Daily God Walk
The Christ Walk

One Anothering

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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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Daily God Walk Theme for This Devotional

"One Anothering"

There are many Scripture references which instruct us in how to relate to one another. Many of those passages have the phrase "one another" in them. Here are a few examples:

- "Love one another" – John 13:34
- "Fellowship with one another" - 1 John 1:5
- "Encourage one another– Judges20:19
- "Be kind to one another" – Ephesians 4:29

There are many more passages which instruct us on relating to one another and we will reference many of them in this Daily God Walk devotional.

Dr. J. Gregory Holmes has submitted 7 articles. You will find his contribution beginning on day 15 and continuing through day 21.

It is our hope that these daily devotions will encourage you, strengthen you and lead you into a deeper more meaningful relationship with Jesus our Lord.

Day One

A New Command: Love One Another

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. – John 13:34-35

Of all the commands Jesus gave, in our own strength, this is the hardest. It is not hard to love family and close friends, but we are commanded not just to love, but to love as Jesus loved.

We are being asked to love in a way that is not natural to love. It is natural to love those who love us and it is natural to love the lovely, but it is very difficult to love those who are very different from us.

It is interesting that Jesus didn't say, "By your doctrine shall men know that you are my disciples," neither did he say, "By the way you look shall men know that you are my disciples." Yet, it would seem by the attitude of many that he did say that.

Jesus made this statement while they were around the table at the last supper. Judas had just left to do his dirty deed and now Jesus was giving final instructions to his remaining disciples before he was to be taken to the cross.

These eleven men did not know what it was to love as Jesus loved, but they were about to find out just how far the love of Christ would go. Many years later the Apostle Paul would write, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature

God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant... he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:5-8).

We are being called to love as Jesus loved and that means stepping away from our secure place in life, as Jesus did, and take risks that will lead to great sacrifice, and may even lead to death.

There is only one way to love as Jesus loved and that is to be born of the same Spirit of which he was born. Are you ready to love one another as Jesus loved?

Prayer: Lord, grant me the grace to love as you have loved. Amen.

Message: We are being called to love as Jesus loved and that means stepping away from our secure place in life, as Jesus did, and take risks that will lead to great sacrifice, and may even lead to a martyr's death.

Affirmation: I am committed to loving as Jesus loved regardless of the cost.

Reflection: Consider the depth of love Jesus was calling his disciples to experience. Can you love in that manner without being born of the same Spirit Jesus was born of? Ask yourself if you are willing to truly love as Jesus loved.

Day Two

Have a Sincere Love for One Another

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply from the heart. – 1 Peter 1:22

Peter is making an interesting application of the result of being purified by obeying the truth. Could it be that he is telling us that a measure of whether we have been purified by the truth of God is whether we have sincere love for our brothers?

What is a sincere love? How could one have an insincere love? Love is love; you either love or you don't, so how could any love be less than sincere? Perhaps what he is talking about is love that is feigned. It may be possible to love in word, but not be sincere in love.

Some of us have fallen into the habit of telling people we love them just out of courtesy. It isn't uncommon to tell a close friend or associate, "I love ya" as you are parting company. In fact the old, "I love ya brother (or sister)" is so common that it is hardly noticed.

Peter is talking about something here that is much deeper than glad-handing or a pat on the back. He is talking about the kind of love which causes us to order our life in such a way that others can easily see that we are devoted to the welfare of others.

Paul wrote that love is patient, kind and it is not rude. He also says that it is not easily angered and that

it keeps no record of wrongs (1 Cor. 13:4-5). I'm afraid that when we put that description up against what we mean when we say, "I love ya" we may find that indeed our love is not very deep.

We are being told that when we have been purified by the word and the Spirit we will have a sincere and deep love for one another. It may be time to take another dip at the fountain of Spirit and truth – and stay there until we can love one another deeply and sincerely.

Prayer: Lord, Help me that my "I love ya's" won't be casual but that they will come from the depth of my heart. Amen.

Message: Peter is talking about something here that is much deeper than glad-handing or a pat on the back. He is talking about the kind of love which causes us to order our life in such a way that others can easily see that we are devoted to their welfare.

Affirmation: I am obeying the truth and I am becoming sincere in my love for others as my love for them deepens.

Reflection: Consider the difference between the "I love ya" that we hand out so freely and the more sincere love which compels us to take a personal interest in the lives of others in our life. How can we take our love beyond the surface platitudes and actually love one another deeply from the heart?

Day Three

Have Fellowship With One Another

God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. – 1 John 1:5-7

How much darkness in us makes us walking in the dark? And how much light keeps us out of the darkness? We've all come across those who claim to be in the light, but their light didn't shine into their business transactions, neither did it shine into their personal life. It's as if they keep religion and their personal or business life in different compartments.

John says that if we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk as those in darkness walk then we lie and do not live by the truth. Those are some strong words. Again, I pose the question: How many steps into the dark must we take before we are walking in darkness?

"God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." Does that mean in order to be in Christ, and Christ in us, that we must be totally out of darkness? That should give us some cause to examine our lives to see if we indeed are in the light.

In this passage we are given an interesting test as to whether we are living in the light. John writes, "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another." The word translated

fellowship is *koinonia*. *Koinonia* means more than having a good time at a party. It is deeper than that.

When we are in fellowship, as being referred to here, we are loving, accepting and encouraging one another. If we are having a problem having that kind of relationship with our brothers and sisters then we should examine ourselves to see if we are indeed in the light. Is it important to be in fellowship with one another? John seems to link it with being purified by the blood of Christ.

Prayer: Lord, it is so easy to have just one foot angling toward the darkness. Grant me the grace to keep both feet firmly planted in the light. Amen.

Message: When we are in fellowship, as being referred to here, we are loving, accepting and encouraging one another. If we are having a problem having that kind of relationship with our brothers and sisters then we should examine ourselves to see if we are indeed in the light.

Affirmation: I am committed to being in fellowship with my brothers and sisters so that I will be walking in the light as He is in the light.

Reflection: When we find it being difficulty to be in *koinonia* type of fellowship with others, how do I remedy that? Perhaps first we should try to determine why we are having that difficulty - then we should resolve those issues so we can have *koinonia* with one another.

Day Four

Loving One Another is Life

This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who... murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. – 1 John 3:11-14

We remember the story of Cain and Abel as being the first murder. It is significant to note that the first murder was brother on brother. John seems to be contrasting the death which comes from envy and bitterness with the life which comes from love.

John writes an emphatic command: Do not be like Cain! Most of us can find relief here in that we have never literally killed another person, but are we really free from the guilt of speaking of others in a way that would kill their influence? Is John speaking concerning our attitude toward our brothers?

We often say, "Love the sinner and hate the sin," but for too many of us that means shun the sinner and hold him in disdain because he sins. Paul writes in Galatians, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently" (Galatians 6:1). I don't think he meant to first cut him down with sharp words. He meant to use gentle words to woo him back into fellowship with the body of Christ.

