

*Devotions
for the
First Month
of the New Year*

2023

Dear Family,

A few weeks back I had begun working on devotions hoping to put together a booklet leading up to Easter. However, when I broke my leg, I realized I was going to have a lot of sitting time. As a result, I thought about the possibility of putting together a devotional book to cover the first month of 2023. I almost talked myself out of doing it because of the limited amount of time I had. Since you are holding the booklet in your hands, you know I undertook the challenge. Because I wanted to have the book ready two weeks before the start of the new year, it only left me a little over 2 weeks to write 31 devotions so there would be time to run them off and bind them.

Although I have been able to spend some time rereading, checking for errors, and rethinking the messages of the devotions, I've not been able to spend nearly the time I'd like. In spite of all this, I trust the Holy Spirit to use them to encourage you, challenge you, and speak to you. Although I did begin the devotions thinking about the new year, most of them can be used to speak to us at any time. If you'd like to take one to pass on to a friend, please do so.

Lastly, if you find obvious errors, please let me know so corrections can be made for the future.

It is my prayer that these can be a tool to help us grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Happy New Year. May the Lord Jesus be glorified in your life.

Pastor Mike

January 1: Lamentations 3:22-23 Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. [23] They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.

Happy New Year! A new year can be a blessing because it may seem like an opportunity for a fresh start. But praise God, we don't have to wait for a new year to hope for a fresh start. God allows fresh starts every day. His mercies are new every morning and it is because of those mercies that we are not consumed. And praise God, His mercy isn't measured out in small amounts, but as it says in 1 Peter 1:3, His mercy is abundant.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."
(Notice His abundant mercy has given us a living hope in the resurrected Christ.)

In any situation where mercy is given, to some degree it represents a fresh start. O how marvelous that our God specializes in new beginnings. He delights in extending mercy. Ephesians 2:3 & 4 teaches that at one time each of us were by nature children of wrath, **BUT GOD, WHO IS RICH IN MERCY**, because of His great love..., even when we were dead in trespasses, He has made us alive together with Christ... God doesn't extend mercy because we deserve it, or even because we asked for it. A dead person can't ask for anything. He gives mercy because that is His character.

John 3:3 says we must be born again... - this is a new beginning. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says in Christ we become new creations - this is a new beginning. Since it is God's nature to give mercy, since His mercy is abundant, and since it is new every morning, we can live with gratitude that whatever we face, God is the God of new beginnings. Start this year off rejoicing in the help and hope of His mercy. As you do so, pray that you will be a person with a heart to extend mercy to others, offering them hope of new beginnings.

January 2: *Today's devotion shares a connection with yesterday's. If you haven't read yesterday's, please do so before reading this one for today.*

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, *(in view of God's mercy)* that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service *(worship)*.

- Let's stand and worship.
- How was today's worship service?

These are both statements which we hear often in church life. These statements aren't bad or incorrect, they are just very limited.

In many Bible translations, the word service in the above verse, is translated worship. The definition of the word service means divine service or worship. In Romans 12:1 worship isn't just something we do as a church activity. It is that which we are called to in daily life as we offer our bodies as living sacrifices which is our reasonable worship. Working can be worship, just like singing can be. Conversations with others, a walk in the woods, stillness, taking care of a child, cooking a meal, or helping someone in need can all be acts of worship when it is our intent for them to be done as acts of worship unto the Lord. The summary of what he is saying is, "*Let all of your life be an act of worship.*"

We aren't just told to live a life of worship, but we are told why. Let's be clear, God is worthy of worship just because of who He is. But this passage says that in view of the mercies which God has given, is giving, and will give, we should be motivated to worship. When we realize the reality of the mercy which the Lord constantly extends, our response should be to worship. The word worship comes from the word worth-ship. To worship means to declare the worth of someone. Worship is an appropriate response to an encounter with the Resurrected Lord.

Lord, help me to live the life of a worshiper and to also live with awareness of Your mercy to me. Amen.

January 3: Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [2] looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Life is a journey, a pilgrimage, a race. None of us know how long our race will last. None of us know what is around the next curve, if the surface is smooth or full of potholes. When we start a new year, we often feel optimistic about running the race with a fresh focus, and that can be a very positive thing. However, life is filled with uncertainty and change. We recognize most things are out of our control and this can create a lot of anxiety. In this world of uncertainty and brokenness, thousands of things demand our attention and these have the ability to create fear.

