dead to our past way of life, particularly as regards sin. We will find that when we give more thought to the life of Christ in us and his will being expressed in us that we think less about the old life. That’s transformation.

Prayer: Lord, I thank you for the life I have in Christ. Grant me the grace to count myself dead to sin. In Jesus name, amen.

Message: As we are being transformed into his image we must continue to consider ourselves alive in him and dead to our past way of life, particularly as regards sin. We will find that when we give more thought to the life of Christ in us and his will being expressed in us that we think less about the old life. That’s transformation.

Affirmation: This world does not have the hold on me that it once did because I count myself dead to it and alive in Christ.

Reflection: We are called to consider ourselves dead to our old ways, thoughts and desires. How do we do that? Give some careful thought to how you can live faithful to Christ while still living in this body which is attached to this world.

My Thoughts:

Day Twenty One

Submitting to God Defeats the Devil

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. – James 4:7-8

James starts out the fourth chapter of his writing with, “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?” The obvious answer is “Yes” and he goes on to explain that the issue is that they covet what they don’t have.

He explains that their problem is they are driven by their own desires. In verses 2 and 3 he writes, “You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

Have you given much thought to your own times of dissatisfaction? I have, and when I think it through I have found that my dissatisfaction comes more from what others have than from what I actually need.

When someone I know gets recognition or a promotion I feel just a little bit like that was something I should have gotten. When I see a friend with a new car I sometimes feel like I should have one too. That kind of thinking leaves me feeling unsatisfied and unfulfilled which in turn causes me to begin to harbor feelings about those who have the things I long to have. That was what James was talking about here.

How does one escape this devil of covetousness? James writes, “Submit yourselves, then to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” When we have submitted our will to God then we are content with his will in our lives. When we are submitted to God we can rejoice at the good fortune of others without feeling like it should have been us.

Being submitted to God is a state of being. It is affected by our mental and spiritual being. We must make a conscious choice of the will to yield ourselves to the will of God. When we do that God reinforces our decision with his Spirit and we receive a spiritual contentment with God's will for our lives.

We should pray for the spirit apostle Paul showed when he writes, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation" (Philippians 4:11-12).

Prayer: Help me to make the choice to submit to you. In Jesus name.

Message: When we have submitted our will to God then we are content with his will in our lives. When we are submitted to God we can rejoice at the good fortune of others without feeling like it should have been us.

Affirmation: I know evil has no power over me because I am submitted to God and His will. And because I am submitted to God and His will ego does not control me and I can rejoice with others in their blessing.

Reflection: James begins chapter 4 by asking, "What causes fights and quarrels among you?" Then answers that it is their own lack of submitting to God and His will. Ask yourself if you are truly submitted to God, or does ego still rule?

My Thoughts:

Day Twenty Two

I Am A New Creation

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ , he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

- 2 Corinthians 5:17-18

The Christian faith is more than just a set of doctrines. It is a faith which births us into a new world. We are not just Christian by mental assent; we are Christian by birth, the New Birth. We may go through a process of assimilating information and pondering upon what we have heard about Christ. We may even get to the point that we agree that Jesus died for the sins of the world, but until we come to the point of faith which calls us to commit our life to him we are not Christian.

Becoming a Christian does not demand a radical change in our life, it produces a radical change. When the creature which was a caterpillar emerges from the cocoon it is no longer a caterpillar but it is a butterfly. The caterpillar doesn't sit in the cocoon and try to decide whether it can handle being a butterfly. It doesn't wonder how it will fly or how its fuzzy hairs will become wings. The caterpillar just becomes what he was intended to be.

So it is when we come to Christ. Whatever we were before we came to faith is past and we are now entering into a new life, the Christ life. We may have been the ugliest caterpillar that we knew, but when we came to Christ we became a beautiful butterfly.

A phenomena among believers is that we are too often butterfly's trying to be caterpillars again. We could soar to the skies and fly from place to place, but

we are drawn to the lowly places we would go as a caterpillar. We must become awakened to the fact that we are not caterpillars anymore.