The way we act toward those around us is going to reveal our faith to the world. What does the world see of your faith? Do they see you showing a bad attitude

toward others? Do they see you participating in cutting others down, talking negatively about the boss, the company, government, the world in general?

You have heard, "There's more than one way to skin a cat," and there's more than one way to kill a brother. The spirit of Cain seeks to destroy brothers, but the Spirit of Christ calls us to love one another. In doing that we pass from death to life.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be careful how I think of my brothers and what I say about them. Amen.

Message: The way we act toward those around us is going to reveal our faith to the world. What does the world see of your faith? The spirit of Cain seeks to destroy brothers, but the Spirit of Christ calls us to love one another and in doing that we pass from death to life.

Affirmation: My goal is to demonstrate to the world the true faith of Christ by loving those in my sphere of influence.

Reflection: Is John telling us in this passage that loving one another is a vital step in the rite of passage into eternal life? Consider the question of how your faith walk affects others and how do they perceive your faith when they see your actions and interactions with others?

Day Five

Believe in Christ and Love One Another

This is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us. – 1 John 3:23-24

Among the "one another" commands the one to "love one another" seems to be the most often repeated. In this passage John links believing in Christ with loving one another then he connects obeying his commands with being in Christ.

Believing, obeying and loving go hand in hand with being in Christ. If we say we believe in Christ but do not obey his commands do we actually believe in Christ? If we say we believe in Christ but we do not love others in the way Christ showed us to love them, do we actually believe in Christ?

Following Christ can appeal to some kind of religious romanticism. I remember back in the 1960's, during the hippy era that it was not uncommon to see a young man walking the streets with long hair and robe trying to be like Jesus. For some being like Jesus is a romantic ideal, but being like Jesus requires more than just putting on a robe.

Jesus gave us many commands that are difficult to follow. Among them are, "Turn the other cheek;" "Love your enemies;" and "Love your neighbor as yourself." Those are all noble goals, but they run counter to our human nature.

So, how do we do we get from wanting to strike back when we are struck to turning the other cheek? How do we get from getting even with our enemies to loving them? John tells us how in the last part of this passage.

"And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us." When we truly believe upon Christ as our Lord and Savior the Holy Spirit comes into us. When Holy Spirit is there he brings love and a strong desire to obey. Believing in Christ is synonymous being in the Spirit.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit so that loving and obeying will be in my nature. In Jesus name.

Message: Believing, obeying and loving go hand in hand with being in Christ. If we say we believe in Christ but do not obey his commands do we actually believe in Christ? If we say we believe in Christ but we do not love others do we truly believe in Christ?

Affirmation: Believing in Christ calls me into obedience to his teaching and when I am in obedience I will fulfill "love one another."

Reflection: Many today see receiving Christ as believing in a doctrine without experiencing a life change. Give some thought to just what it means to believe in Christ. What do we obligate ourselves to when we become a follower of Christ?

Day Six

When God Lives in Us We Love One Another

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God... If we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. – 1 John 4:7, 12

To love the way Jesus calls us to love is not the norm in human relations. The normal person loves others with a "because" attached to it. You know what I mean: "I love her because she..." (fill in the blanks), or "I love him because..." There is no "because" attached to the love Jesus calls us to.

This kind of love requires that one be born of the Spirit so that his love can flow through us. His love has no conditions attached and there is no "because." He loves the way he loves simply because that is who he is: "God is Love" (verse 8). The only way to love as he loves is to become born of God so that his nature lives in us.

Can you imagine God speaking to the angels and saying, "I just can't love that person. Look at what they are doing. I am God and not even I can love them!" No. We know he could never say such a thing, yet, we who claim to be born of God have said similar things. It is easy to love the lovely, but *agape* love, God's love, is tested by the unlovely.

"If we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." I suppose if we look at the other side of that statement we would conclude that if we don't love one another then God doesn't live in us. Then there are the unlovely.

A key to loving the unlovely is to look at them through the eyes of Jesus. Jesus never saw unlovely people he just saw people in need of his love; and the more unlovely they appear to the average person the more he realized their need for his love.

Do you have some unlovely people in your life? Try looking at them the way Jesus sees them. The more unlovely they are the more they are in need of God's love. Love them like God does.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the grace to not only love those who love me but to also love the unlovely. In Jesus name, amen.

Message: A key to loving the unlovely is to look at them through the eyes of Jesus. Jesus never saw unlovely people he just saw people in need of his love; and the more unlovely they appear to the average person the more he realized their need for his love.

Affirmation: I have learned that the only way I can love as Jesus loved is to be born of the same Spirit he was born of.

Reflection: It seems the harder we try to love the unlovely the more difficult it becomes. What is the solution? Should we try harder, or should we discover how to love in that way. This devotion gives the answer: What do you see as the answer?

Day Seven

Loving One Another is Walking in Obedience

I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love. – 2 John 1:4

Loving one another is not only the theme of this short book but it is also the sounding board for our relationship with God. It sounds like John is saying, "We've been trying to convince you from the beginning that love is the number one thing. Now grow up and start walking in obedience."

I have noticed something very interesting. People who have attitude sins in their life don't have a love problem, they have an obedience problem. I have noticed in my own life that when I am having a problem with other people I can usually trace my attitude back to a root problem and that problem is usually a part of me that is not surrendered to God.

Paul gives a list of attitude sins in Galatians 5. His list includes hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy (v20). Each one of those sins is a reflection of how we view others. Think about it for a moment. Hatred is obvious, but what about discord (or gossip)? Love doesn't prompt us to speak negatively of others.

If we can accept that having difficulty loving the way God calls us to love is a result of not walking in obedience to Christ then perhaps we will focus on being

obedient. We can actually use our attitude toward others as measure of our obedience.

Here is a suggestion. Whenever you find that others are starting to bother you and you catch yourself thinking about how bad they are just stop yourself and begin to ask God what is out of place inside of you. I have done that many times and when I get myself straightened out others don't seem so bad.

Prayer: Lord, help me to examine myself when others begin to irritate me. Grant me the grace to obey your word. Amen.

Message: If we can accept that having difficulty loving the way God calls us to love is a result of not walking in obedience to Christ then perhaps we will focus on being obedient. We can actually use our attitude toward others as measure of our obedience.

Affirmation: It is easier to love others when I have submitted myself to God.

Reflection: This devotion states that we can use our attitude toward others as a measure of our own obedience. How well do you do when you compare your attitudes in life to the attitude sins of Galatians 5? How well do you do when you compare your life to the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5?

Day Eight

Encourage One Another in Battle

The Benjamites came out of Gibeah and cut down twenty-two thousand Israelites on the battlefield that day. But the men of Israel encouraged one another and again took up their positions where they had stationed themselves the first day. – Judges 20:21-22

It was a sad day in Israel. 22,000 men cut down in battle in one day. In times like that most men would take another look at the situation and consider going home, but that was not in the mind of the Israelites. Rather than talking retreat or surrender they encouraged one another.