We don't even know what the rest of the day holds, much less the entire year. As you start this year, try to commit yourself to the encouragement of Scripture; fix your eyes on Jesus! Voices will tell you to fix your eyes on politics, the economy, and scores of other things outside your control. In the year ahead we will all hear the voice of the Goliaths telling us the situation is hopeless. In the book of 1st Samuel, the army of Israel was filled with fear as they focused on Goliath. Along came David. He saw and heard Goliath also, but he was filled with faith because he lived a life looking unto his God.

If you know the Lord today, remember, He is the author and the finisher of your faith. As you look to Him, you can trust Him to lead you in the year ahead. If you don't know Him, the most awesome thing you could do to start the year is to receive Him as your Lord and Savior.

Prayer - Father, you know I have a tendency to focus on my troubles. I humbly ask you to help the command of Hebrews 12:2 to become reality in my life. With Your help, I choose to fix my eyes on Jesus the author and finisher of my faith. Thank you.

January 4: Matthew 4:19 Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Jesus is early in His ministry when He approaches 4 fishermen, very ordinary men, and says "Come follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." Jesus didn't say come follow a religious system, follow a group of rules, or follow a higher moral code. He said, "Come follow Me." As we seek direction for a new year, Jesus gives us a very clear direction, "Come follow Me."

Vernon Brewer is the founder and president of World Help International. He is a highly respected man who has dedicated his life to the cause of Christ. If you were to hear him preach, you may never hear him use the word Christian. However, you would probably hear him use the phrase "Christ follower" numerous times. Isn't that a great way to describe a Christian?

When Jesus called the first disciples to follow Him, it wasn't because they were rich, influential, overly intelligent, or anything else the world holds in high esteem. They were actually on the lower end of the social standing. Aren't you grateful that when the Lord is calling us to follow Him, it isn't based on who we are, but on who He is? Isn't it wonderful that He not only forgives sinners but calls them to follow Him?

Things to consider today:

1. What do you think it means to be a follower of Christ?
2. Do you think those who know you best would describe you as a follower of Christ?
3. Question # 2 may seem condemning. However, Christ calls you to follow Him - not because you have it together - He knows you need Him. Today would be a wonderful time to say, "Jesus, with Your help, I want to follow you."

January 5: 1 Samuel 17:26 Then David spoke to the men who stood by him, saying, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

To live in victory, WE MUST HAVE A CORRECT VIEW OF GOD! In the case of the Israelite army in 1st Samuel, it wasn't that they didn't believe in God, they just had too small a view of God. David, on the other hand, had a correct view of God. David didn't say that Goliath didn't exist. He didn't say that Goliath was small or a weak warrior. However, David had spent time with his God and knew His greatness. He was offended that this uncircumcised Philistine would insult his God.

The devil isn't concerned because someone claims to believe in God, as long as that person's view of God is limited. We are living in perilous, wicked, and dark times. We are called to rescue people from the kingdom of darkness and help call them into the kingdom of light. For this to happen, our focus can't be on our own strength and abilities. We must walk in the power and greatness of our God.

Isaiah's (a man of God) life was radically changed when he had a deeper revelation of the holiness, majesty, and power of God. Most likely each person reading this is in need of a deeper understanding and revelation of the Almighty God. He is certainly pleased anytime one of His children seek a deeper understanding of Him. There can be an understanding of God gained through a head knowledge but there can also be an understanding that is transforming from experiencing Him in the power of the Holy Spirit. Will you pray that you, your family, and your church will encounter Him in a way that is far beyond head knowledge? Pray for encounters that will transform lives as Isaiah was transformed.

January 6: Psalm 85:6-7 Will You not revive us again, That Your people may rejoice in You? [7] Show us Your mercy, LORD, And grant us Your salvation.

In our walk with the Lord there seems to be a constant need for spiritual renewal. Perhaps the first step in the process is to recognize our need and to confess how often we need this revival to take place. 2 Corinthians 4: 16 says, We do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet our inward man is being renewed day by day. DAY BY DAY! This speaks to all of us about our needs.

In Psalm 23:3 David says "He restores my soul." This is an ongoing, repeated happening. Psalm 119:7 states that the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. Our soul, our inner person, is in constant need of reviving.

Only the Spirit of God can bring revival; however, He usually only does it when we enter into agreement with Him, inviting Him and allowing Him to revive us. Imagine how different this year might be if you truly set yourself to seek God for revival in your life. In the process ask Him to bring it into the life of your family and your church family. Ask that in His mercy He might bring it to His church worldwide.

Steps you might take towards revival:

Ask Him to make you hungry for Him to move in your life.

Confess your need and then pray Psalm 85:6-7 on a regular basis.