We are new creations in Christ Jesus. We should not think like we used to think; we should not go where we used to go; we should not hang out with the people we used to hang out with.

It is time we quit trying to be caterpillars again and accept our role as beautiful creations of God. Be a butterfly.

Prayer: Lord, too often I find myself trying to be a caterpillar again. Help me to surrender the old life and embrace the new life.

Message: We may get to the point that we agree that Jesus died for the sins of the world, but until we come to the point of faith which calls us to commit our life to him we are not Christian. Becoming a Christian does not demand a radical change in our life, it produces a radical change.

Affirmation: I saw; I heard; I believed; I acted in faith. Now I am radically changed by the power of a living God. I have been born again.

Reflection: A person is not made a new creature just because he believes the doctrines of Christ. His belief must move him to faith and faith demands action.

My Thoughts:

Day Twenty Three

I Am God's Workmanship

We are God's workmanship, created in Christ-Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

- Ephesians 2:10

I envy people who are creative. My wife gets creative ideas which she puts together as gifts to others and I am amazed at some of the things she comes up with. I watch people with musical instruments create beautiful music and I long to be able to do that. I have a friend who takes discarded tools and farm implements and welds them together making them into amazing pieces of art.

God is just such a creator. He picks up pieces of broken things and puts them together making an entirely new creation fashioned after his own nature and designed to fulfill his purposes in the kingdom. That is what Paul means when he writes, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ-Jesus to do good works."

In Chapter one of Ephesians Paul speaks of redemption, forgiveness of sins and the riches of his grace which he lavished on those who would believe and become born again. In verse 9 he refers to this as being his good pleasure, "He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ." It is his good pleasure to put together broken pieces and make them over into the image of Christ.

A few years ago I had wonderful picture come into my mind as I was in worship. I saw Jesus in a field of wildflowers. He was jumping and dancing with the most joyful expression on his face. Every few steps he would bend down and pick up something from off the ground and place it in a basket he was holding, then he would laugh hilariously.

I wondered what this meant and I felt the Lord speak to me saying, "He is picking up broken people and putting them

back together and that is his joy.” It became clear to me that the joy of the Lord is restoring broken people.

It is God’s good pleasure that the fullness of Christ should dwell in those who were broken but who now are fully restored to the people God intended them to be. We who have become his workmanship are now his glory. We are his joy and his pleasure.

His pleasure and his joy becomes our joy and that joy becomes our strength as we who are his workmanship do the works of the kingdom.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the grace to be worthy to be your joy. Amen.

Message: It is God’s good pleasure that the fullness of Christ should dwell in those who were broken but who now are fully restored to the people God intended them to be. We who have become his workmanship are now his glory. We are his joy and his pleasure.

Affirmation: I am gloriously and wonderously made because I am the workmanship of God.

Reflection: We must remember that we have been chosen by the Lord God himself to be born into his family and to be re-created by his own hand so that we might become the representative of him and his kingdom. Think about it.

My Thoughts:

Day Twenty Four

I Am United With God In Christ

Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. - John 14:19-20

There is a great mystery in God that is revealed to those who seek to know him. That mystery is that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). But the mystery does not end there. Jesus said, "I am in my Father," we get that pretty easily. Then Jesus goes on to reveal, "You are in me and I am in you." God in Christ - Christ in believers - believers in Christ - God in believers.

While religion has been trying to train people to be good enough to become gods the Lord God himself is opening a door by which He can set up residence in believers. We may not become a god, but the sovereign God of the universe dwells with us.

God intended to have a special relationship with man. That is why he made a special garden in which he placed Adam and Eve. In Genesis three we are given a glimpse of the relationship God had with Adam and Eve; "The man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day" (v8). It appears to have been God's practice to walk with them in the cool of the day.

All of that is true, but Jesus was introducing a new concept. He was telling his followers that they could enter into relationship with God on a different level than man had ever been in relationship with him. Not only had God come to earth as the Christ, the promised

messiah, but the messiah was promising that God himself would be in the believers.