I have seen ministries going through tough times and have noticed that in those times there are some who will bail out, some who will stay and complain about the way things are, and then there are some who will band together and encourage one another.

Godly men and women need to surround themselves with people who believe in their vision, are in agreement with their mission, and who are committed for the long haul. Great victories only come out of great struggles and those who stay in the battle are the ones who win the victory.

Because there were leaders among the soldiers who would not accept defeat but encouraged one another they came up with a plan which defeated the Benjamites giving them the victory.

Do you know anyone who is struggling? They may be having problems with a sin in their life, or maybe a relationship has gone bad. Maybe they are the victim of someone else's sin and they are so discouraged they are thinking about giving up. Seek them out and begin to encourage them. Share God's promises with them and help to rebuild their hope.

You may find that when you have invested in another who is going through hard times that you will have someone to encourage you when you are going through the tough times.

Prayer: Lord, give me grace to be an encourager. Amen.

Message: Godly men and women need to surround themselves with people who believe in their vision, are in agreement with their mission, and who are committed for the long haul. Great victories only come out of great struggles and those who stay in the battle are the ones who win the victory.

Affirmation: I have a clear vision of ministry and I bring others into this ministry who have a similar vision and who are in agreement with the mission.

Reflection: Someone has said that the Christian army is the only army in the world who shoots their wounded. Why do you think that has been said? What is the remedy? Consider Psul's admonition in Galatians 6, "If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently."

Day Nine

Stop Passing Judgment on One Another

Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.

– Romans 14:13

Jesus said, "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). That passage has been the topic of a lot of conversations.

I've heard people say when confronted with a sin in their life, "Jesus said not to judge." Yes, Jesus did say not to judge, but he also said that we are to be fruit inspectors. In another place he said, "You will know them by their fruit." And so the discussion about judging goes on.

But, what is the message of not judging? Does that mean we are to ignore sin or error in others? Paul is not talking about dealing with a person who has sin in their life; he shows his attitude toward the sin of believers in numerous places. So then, what is he saying?

He gives some clarity to his meaning when he writes, "Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way." If someone has issues minister to them out of grace rather anger or harshness.

I have a friend who has some problems relating to others in a healthy way, particular people in leadership. This person can be stubborn and sometimes belligerent.

However, this person is a dedicated worker. A leader who didn't want to deal with the issues just wrote this person a letter excommunicating them from the church. That person has not gone to church since.

In Galatians 6 Paul writes, "If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently." That is the message of our passage today. We must be careful so that our judgment of the situation doesn't cause another to stumble. We should also keep in mind that judging others is a boomerang. The way we judge others will be the way we are judged.

Prayer: Lord, give me a heart to nourish and encourage others rather than judge them. In Jesus name. Amen.

Message: We must be careful so that our judgment of the situation doesn't cause another to stumble. We should also keep in mind that judging others is a boomerang. The way we judge others will be the way we are judged.

Affirmation: I am committed to being a restorer rather a destroyer. When I see someone struggling I will reach out to them rather than push them down further.

Reflection: Can you tell the difference between judging someone and observing the error in what they are doing? Have you known someone who was very hard on others who were not living just as they thought others should live? How did others view that hard or harsh person?

Day Ten

Be Kind and Compassionate to One Another

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building up others according to their needs that it may benefit those who listen. And 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 4:19-32

We have heard the admonition, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit," but have we heard it in the context of making a list of things which Paul is apparently telling us will grieve the Holy Spirit? Let's check out his list:

- ✓ Unwholesome talk
- ✓ Bitterness
- ✓ Rage and anger
- ✓ Brawling and slander
- ✓ Every form of malice

If you will notice all of the items in this list have to do with how we relate to one another. It grieves the Holy Spirit when we think and speak negative things about others. Holy Spirit is grieved when we carry bitterness toward others. Holy Spirit is grieved when we carry unresolved anger toward others, slander them, or have malice toward them.

How do we remedy these issues that grieve the Holy Spirit? By being kind and compassionate toward each other. How do we manifest kindness and compassion? By forgiving each other. I can hear someone saying, "Yes, but you don't know what they have done to me." If that is the way you feel about it just consider the last phrase, "Just as in Christ God forgave you."

Think of all you did that grieved our Lord, yet he forgave you. That is what Paul is reminding us of when he calls us to forgive one another. Be kind and compassionate to one another.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the grace to be kind and compassionate toward others so that I won't grieve the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Message: How do we remedy these issues that grieve the Holy Spirit? By being kind and compassionate toward each other. How do we manifest kindness and compassion? By forgiving each other.

Affirmation: Forgiving those who have offended me is as important as being forgiven by God myself. Therefore, I will forgive others their offences and I will be kind and compassionate toward them.

Reflection: The apostle Paul gives a list of attitudes and behaviors which grieve, or offend Holy Spirit. Examine yourself to see if any of those are working in your life and if they are seek God for a spirit of repentance concerning them.

Day Eleven

Admonish One Another With Words of Christ

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. – Colossians 3:15-16

In reading the entire third chapter of Colossians it seems that Paul is addressing the subject of having proper relationships with one another. In verse eight he addresses anger, malice, slander and filthy language. In verse nine he writes, "Do not lie to each other."

When he finishes with what not to do he goes into the way we should treat one another. Beginning in verse twelve he writes, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."

Paul wraps up this instruction on having good relationships with one another by calling us to, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (verses 15-16).

He seems to be telling us that the key to having healthy relationships with one another is to cover all of our communication with love while being sure that the peace of Christ rules in our hearts. When we speak to others about any area of concern we should be sure that it is from the perspective of love covered peace as we admonish them patiently in all wisdom, compassion, kindness, humility and gentleness.

Having healthy, productive relationships is not always easy, but it is always worth the effort.

Prayer: Help me to submit my will and emotions to you so that my relationships with others will be covered in love. Amen.

Message: The key to having healthy relationships with one another is to cover all of our communication with love while being sure that the peace of Christ rules in our hearts.

Affirmation: I am careful to cover in love and peace my communication with others, especially when expressing any disagreement I might have with them.

Reflection: Remember that having healthy, productive relationships is not always easy, but it is always worth the effort. What are some ways you can express your disappointment, or disagreement with another which will produce a positive and productive result.

Day Twelve

Build Up One Another

He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. – 1 Thessalonians 5:10-11

In any context the instruction to encourage one another to build up one another is good teaching, but this teaching is being given in the context of reminding people of the coming of the Lord and warning them to be prepared for that event.

"We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air... Therefore encourage each other with these words" (4:13-18).

Paul goes on in his instruction concerning the coming of the Lord and tells them that they should live in such a way that they will not be surprised at the coming of the Lord (v4-10). Then he gives one of his famous therefores. "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up."