Repent of and forsake anything that will hinder the Spirit of God from moving in your life.

Pray for a renewed love for Jesus and His word.

Acknowledge your need to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Know that it is the Father's desire to continually restore you and by faith to renew His work in your life.

It is through faith in His blood that we continue to draw near.

Ask Him to reveal to you steps you need to take.

January 7: Psalm 42:4 When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, With the voice of joy and praise, With a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast.

A new year is often a time to look ahead and pray for better things. However, even this early in the year, some of you reading this have most likely experienced disappointment and maybe even deep pain.

Psalm 42 is the expression of one whose soul is feeling disappointed. He thinks back to the good old days and pours out his soul to God because the day in which he is living doesn't measure up to those times. Notice what he says: I used to go with the multitude to the house of God. I/we went with the voice of joy and praise. We went to keep the feast.

He is lamenting, it used to be that way but it's not anymore. You can probably relate to this on some level, if not on many levels.

- I used to see God move in church but....
- I used to be strong and healthy but...
- I used to feel as if I was living life to the fullest but...
- I used to feel so close to God but...
- I used to be in a good relationship but...

One of the beautiful things about the Psalms is they are so honest about expressing the human condition and emotions, AND GOD MUST BE OK WITH IT BECAUSE IT'S IN HIS WORD. In this life we experience loss and grief and it seems the longer someone lives the more loss they experience. Thank God, this Psalm doesn't end with verse 4. In the last verse, he speaks to his soul and asks "Why are you cast down, O my soul?" Then he answers the question of his soul. He speaks truth to himself. In the face of disappointment, I will hope in God; I shall yet praise Him, He is the help of my countenance and my God. Pray for yourself, or someone else, who is downcast today, and ask the Lord for the assurance He is your/their hope and help.

January 8: Acts 2:2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

Luke 2:13-14 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: [14] "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" Acts 9:3-4 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. [4] Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

Suddenly can mean unexpectedly. In the western world we work on a schedule, and this seems to be a good thing for the most part. Certainly, there needs to be a set time to report to work, to meet friends for dinner, or to catch the plane. However, the God who created time refuses to be regulated by that time. In each of the 3 cases above, the Spirit of God moved surprisingly, quickly and on His schedule; not on the schedule of the people to whom He chose to go.

What does this have to do with us?

1) Perhaps you've prayed for something for a long time, which you believe to be the Lord's will, and it doesn't seem like anything is happening. God often moves suddenly and unexpectedly. He can change history in a moment's time. He can appear completely unexpectedly to a virgin maiden and announce, "You are going to give birth to the Savior of the world." The Psalmist said in Psalm 62:5, "My soul waits silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him." Keep your expectation and don't be surprised when God does a "suddenly."

2) God doesn't set His schedule to meet yours. Because we are so schedule oriented in the western world, perhaps we often miss what God wants to do because He's not doing the work within our allotted time-slot. In many of the world's locations, where the Spirit of God is moving in great power, they seem to respect the Lord's agenda. They often have very long worship services where they spend time seeking the Lord. Perhaps it's because, if God doesn't show up on their behalf, they don't have a plan B.

January 9: Psalm 139:14 I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well.

We might be shocked at the number of people who don't feel very good about themselves. We must choose to think according to what God says about us instead of how we feel or in spite of what others may say. Psalm 139:14 reveals who God says you are and also what He says about others.

Made - you are not an accident. God made you for Himself.

Fearfully - respect, awesome, the word used for the fear of the Lord. This isn't because you are someone great in yourself. It is that you are a creation of God who is to be respected, and so are other humans.

Wonderfully - set apart, distinct, unique. There are now 8 billion people on earth and no two are exactly alike. Why? Because God made each individual uniquely for Himself. Even though there are 8 billion other people, you are special to Him. In your uniqueness He has called you to join Him in His mission.

Marvelous - something wonderful, extraordinary.

That my soul knows very well. These are truths we are to know, by faith, in our innermost being. The devil, the father of all lies, will say you are worthless. Your God says you are amazingly special because He created and redeemed you.

Our reaction needs to be that of the psalmist,
I WILL PRAISE YOU FOR...

We must choose what He says about us.
We must seek to see others as He does and treat them according to His truth.

January 10: Luke 5:8 When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

When we see the Lord in His holiness and majesty, it causes us to see ourselves in our sinfulness and our weakness.

Outside of the fact that he made his living as a fisherman, that he was a Jew, and where he lived, we don't know much about Peter up until this time. The life he lived, as a fisherman, could cause us to think he may have been a strong tough man. He was most likely somewhat crude and arrogant. He probably didn't easily take advice and may have thought of himself as a self-made man who didn't need the help of many others.