Jesus was telling them everything that was wrong with the law was changed. Instead of man being constantly faced with the fact that he could never measure up to divine expectations, man is given the ability to live the spirit of the law by being born of the Spirit. Today we know that the Father was in Christ, but we also know that Christ is in us and gives us a direct link to the Father.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for being in me as I grow into your image. Amen.

Message: While religion has been trying to train people to be good enough to become gods the Lord God himself is opening a door by which He can set up residence in believers. We may not become a god, but the sovereign God of the universe dwells with us.

Affirmation: I am not God, or a god, but I am the dwelling place for God. Christ is in the Father; the Father is in Christ; Christ is in me; I am in Christ; the Father is in me.

Reflection: This is a powerful truth that Paul calls in another place "a great mystery." We are not becoming gods, but we are being transformed into his likeness and his glory, or presence, is in us in an ever-increasing manner (2 Corinthians 3:18).

My Thoughts:

Day Twenty Five

I Am the Temple of God

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple. - Corinthians 3:16-17

In Deuteronomy Moses told us that God would choose a place where he would put his name and that his Spirit would dwell there. It would be a place where they would go to offer sacrifice and to worship. It was to be a sacred place that was to be revered as the dwelling place, or the home, of God.

For many centuries God's dwelling place was in a tent, but finally God allowed Solomon to build a place that would be known as the Temple of God. The temple Solomon built was beautiful and a worthy place for Israel to worship their God. But God had something in mind which was different. He had in mind a temple not made by human hands.

God's plan was not for man to build him a place, after all, the universe itself is the habitation of God. God's plan was that he would make man his dwelling place. Man the fallen creature; man the one who broke covenant with God in the garden.

While man was trying to become God, God was planning to become man. While man was trying to build a place for God, God was preparing a place for himself in man. God's plan for his eternal abode was to dwell within the heart of man.

God does not dwell in every man, but every person who will hear him knocking at the door of their heart and invite him in will become the habitation of God.

When we receive Christ and become a temple of God we are called to hold his temple sacred. We are to respect the fact that God has come to live in our hearts and we are to conduct ourselves appropriately. Paul is telling us in this passage that we must not destroy this temple but we are to keep it set apart as the place where God lives.

It is a joy to know that God has chosen to dwell in us, but it also prompts us to live responsibly as his temple.

Prayer: Lord, help me to treat your temple with respect. Amen.

Message: While man was trying to become God, God was planning to become man. While man was trying to build a place for God, God was preparing a place for himself in man. God's plan for his eternal abode was to dwell within the heart of man.

Affirmation: I am the place God has chosen to dwell therefore I will keep my body, God's Temple, free from sin and corruption.

Reflection: Many followers of Christ do not realize what it means to be the temple of God. Far too many of us think of ourselves as being the tool shed, or the shack out back, for God. We are His temple. Give that some careful consideration.

My Thoughts:

Day Twenty Six

I Am a Partaker in His Divine Nature

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. - 2 Peter 1:3-4

We have learned that all of the power in the world is of no value to us unless we realize we have the authority to use it. The police have the power to stop a crime. They have training and they have weapons, but if they don't realize they have authority they will sit back and say, "What can I do?"

Peter tells us that God has given us divine power and everything we need for life and godliness. That power is released through our knowledge of him. The authority to use the power of God in us is limited by the knowledge we have of him.

If we only see God as saving us from hell, then our relationship with him will be limited to getting our ticket punched for heaven. If, however, we have all the knowledge of all he has revealed about himself for us, then all of heaven is available to us.

God has imparted to us his divine nature with the hope that we would realize the power of the Christ within us and the authority he has given us to use that power for the benefit of the kingdom. The divine nature he has given us through faith in Christ gives us the power to be set free from sin, but if we do not realize that power and the authority to use that power, sin will still dominate our lives.