He is telling us that in view of the fact that Christ is returning as a thief in the night we must be diligent about our walk and we must be encouraging one another and building each other up in the faith. It is not the time to find fault with our brothers and sisters.

It is time to use words of faith and hope to encourage those who are discouraged and build up those who have been torn down by the circumstances of life. I challenge you to think about who you can encourage today and make it your goal to build them up in the faith.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be an encourager the brethren. Amen.

Message: It is time to use words of faith and hope to encourage those who are discouraged and build up those who have been torn down by the circumstances of life. We must be diligent about our walk and we must be encouraging one another and building each other up in the faith. It is not the time to find fault with our brothers and sisters.

Affirmation: I am committed to taking every opportunity to build others up in the faith so that we all might be ready when the Lord returns.

Reflection: This devotion challenges us to be diligent in our walk and to consider how me might be an encouragement to others. Think of some ways that you can reach out to other believers who need a helping hand or an encouraging word.

Day Thirteen

Encourage One Another Today

See to it brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.

– Hebrews 3:12-14

The writer of this passage had just been reminding those who read it that those adults whom Moses led out of Egypt did not cross over into the promised land because of unbelief. Only their children survived the 40 years of desert wandering to walk across the Jordan into the promised land.

While he is reminding the readers of the rebellion and disobedience of the wilderness wanderers he is telling us that we must be careful that we are not deceived by unbelief and fall into the same trap that Israel fell into.

One phrase from this passage really gets my attention. It is the warning of being hardened by sin's deceitfulness. Sin appeals to our base appetites and as we respond to those appetites we become hardened against anything that would deprive us from answering the call of the flesh.

Sin hardens us against the working of Holy Spirit within us. That is why we are being instructed to encourage one another daily. I have watched as believers

have become inconsistent in their attendance to worship services and I have heard their excuses for not participating in activities with other believers. I have watched as they slowly fell into complacency and finally let their faith slip away. I have been guilty of watching this happen and did not feel compelled to encourage such a one daily.

Have you been guilty of watching others slowly slip away from their faith while you yourself were not moved to encourage them? We must encourage one another daily. We must first guard our own heart, then we must be ever vigilant to encourage one another, “as long as it is called today.”

Prayer: Help me to not be so complacent as to watch others slip away without giving them encouragement daily. Amen.

Message: Have you been guilty of watching others slowly slip away from their faith while you yourself were not moved to encourage them? We must encourage one another daily. We must first guard our own heart, then we must be ever vigilant to encourage one another, “as long as it is called today.”

Affirmation: I am committed to encourage those I see beginning to slip away and who are in danger of becoming entangled again with this world.

Reflection: The admonition in our Scripture passage today is pretty strong about encouraging one another. The writer says, "See to it brothers..." That doesn't sound like a suggestion. How do we do that so others don't slip away? How do we encourage one another daily?

Day Fourteen

Accept One Another

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. – Romans 15:5-7

Apostle Paul often addresses the theme of unity in his writings to the churches. In Ephesians 4 he writes, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (v3). To the church at Corinth he writes, "Finally, brothers, good-by. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace" (2 Corinthians 13:11).

So, how do we live in unity with other believers? Paul instructs us to accept one another. The Greek word translated "accept" implies considerably more than just saying, "Yeah, I accept him – but I don't have to like him!" The word translated "accept" is *proslambano* and is a combination of two other Greek words. *Pros*, which indicates a moving toward or a coming along beside. *Lambano* indicates taking by the hand.

Proslambano, then, would indicate that when we accept one another we are making an effort, as if we were taking one by the hand, to come along beside another and walk together as one. This principle is affirmed in the next phrase where Paul writes, "Just as

Christ accepted you." We are taught that we are "in Christ," that is we have become one with Christ. When we accept one another we are becoming one with each other.

We cannot fulfill the command of Christ to love one another, and we will not be united in Christ, until we learn to accept one another. That means we are to walk beside all who call Jesus Lord without regard to their ethnicity, social status, or appearance. Paul didn't exactly say that our acceptance by Christ depends on our acceptance of others, but it certainly seems implied. Accept one another as Christ has accepted you.

Prayer: Lord, help me to accept my brothers and sisters in Christ just as you have accepted them. Amen.

Message: We are taught that we are "in Christ," that is we have become one with Christ. When we accept one another we are becoming one with each other. We cannot fulfill the command of Christ to love one another, and we will not be united in Christ, until we learn to accept one another.

Affirmation: I do accept all who call upon the name of the Christ as my brethren. I take them by the hand and walk with them on this journey of faith.

Reflection: Give some thought to the way Paul addresses the church concerning unity. What are some of the things which cause dis-unity in the body of Christ? What are some steps that can be taken to restore and maintain unity?

Day Fifteen

Show Compassion to One Another

"This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. . . In your hearts do not think evil of each other.'

– Zechariah 7:9-10

The differences between sympathy and empathy are ones of emotional involvement. Sympathy looks at the misfortune of another, and feels both pity and concern. Empathy looks at the misfortune of another, and feels what the other person is feeling. Compassion, however, takes the observer beyond these nuances of emotion into the area of personal involvement. Having been emotionally moved by the misfortune of another, feeling their pain and loss, we are called to act on their behalf.

This is dangerous and tricky ground. How far can we pursue 'true justice,' showing 'mercy and compassion,' before we find ourselves in the powerful quicksand of codependency? This is an all-too-common place of bondage. It has such prisoners as parents codependent to adult children who 'can't make it' and wives or husbands codependent to their spouse's alcohol or drug or other habit. There are many people in this 'jail cell.'

So, someone else's misfortune captures our attention – how do we respond? Doesn't it depend on the circumstances, and don't we need wisdom every time? The story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 gives some direction. In this circumstance, the Samaritan helped a man who, through no fault of his own, had encountered great misfortune; he had been robbed and beaten and

left for dead. If the Samaritan hadn't helped, the man would have died.

Jesus gave us the parable of the good Samaritan to help us understand that having compassion means we are to help the helpless. But we must also be able to discern who is helpless and who is a perpetual victim.

We must learn to discern what is just as Scripture tells us, and we must show appropriate compassion. This requires wisdom. This wisdom comes through walking in the Spirit.

Prayer: Lord, grant me a heart of compassion administered through wisdom which comes only from you. Amen.

Message: Jesus gave us the parable of the good Samaritan to help us understand that having compassion means we are to help the helpless. but we must also be able to discern who is truly helpless and who is a perpetual victim.

Affirmation: I pray for a heart of compassion that I might be motivated to serve those who are in need and I pray for a spirit of discernment to distinguish between those who are in need and those who are chronic seekers of help.

Reflection: Can you explain the difference between sympathy, empathy and compassion? Give that some thought as you examine how you respond to the misfortune of another in the body of Christ. Also consider how you should respond to the need of your neighbor as demonstrated by the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Day Sixteen

Offer Hospitality to One Another

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. – 1 Peter 4:7-10

hos·pi·tal·i·ty / Noun: The friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers.