We are not only given power and authority over sin but we are given power and authority over the devil, the world and spiritual wickedness in the heavenly realm (Ephesians 6:12). God has given his divine nature to all who believe so that we can participate in the kingdom of God on earth now and in heaven for eternity.

It is time to gain knowledge of God and his plan for us so that we will realize the authority to use the power his has placed in us.

Prayer: Lord, help me to realize the power and the authority you have given me. In Jesus name, amen.

Message: We are not only given power and authority over sin but we are given power and authority over the devil, the world and spiritual wickedness in the heavenly realm (Ephesians 6:12). God has given his divine nature to all who believe so that we can participate in the kingdom of God on earth and in heaven for eternity.

Affirmation: I am a partaker in His divine nature, therefore I have been given power and authority over the devil, the world and spiritual wickedness in the heavenly realm.

Reflection: Becoming a follower of Christ is about more than just getting saved from judgment. It is also about becoming an overcomer and being a participant in God's plan for this age. Give some thought to the purposes God has for you.

My Thoughts:

Day Twenty Seven

I Am Victorious Over Fear and Timidity

God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. – 2 Timothy 1:7

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity (of cowardice, of craven and cringing and fawning fear), but [He has given us a spirit] of power and of love and of calm and well-balanced mind and discipline and self-control. – 2 Timothy 1:7 (AMP)

This passage can be applied in many situations for us, but it was originally written to Timothy, Paul's son in the gospel, concerning the gift of ministry he had been given when he was ordained. That is made plain in the verses which precede verse seven. Paul is telling Timothy that he has a great spiritual heritage and that he should not be intimidated by those who don't accept the message of the Messiah.

I've been in ministry a very long time and I have been rejected by some who didn't understand me, and by some who did understand me and that was what they were rejecting me. When I was younger this really bothered me, at times I felt intimidated by those with a stronger voice or more experience. Now that I am older and have the experience I have come to realize that I am not responsible for whether someone accepts or rejects me, but I am responsible to God for properly presenting the message of Christ and the working of the Holy Spirit.

I have a friend who once told me that he had gotten tired of those in his congregation of about 250 people who weren't supporting the church. They didn't give and they didn't accept responsibility for ministries in the church; they just sat in the pew, attended business meetings and disagreed with everything progressive anyone wanted to do.

He decided to preach a message on commitment. He talked about all the things mentioned above then in conclusion he told them, “Now, I don’t want you to feel bad I just wanted you to know how I feel.” I told him you just blew your message. You should have told them you wanted them to feel godly sorrow for their actions and your hope was that godly sorrow would lead them to repentance.”

God has not given us a spirit of intimidation, fear and powerlessness. He has given us a spirit power, love and self discipline.

Prayer: Help me Lord to be strong trusting your Spirit. Amen.

Message: For God did not give us a spirit of timidity (of cowardice, of craven and cringing and fawning fear), but [He has given us a spirit] of power and of love and of calm and well-balanced mind and discipline and self-control. - 2 Timothy 1:7 (AMP)

Affirmation: I am not intimidated by the world, or evil. God has given me a spirit of power, tempered with love and a well-balanced mind. Because of that I stand against evil and proclaim the uncompromising gospel of Christ.

Reflection: Give some thought to what it means to not be intimidated by this world and evil, but rather to be bold in the power of Holy Spirit.

My Thoughts:

Day Twenty Eight

I Am Being Transformed Into His Likeness

We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. - 2 Corinthians 3:18

Thank God for his transforming power. When we come to Christ we are opposite of God in just about every way. Where God is others-centric we are self-centered. God is pure in every way and we become contaminated by the world in just about every way.

In the midst of our fallen and broken state the Lord of the universe reaches down into humanity, puts his hand on us and says, "I want you." When we respond to him we begin an eternal journey.

None of us who started out serving God were saintly in the beginning, but as Holy Spirit began to do his work in us we started to change. It is this changing process which is transforming us into his likeness.