Not everyone has the 'gift of hospitality,' but we are all called to be hospitable. We are usually adept at receiving guests; after all, we invited them. It may be a little inconvenient, but we tend to carry this same attitude over to visitors. However, what about strangers – how friendly and generous are we towards them?

In the Christian community, we often have fellowship gatherings at the church, or small groups coming together in homes. In these circumstances, the social norms of 'our type' are carried out almost automatically. We are comfortable with our traditions and our customs, and it is easy to be hospitable.

When someone drops by un-announced or after a last-minute call, hospitality becomes a little more difficult. Sometimes weighing the social order and relational values enter into our calculations – how important is it to spend time with this person? It can be anywhere from inconvenient to downright difficult to be interrupted in the middle of our plans. How we react to such visitors is colored not only by our goals for

the day, but also by our 'default settings' as regards the importance of relationships.

Strangers are a different level of interpersonal relationships. Their impositions on our time can be as temporary as an unsolicited sales call to the jarring circumstances of a neighbor in dire need. A sales call is easily handled with a "not interested." A neighbor whose husband has just had a heart attack requires that we adapt to a greater need.

Prayer: Lord, being hospitable is not always easy and I need your grace to carry it off. Give me your grace. In Jesus name. Amen.

Message: Hospitality is the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers. We are instructed to offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

Affirmation: I make a sincere effort to be friendly and generous to all in my sphere of influence.

Reflection: How hospitable are you? Do you welcome guests, even when they weren't invited? What about strangers? Do you reach out to them with friendship and generosity? Most of us will "help out" when called upon, but are we ready to extend a hand of friendship and generosity even before we are asked?

Day Seventeen

Give Presents to One Another

Mordecai... sent letters to all the Jews... to have them celebrate ... the month of Adar as the time when the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month when their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration... to observe the days as days of feasting and joy and giving presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor. – Esther 9:20-22

It was a dire time for the family of God during the time of Esther. The people were already living under a harsh edict. Their enemies had gotten the ear of the king, and he was about to impose laws that would enslave and perhaps annihilate them.

God's favor was unexpected. But His favor was also the only remedy for the dire circumstances the people faced. There was no way out of these difficult times unless God intervened.

God's people throughout time have learned this lesson: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). This means that His Holy Spirit power is greatest when we are at our weakest. Another way of looking at this is to realize that if we can figure out a way to fix it on our own, we oftentimes will do exactly that, and in so doing, we keep God from his work in, through, and for us.

A great lesson from the people of ancient Israel in the Old Testament is this: As we face tough times, remember what God did the last time we found ourselves in an impossible situation and cried out for

His help. The Jews remembered that He 'took us out of Egypt,' He 'parted the Red Sea,' He 'provided for us in the wilderness,' and He 'took us into a land of milk and honey.'

Where has the power of God intersected with the impossible circumstances of your life and brought blessed relief? Remember such a time, then thank Him for what He is about to do in your current 'impossible circumstances' and share these times in our journey by sharing what God has given us. Share God's goodness to one another.

Prayer: God, I am thankful for your many deliverances. Grant me the grace to share my thankfulness with others. Amen.

Message: Remember times God intervened in your impossible circumstances, then thank Him for what He is about to do in your current 'impossible circumstances' and share these times in our journey by sharing what God has given us. Share God's goodness with one another.

Affirmation: I am committed to being a willing servant of others who are blessed by my giving.

Reflection: The feast described in our Scripture passage is the feast of Purim which celebrates the deliverance of the Jews from being annihilated through a sinister plot. We should also have regular times of coming together with joy and celebration of being delivered from the enemy of our soul. Start planning now for your next feast day and invite friends, even strangers, to share in your joy.

Day Eighteen

Forgive One Another

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

– Colossians 3:13-14

The hardest thing of all is to forgive. We have places in our spirit, mind, and emotions that are tied to an unsolvable problem involving others. They have wounded us in some way that still controls our thoughts and our actions – our *past* has stolen our *future* and obliterated our *present*, and we haven't been able to unlock the door of our *self-imposed* jail cell.

Here is the key: Jesus said, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matt 6:14-15).

Our ignorant reaction to this key to freedom is often phrased, "Of course I'd forgive, if he/she/they just asked." What we really mean is, "I might forgive, if they crawled to me over a mile of broken glass, leaving a trail of blood and wailing for mercy – that might be enough to sway my heart. Nevertheless, I'd have to watch them for a long, long time. Besides, Lord, you don't know how badly they hurt me."

A powerful image of forgiveness in the Bible is seen at Jesus' crucifixion. Just before he died on the cross,

he looked down at the soldiers gambling for His last paltry earthly possessions, and said: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Don't you think there is a lesson here for us? The lesson is one of unconditional love – a love we can only share if we have received the Lord's love.

Here is a liberating thought: What if we decided to truly forgive everyone who had hurt us in the past? But go further now: What if we decided to forgive others *before they ever wounded us*?

Prayer: Lord, you know I want to forgive, but what they have done has made it difficult. Grant me the ability to forgive as you have called me to forgive. In Jesus name. Amen.

Message: Here is the key: Jesus said, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matt 6:14-15).

Affirmation: I have chosen to submit my will to God and have taken on the nature of Christ so that forgiving others is as natural to me as it was to Jesus as he hung on the cross.

Reflection: Forgiving others who ask for forgiveness is not that hard, but forgiving those who have not asked for it is very difficult. Should we forgive others, even when they don't ask for it? How can we forgive others before they offend us?

Day Nineteen

Do Not Slander One Another

Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you-- who are you to judge your neighbor? – James 4:11-12

Old folks sometimes share great life wisdom. My grandmother once advised: "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all." Scripture admonishes, "If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless" (James 1:26).

So when do we speak up against injustice? What are the guidelines we should follow as Christian people when we find the poison of slander in our midst – should we keep silent and not "sit in judgment," or zealously guard righteousness?

We acknowledge that church families are filled with sinful people who sometime make damaging statements about others. Some of this is ignorance and some of this evil. It has always been so, but we still have the responsibility of confronting such evil. There can be collateral damage from confronting evil, however, it is far less than letting evil continue to work its poison throughout the Body of Christ.

Think about these criteria when confronting evil: Educate ignorance, rebuke sin. If diligent effort is placed on actions, then there will be far fewer times when evil must be confronted. Jesus said, "The things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man unclean" (Matthew 15:18). A person who habitually defames the character of others reveals something very deep and dark in their own heart.

"If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man" (James 3:2). We should not only use that passage to comfort ourselves but to grant tolerance to others as well.

Prayer: God, grant me the grace to keep my tongue silent in regards to speaking evil of others. In Jesus name. Amen.

Message: Jesus said, "The things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man unclean" (Matthew 15:18). A person who habitually defames the character of others reveals something very deep and dark in their own heart.

Affirmation: I have chosen to speak only of the good and to pray for those who seem to wayward.

Reflection: It is interesting that among those God hates are the ones who spread discord among the believers (Proverbs 6:19). When you speak evil of another you are tearing down another member of the body of Christ and when you do that you are weakening yourself. Think about it.

Day Twenty

Spur One Another On

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-- and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

– Hebrews 10:23-25

I am one who believes that we have entered into what the Bible calls the 'last days.' I base that opinion both in Jesus' descriptions of the world events that would be prevalent in such times ('wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines, floods' etc. – *from the Olivet discourses in the synoptic Gospels)*, and in specific fulfilled prophecy such as the restoration of the State of Israel in 1948. Obviously, any serious Bible student knows that there are far more such prophecies fulfilled than just these. My point is not sensationalistic, but instead is a call for realistic response from Christian people.

While a reasonable response might include storing food and medicines and water, having emergency communications capability, and having contingency plans for family and friends to unite in difficult circumstances, I am not calling for such actions, even though I believe them to be prudent and useful in any times and circumstances.

Instead, what I call for is a commitment to the tenets of our faith in Jesus Christ. From what I see, the

church has been overwhelmed by the cares of the world. I've been in many parts of the world, and I see this erosion of Biblical values in all the places I have been.

With all of our concern about the events of these last days we must remember to encourage one another. We must give one another a reason to continue in the faith. To accomplish that task we must make a habit of regularly gathering to worship, pray, study God's word and encourage one another.

Prayer: Lord, help to realize that we are in the last days and grant me the grace to encourage others on this journey. Amen.

Message: We must give one another a reason to continue in the faith. To accomplish that task we must make a habit of regularly gathering to worship, pray, study God's word and encourage one another.

Affirmation: I am committed to encouraging others and motivating them to loving with God's love and to doing good works. I can best do that by being an example of the same.

Reflection: It is interesting that so much is being said today about how we can be blessed, be prosperous and be successful, but there is much less being said about how we can help others to be blessed, prosperous and successful. Give some thought to how you can encourage and motivate others to be blessed.

Day Twenty One

Be Patient With One Another

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

– Ephesians 4:2-3

Historically, it is clear that 'the church' has done a mediocre job, of "keeping the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." I think that the reason for this failure is imperfect conversion followed by faulty discipleship, producing both false and immature disciples.

Let me try to explain. It is partially about the difference between the Law and Grace, and partially about the distinction between conversion and sanctification. Most people drawn to church fellowship have a desire for 'the good.' But if anyone drawn to do good has not truly received Jesus and submitted themselves to His lordship, then their attempt to do 'the good' comes from their own unconverted fallen nature. The 'fruits' of fallen man who wants to do good will always fall back on an insistence of the Law.

Conversely, the disciple of Christ has entered into a process of becoming like Christ. Christ-likeness exhibits the characteristics of Jesus: Led of Spirit, humble, wise, knowing the Father's will, etc. Notice the word 'process.' We all start with being born again, and from that condition we mature at different rates. There are immature saints well into their 40th year of Christian walk, just as there are youth wise beyond their years. All

face their own struggles, and all have different aspects of Godly character to work out on their way to Eternity.

The Apostle's advice stands well across 2000 years, in every age. 'Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.' Patience is not only a virtue, it is an outcome of the work God does in us through relationship with others. We will only have unity in the body when we are bound together with the common goal of peace.

Prayer: Lord, it is difficult to patiently bear with those who rub me the wrong way. Grant me the grace of humbly submitting bearing with those with whom I disagree. In Jesus name. Amen.

Message: Patience is not only a virtue, it is an outcome of the work God does in us through relationship with others. We will only have unity in the body when we are bound together with the common goal of peace.

Affirmation: I am developing patience with others, even when I see inconsistencies, because I am committed to unity in the body of Christ.

Reflection: It is not hard to be at peace with others when they are in agreement with me. The difficulty is bearing with those who aren't in agreement with me. What must we do to be patient with others and bear with them even when we have differences?

Day Twenty Two

Be Devoted to One Another

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. – Romans 12:9-11

What a succinct definition of *agape* (love). "Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves." When we do that we are fulfilling the great love command: Love God with all your being and love your neighbor as yourself.

Paul is calling us to a position beyond just shaking hands with one another on Sunday Morning. He is calling us to "be kindly affectioned one to another" (KJV). "Kindly affectioned" is translated in the NIV as "devoted." The Greek word is *philostorgos* and simply means to cherish one's kindred and is used to indicate the relationship between close relatives like parents and children.

Believers seem to be being instructed that if one is to have sincere love for the brethren one must be devoted to them as if they were their natural family. How does that translate into our daily responsibility toward one another?

If you see your child struggling with one of the many trying issues of life do you approach them with the attitude that they should just "get over it," or do you approach them with an extended hand asking what you can do to help? We would never get any satisfaction out of seeing a close relative fail, yet how often do we look at the failures of other believers as opportunity to advance our own cause?

The second “one another” command in this passage is to honor one another. To honor another is to esteem them with great value and here Paul is instructing us to ascribe honor to others that is greater than the value we place upon ourselves.

When we are devoted to one another in the sense of *philostorgos* we honor, or esteem them above .ourselves. It is good to notice that Paul is not talking about our attitude toward leaders but to our peers.

Prayer: Lord, Grant me the humility to honor others and to be devoted to others and honor them. In Jesus name. Amen

Message: Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

Affirmation: A test of the sincerity of my love toward others is whether I am devoted to others and whether I honor them above myself.

Reflection: The Greek word translated "devoted" in the NIV speaks to the devotion we have for close relatives. Paul seems to be calling believers to love others with that same kind of devotion. Give some thought to how you can demonstrate that kind of devotion to others followers of Christ.

Day Twenty Three

Live in Harmony With One Another

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. – Romans 12:14-16

The heading for my Bible in this section is simply "Love." Paul begins with, "Love must be sincere" (v9) then goes on to explain what sincere love is. He gives three "one another" commands: Be devoted to one another; Honor one another; Live in harmony with one another. We're looking at living in harmony with one another.

Paul explains what it will take to live in harmony with one another. He first says, "Bless those who persecute you." He is not talking about unbelievers here because the context is having right relationships with other believers. That would mean that there will be some in the faith who will not accept us and in fact will spread negative remarks about us. Paul is telling us that when that happens we are to bless them.

How are we to achieve this harmony? Paul next tells us, "Do not be proud, but be willing to be associated with people of low position – [and] do not be conceited." If our love is sincere we will set aside our own ego and pride as we reach out to others around us regardless of their station in life.

The only way to be in harmony with those around us is to be willing to place our desires and ambitions on

the shelf as we build relationships with others. And the only way we can be that humble is to allow the Holy Spirit to be in control of our life.

Do you want peace in your life? Then you must be a peace maker. Start by being kind and blessing those who mistreat you. Then observe those around you; are they happy? Be happy with them. Are they sad? Empathize with their sadness.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the grace to bless, rejoice and mourn with others as I put my own ego on the shelf. In Jesus name. Amen.