Next to the message of salvation the most important message I preach is the need for change. We cannot continue to be the person we were when we came to Christ and we will never become mature followers of Christ if we don't allow Holy Spirit to change us day by day.

Paul follows this promise of a transforming relationship with the Spirit with reminding the readers that at one time we were all blinded to the truth of the gospel and the power that was available to us to live above sin. He concludes the next chapter with, "Inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an

eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen.”

We are being renewed day by day as we are becoming the person God originally intended us to become. That is why I often speak of the lifetime process of being reconciled to God, renewed by the Holy Spirit, and being restored to the person God intended us to become. I am not what I used to be, and I am not yet what I am going to be, for I am being transformed into his likeness.

Prayer: Lord, help to submit to your transforming power. Amen.

Message: We are being renewed day by day as we are becoming the person God originally intended us to become. We must be committed to the lifetime process of being reconciled to God, renewed by the Holy Spirit, and being restored to the person God intended us to become. I am not what I used to be, and I am not yet what I am going to be, for I am being transformed into his likeness.

Affirmation: I am becoming more like Him because I am being transformed into His likeness.

Reflection: In what way are we being transformed, and how are we becoming more like Him?

My Thoughts:

Day Twenty Nine

I Am an Ambassador of Christ

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. - 2 Corinthians 5:19-20

What does it mean to be reconciled to God? It is very similar to the idea of two people who have been estranged and who finally resolve their issues. Sometimes we hear of a married couple who are estranged and separated, but then at a later time we hear that they have reconciled and are now together.

The message of being reconciled to God is that we who were estranged from Him have now made peace with Him. Paul writes in Romans, "The sinful mind is hostile to God," and that is our natural state. We have been cut off from all the good things God makes available because we have become hostile toward Him and have rejected His offer of peace. But through faith in Christ we have been reconciled to God.

Paul writes in Ephesians, "You who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:13). It is through faith in Christ that our differences with God have been settled and now we have been reconciled to Him. It is that relationship with God which gives us hope for the future.

As Paul writes in our scripture for today that we have been given the message of reconciliation. That means we who have been reconciled to God have the responsibility to show others how they may too be reconciled to God. All believers have been made

ambassadors of Christ and we are to take the message of being made right with God to the world.

The only vehicle God has for getting his appeal to the world is those of us who have tasted the gift of salvation. He has no other voice. We are his hope for reaching those who have not been reached by the gospel.

Paul calls us ambassadors and I ask what kind of ambassador are you? That is something to think about.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be an effective ambassador for Christ.

Message: We who have been reconciled to God have the responsibility to show others how they may too be reconciled to God. All believers have been made ambassadors of Christ and we are to take the message of being made right with God to the world.

Affirmation: I am an ambassador of Christ teaching others how they can be reconciled to God, renewed in the Holy Spirit and restored to the person God intends them to become.

Reflection: We are called to be ambassadors of the grace of God. What work can you see yourself doing as an ambassador of God's grace?

My Thoughts:

Day Thirty

I Am a Servant of the New Covenant

He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant - not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. - 2 Corinthians 3:6

One of the challenges Paul faced in his ministry came from the followers of Christ who still held to the laws of Judaism. Many of the early believers saw Jesus as an added feature to their Judaic faith and they did not understand that God was introducing an entirely new kind of relationship.

The law was very good at expressing the will of God concerning the way people should live, but it did nothing towards giving people the ability to live that way.

The old covenant established a relationship with God based upon the performance of the followers; the new covenant establishes a relationship with followers based upon what Christ has done and our faith in Christ. Paul is telling the church that he is a competent minister, or servant, of the new covenant.

In contrasting the old covenant and the new covenant Paul says, "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." What he seems to be saying is that when we are constantly trying to perform the works of the law in our own strength we fall far short of the mark, but when we are living in the power of the Spirit the intent of the law is fulfilled in our life. Being enthused with Holy Spirit produces a godly life which is the intent of the law.

When Paul says that he is a competent minister of the new covenant he means that he fully understands that living under grace doesn't give him permission to live in sin and his sin is automatically covered by grace.

He is telling us he understands that by living in the Spirit we will, because of our born again nature, live out the principles of the law.

We are all called to be ministers, or servants, of the gospel of Christ and Paul is admonishing us to be competent ministers who understand the value of both the law and Spirit. When we live in the Spirit we are given the grace to live righteously, and the grace not to judge others harshly.

Prayer: Lord, give me the grace to be a competent minister.

Message: When Paul says that he is a competent minister of the new covenant he means that he fully understands that living under grace doesn't give him permission to live in sin and his sin is automatically covered by grace. He is telling us he understands that by living in the Spirit we will, because of our born again nature, live out the principles of the law.

Affirmation: I am a competent servant of the New Covenant because I do not walk in the letter of the Law but I walk in the Spirit which fulfills the law in me.

Reflection: What is meant by, "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life?"

My Thoughts:

Day Thirty One

I Am Light to the World

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. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. – Matthew 5:14-16

Have you ever had a flashlight put in a safe place where you can find it in an emergency and then when the emergency does come you reach for the flashlight and the batteries are dead? If you have then the point of our passage today is easy to grasp.

When we come to Christ a light is ignited inside us and that light is to light up the world around us. John 1:4 tells us, “In him was life, and that life was the light of men.” When we receive his life we become that light.

What is that light which shines forth from us? It is the Christ in us which is influencing our lives. As a light to the world our world view is different. The way we talk is different. The way we act is different. The way we think is different. And Jesus is telling us the world should be seeing that light shining out from us.

The unfortunate reality is that many people who call themselves Christian do not have the light of Christ shining out from them. If we do business like the world, do all the same things the world does, think like the world and talk like the world then perhaps it is not the light of the Christ life which is shining out from us.

It is true that we do not receive Christ and His salvation through works, but it is also true, according to Christ, that when we have received Him we our good

works will be a shining light testifying to the world the goodness of Father God.

In one way we are all lights shining out into the world. That is, the world is seeing our life as a reflection of who we are on the inside. My question is this: when the world sees your life, what do they see? Is it the Christ light shining, or is it the same old world light they see?

Prayer: Lord, help me to let the Christ light shine from me. Amen.

Message: In one way we are all lights shining out into the world. That is, the world is seeing our life as a reflection of who we are on the inside. My question is this: when the world sees your life, what do they see? Is it the Christ light shining, or is it the same old world light they see?

Affirmation: I am careful to keep the Christ-light shining bright from my inner person.

Reflection: We are all a light shining. That is, those around us see who we are by how we act making our actions the light to our soul. What light to people see shining from you?

My Thoughts:

Have You Heard of the Take A Knee Challenge?

Calling for 1000 Prayer Warriors to Accept the Challenge to Take a Knee In Prayer Every Day

The idea was inspired by watching coaches of sports teams tell their players to "Take a Knee" when they have something important or inspirational to share with them. You will also notice that many of the professional sports teams will take a knee after a game to offer thanks.

Recently I felt God strongly urging me to call for 1000 prayer warriors to commit to daily praying for three things:

- ✓ Revival and renewal in the body of Christ
- ✓ Another great awakening in our nation
- ✓ Awakening and renewal in our own communities

This is a 30 day challenge for followers of Christ to do two things:

First, is the challenge simply to make a purpose to "Take A Knee" every day at least once a day. We are simply challenging believers to bend their knee before the Lord every day to pray for the three things listed above and to give thanks, ask for guidance for the day, wisdom to act appropriately in every situation and for the power of Holy Spirit to be an effective witness for Christ.

Second is the challenge to invite 5 of your friends to accept the challenge. We all have at least 5 friends who would be willing to accept this challenge.

Everyone who accepts the challenge gets a free book of devotions. You will get a book of 30 devotions on prayer when you join the challenge and each of your friends who join the challenge will also get the book.

For more information go to: <http://www.take-a-knee.org>