Message: The only way to be in harmony with those around us is to be willing to place our desires and ambitions on the shelf as we build relationships with others. And the only way we can be that humble is to allow the Holy Spirit to be in control of our life.

Affirmation: My goal is to allow Holy Spirit to be in control of my life and to put my desires and ambitions aside to that I will be in harmony with other followers of Christ.

Reflection: When Paul writes, "Bless those who persecute you," who was he talking about - other believers or unbelievers? While you think about that consider his instruction to not be proud but be willing to associate with those who are in a lower position in life than yourself. How does one accomplish that?

Day Twenty Four

Agree With One Another

I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

– 1 Corinthians 1:10

In reading the letters Paul wrote to the church at Corinth it looks like that church had all of the problems churches have today. Their immaturity in spiritual things ranges from tolerating sin to fighting among themselves. In this passage Paul is addressing the problem of squabbles among the brethren.

In verses 11-12 he identifies the quarrel which is causing division. "My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; and another, "I follow Cephas (or Peter)"; and still another, "I follow Christ." Is that unlike today?

It is interesting that lines were drawn between those who were either converted under a particular leader or at least have become loyal to the teachings of particular leaders. While there was quite a schism over who they should follow, one self-righteous person stands up and says something like, "I don't follow any man – I just follow Christ."

There is nothing wrong with being loyal to those who have invested in our lives. In fact, there should be

a special attachment to those who were instrumental in leading us to Christ, but we cannot allow our attachment to spiritual leaders cause division within the body.

Paul is calling believers to come into agreement so that they all might be "perfectly united in mind and thought." The only way we can accomplish the task set before us is to come into agreement and the only way we can be in agreement is if we are united in purpose and in agreement with our mission. The world will never be won to Christ as long as the body is not submitted to Christ, allowing Holy Spirit to bring harmony.

Prayer: Lord, help me to lay my agenda aside and be in agreement with my brethren. In Jesus name, amen.

Message: We are being called to come into agreement with other followers of Christ so that we all might be "perfectly united in mind and thought." The only way we can accomplish the task set before us is to come into agreement and the only way we can be in agreement is if we are united in purpose and in agreement with our mission.

Affirmation: I am committed to walking in agreement with all who follow Christ. Even when there are differences of opinion we will still be agreed on the important issues.

Reflection: Paul addresses a very important issue in the Scripture passage for this devotion and we should consider the point he is making. Consider your own attitude about those believers who do not hold to the particular distinctives of your denomination.

Day Twenty Five

Serve One Another in Love

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

– Galatians 5:13-15

Apostle Paul here contrasts using our freedom to indulge the sinful nature with serving one another in love. There seems to be more than one principle at work here. First is the idea that we are no longer under the law, therefore, we are free to do whatever we desire. We are under grace and all things are covered by grace. Paul is correcting that idea by instructing, "Do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature."

A second issue he addresses is serving one another in love. He seems to be saying that when we are indulging our sinful nature we are not serving others. I have seen many who felt they were free to live as they choose because they are "under grace," but I haven't seen any with that perspective who weren't using it as an excuse to be self-indulgent.

Paul is reminding us that when it is all about us and our desires we are violating the single command that is the fulfillment of the law: "Love your neighbor as yourself." How can we say we love our neighbor as ourselves when we don't use any of our time, talent or treasure to serve our neighbor?

Some might say, “O, I don’t have any neighbors who need help from me.” To that I would say, “O, really! Have you not read the story of the Good Samaritan?” If you remember in that story Jesus told of the man who should have been served by those of his own country but was not and how a foreigner not only stopped to help him but paid for his medical care.

Can we really say we love our neighbor if we are not investing any of our resources in building relationships and serving those around us? It is something to think about.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the grace to surrender my own desire to gratify the flesh and use my resources to serve others. Amen.

Message: Can we really say we love our neighbor if we are not investing any of our resources in building relationships and serving those around us? It is something to think about.

Affirmation: I am committed to loving my neighbor and my neighbor is anyone I touch who needs encouragement or any help that I can give them.

Reflection: Paul makes a very good point in our Scripture passage for today. "If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other." He seems to be equating loving our neighbor with the way we treat one another. Look around you; who can you encourage, or lend a helping hand to?

Day Twenty Six

Submit to One Another

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

– Ephesians 5:21

The command to submit to one another is similar to the command to love one another. When we love another we are literally submitting to their needs and desires. When we submit to one another we are yielding to their needs and desires. It is nearly the same thing.

Paul does a pretty good job of describing what it means to submit to one another in this passage which goes from Ephesians 5:21 through 6:9. He covers the full range of relationships from husbands and wives to parents and children to slaves and masters.

The message he gives is simply to give to the others in our lives the respect they deserve. The respect factor is very neglected in our society today. Individualism and personal rights take precedence over community and the concept of what is best for the others in our life.

Wives are taught that they do not need to submit to anyone; husbands are taught that they don't have responsibility to care for and nurture their wives; children are taught that they have rights and don't have to submit to their parents; employees organize to stand against management while management only looks at the "bottom line." Is it any wonder there is so much conflict today?

The simple solution to most of the conflicts in families, communities, and even among nations, is to

submit to one another. If my goal is to meet the others with whom I am in relationship at their point of need, with little regard for my own desires, then peace is the inevitable outcome.

Submitting to one another mean that we often will forgo our own pleasure to see that another's difficulty is resolved. Submitting to one another is about creating a community of *agape* (Godly love) and *koinonia* (caring, nurturing fellowship). I pray that God will give us that kind of love for one another.

Prayer: Lord, help me to submit to the others in my life. Amen.

Message: The simple solution to most of the conflicts in families, communities, and even among nations, is to submit to one another. If my goal is to meet the others with whom I am in relationship at their point of need, with little regard for my own desires, then peace is the inevitable outcome.

Affirmation: Submitting myself to others is an expression of God's love. If I truly love God, and his love abides in me, then I will submit myself to others.

Reflection: The concept of submitting to one another has gotten a bad rap. When we submit to another we are not allowing them to use or abuse us. Rather, we are considering their needs above our own desires. Think about it.

Day Twenty Seven

Be Humble Toward One Another

All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. – 1 Peter 5:5-7

A motivation for Peter to write, "clothe yourselves with humility toward one another" might be that he faced the same problem with people that we do today. Far too many believers fail the test of being humble toward one another.

There is a one-line joke about humility that goes like this: "I try to be humble, but it is really difficult to be humble when one is as great as I am." The reality of humility is that if you have to try to be humble then you are not really humble. So how does a person clothe himself with humility toward others?

Is there value to being humble? Yes there is. Our passage states, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." If the line of blessing is cut clearly between the proud and the humble then we would do well to understand what is meant by both of these words.

The Greek word translated pride simply means to put ones self above others, to be haughty. Pride offends the principles of "one another" because pride stands for raising ones self above others. Pride leads me to prefer myself in an opportunity because I am more worthy

than the others. Pride causes me to expect others to cater to my wishes.

Humility, or being humbled is the opposite of pride. If I humble myself then I am submitting myself to the needs of those around me. Humility is at the core of "one another" principles.

How do we become humble? Our passage says, "Humble yourselves therefore, under God's mighty hand." We must realize God is greater than ourselves and our circumstances. His plans are far superior to any I could come up with. When we fully realize that then humility just seems to slip in unnoticed.

Prayer: Lord, help me to yield my will to the mighty hand of God and grant me humility toward others. Amen.

Message: How do we become humble? Our passage says, "Humble yourselves therefore, under God's mighty hand." We must realize God is greater than ourselves and our circumstances. His plans are far superior to any I could come up with. When we fully realize that then humility just seems to slip in unnoticed.

Affirmation: I do not try to be humble, rather I choose to humble myself before God's mighty hand and he then gives me the grace of humility.

Reflection: If trying to be humble doesn't work then how does one become humble? If I am humble does that mean I open myself up to be used and taken advantage of? What does it really mean to be humble? Think on these things.

Day Twenty Eight

Do Not Deceive One Another

Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another. Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. – Leviticus 19:11-12

There are a lot of "Do not's" in this part of Leviticus. I have found that among the "Do not's" found in the Law there are three categories. The first has to do with a person's relationship with God, the second has to do with a person's relationship with the earth and creation, and the third has to do with a person's relationship with others. This chapter deals primarily with a person's relationship with others.

It seems to me that all of the laws God gave Moses have to do with being in proper relationship with God, creation and others by giving each the respect they are due. If we have that understanding we can easily see how the command of Jesus to love God wholly and to love our neighbor as ourselves would fulfill all of the law and the prophets.

How are we to respect God, creation and others? We respect God by realizing him as the sovereign of the universe and accept his word as the law by which we live. We respect the earth by valuing its resources and the rest of creation by valuing its life. We respect others by valuing their right to be equal, their right to property ownership and their right to individuality.

We see those principles espoused in the three "Do not's" of our Scripture verse. "Do not steal" refers to respecting the property of others; "Do not lie"

addresses the issue of integrity in dealing with others; "Do not deceive one another" deals with the issue of respecting others as equal and not trying to defraud them.

I have included in our text, "Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God" because I felt we should be made aware God seems to be telling us that disrespecting one another is profaning his name. That's pretty serious and it's something we should think about.

Prayer: Lord, help me to have proper respect for others. Amen.

Message: We see those principles espoused in the three "Do not's" of our Scripture verse. "Do not steal" refers to respecting the property of others; "Do not lie" addresses the issue of integrity in dealing with others; "Do not deceive one another" deals with the issue of respecting others as equal and not trying to defraud them.

Affirmation: I do not profane the name of my Lord by disrespecting my fellow man. I respect his property, his integrity and his equality.

Reflection: The laws of God are very simple and they make perfect sense. First and foremost is respect the Lord as our creator, our benefactor and our guide for life. Next, respect the earth and all of God's creation. Finally, respect other humans as we would want to be respected. Think about it.

Day Twenty Nine

A Debt Toward One Another

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. – Romans13:8-10

Jesus made it clear that loving God completely and loving our neighbor as ourselves is the fulfillment of all the instruction of the prophets and the teachers (Matthew 22:37-40). Every other instruction given is an addendum to that.

We are being told in our passage today that we owe a debt to our fellow man. That debt cannot be paid by giving them money, although sometimes the debt requires that we give money. This debt we owe is not paid by anything that we could give, except that we would give ourselves.

The continuing debt of love is never paid off. We buy a car, a house, or a computer and one day we make the last payment on those things and our debt is finished. That is not true of our debt to love one another.

Ask a mother who has given her last dollar to a son or daughter if she will ever give them money again. She will look at you strangely and say, "Of course, this is my

child." A mother will never stop loving her child no matter what it costs her.

I feel Paul calling us to the same kind of love toward one another. Helping a friend, or enemy for that matter, does not relieve us of our continuing debt to love.

We must always remember that when Jesus illustrated the point of loving our neighbor he used the kindness of a foreigner as an example. Love has no boundaries and is not limited to keeping a record to see how much is owed. Remember your continuing debt to love one another.

Prayer: Lord, help me to not become so involved in my own life that I neglect to love others as myself. In Jesus name. Amen.

Message: We must always remember that when Jesus illustrated the point of loving our neighbor he used the kindness of a foreigner as an example. Love has no boundaries and is not limited to keeping a record to see how much is owed. Remember your continuing debt to love one another.

Affirmation: Loving others, even strangers, is not an option. I can only love as Jesus called us to love by submitting myself to God and allowing his love (agape) to love others through me.

Reflection: Paul explains well that when we love as God has called us to love we will not break those commands which have to with our relationship with God and other humans. How are we to love in this way which runs counter to our human nature?

Day Thirty

Loving One Another Covers Sins

The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. Above all things have intense and unfailing love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins [forgives and disregards the offenses of others]. – 1 Peter 4:8 (AMP)

There are many who believe we are in the final days of the last days. They see the coming of the Lord as imminent. I tend to agree with that assessment of the times. However, Peter wrote this letter to the churches nearly 2000 years ago and he was giving that warning then.

If there was that since of urgency then, how much more should we be aware of the times today? Then Peter warned that believers should be serious, self-disciplined and given to much prayer. Today we hear the same plea coming across the pulpit.

Knowing these things we must take heed of the warning Peter is giving us and place loving our brothers and sisters before everything else. He calls us to have an intense, unfailing love for one another because love forgives a multitude of sins.

It is not a time for becoming offended over the mistakes others make. It is not the time to carry a grudge against someone who has done you wrong. It is not the time to sit on the other side of the church because someone on this side bothers you. It is time to put all that aside and love one another with a passion that only the Holy Spirit can give us.

We have long heard this passage quoted and it is still true. Love does cover a multitude of sins. When Jesus returns he is going to look for a people who have answered the command to "love one another." I don't know of anything anyone has ever done to me that is worth having bitterness in my heart against them when Jesus comes back.

I challenge you today to seek the Holy Spirit to give you such love for others that you will forgive every offense and have only a desire to see others experience the same forgiveness.

Prayer: Father, help me to be sobered by the thought of the soon return of Jesus and to love my brothers and sisters. Amen.

Message: When Jesus returns he is going to look for a people who have answered the command to "love one another." I don't know of anything anyone has ever done to me that is worth having bitterness in my heart against them when Jesus comes back.

Affirmation: It is easy to forgive the failure of others when I first consider what God has had to forgive in me and it is much easier to love others, even with their faults, when I realize God loves me in spite of myself.

Reflection: Peter says it all in our Scripture passage for today. When we have intense and unfailing love for one another the faults and shortcomings of others are easily overlooked. Do you really love with that kind of intensity?