BUT THEN HE EXPERIENCED THE POWER AND MAJESTY OF THE LORD JESUS, AND EVERYTHING CHANGED. Peter probably wasn't in the habit of falling down at the feet of another. He probably wasn't accustomed to confessing that he was a sinful man. But Peter was convicted of the reality that this wasn't an ordinary man and somehow, he knew this One, at whose feet he fell, probably knew everything about him.

When people experience God in power, it opens the doors for them to understand their need and that only the Lord can meet that need. One of the great dangers with much modern-day Christianity, is that we want it to fit into a mold with which we are comfortable. We want it to be tidy and something we can control. However, as Jesus encountered people, it was rarely tidy, and most of the time there were always some in the group who were uncomfortable.

Every person reading this would say the world is in a mess and that only God can fix it. Now for a very honest question, would you be willing for God to make you uncomfortable in order to manifest His power? What if a move of God meant you were on your knees, in a group, crying out, "Depart from me O Lord, for I'm a sinful man." If God is to truly reveal Himself, it will require that we want Him more than our religious comfort.

January 11: Philippians 3:12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

The journey to truly serve the Lord begins when we become aware that He has taken hold of us. None of us found God. He wasn't lost, but we were. In His incredible mercy He came after us and laid hold of us. For some that event was more dramatic than it was for others. Either way, none of us just got up one day and decided, "I want to be saved." You were saved because, in your lostness, the Good Shepherd came looking for you. He apprehended you. The Scriptures say we were all spiritually dead but He made us alive.

Once we are saved, once He has laid hold of us, He gives us a very clear directive on the purpose of our lives. We are to now live for the purpose for which Christ Jesus took hold of us. We weren't saved just to go to heaven. We were saved to join with Christ in His mission on earth. He has a calling on your life. Most are not called to full time (as a job) Christian service, but we are all called to Christian service in our daily lives. Every believer is called to be a minister of the manifold graces of God. Have you given serious thought to the truth that you were saved to serve Him during your journey on earth? Are you running from something He is calling you to do? If you aren't serving in His kingdom, why not? If you need direction in ways to serve, seek guidance from a mature believer.

Notice, Paul said he hadn't arrived, but he did say he pressed on. He continued to run the race. It is a rare thing to be able to make up for missed opportunities, but we can start anew today. Tell the Lord you want to live to take hold of that for which He has called you, and ask for His anointing to fulfill the mission.

January 12: 2 Timothy 1:6 Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

If you are a child of God, you have spiritual gifts. Although the Lord can use our natural talents, they aren't the same thing as spiritual gifts. Natural gifts are something we are born with and we would have even if we weren't saved. Now, certainly when a person is saved, their natural giftings can, and should, take on a much deeper purpose and hopefully will be used for God's glory, instead of self-recognition and gratification.

Notice what is said in today's verse: "Stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands." Timothy wasn't born with this gift - it was imparted into Him by the Holy Spirit through the laying on of Paul's hands. Apparently, gift/s which the Holy Spirit gives to each of us may possibly lay dormant. Paul is telling his spiritual son "I want to remind you to stir up (just as you would a fire that is dying down) the gift of God which is in you."

There are numerous passages that teach that the Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to all the body of Christ. Among these are 1 Corinthians 12-14, Romans 12:3-8, Ephesians 4:7-16, and 1 Peter 4:10-11.

1 Peter 4:10 teaches, As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

- Each one has received a gift
- Your gift isn't about self-promotion but is a way of ministering God's grace to others.
- God's grace is demonstrated in a multitude of ways. Your gift may look different than that of another, but God gave you the gift He did because He wants you to use it to minister His grace to others.

Stir up the gift within you. Use it. God doesn't want excuses, but ministry. We are not to compare people's gifts. Gifts don't make one person more important than another. Our call is to be faithful with what has been entrusted to us. The greatest spiritual gift is love, which is available to every Christ follower.

Lord, give me wisdom to know the gift/s You've imparted to me and the desire to stir them up for your glory.

January 13: 2 Timothy 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Notice how the teaching of today's verse follows right behind the admonition of yesterday's verse. Paul instructed Timothy to stir up the gift within him. Read yesterday's verse and today's together. There are many times when the child of God feels called to do something for the Lord, and may even desire to do so, BUT fear stops them. Fear is the enemy of faith. Notice what this verse doesn't say - it doesn't say that you'll never be afraid. It says God has not given you the spirit of fear. Certainly, there is a fear that is healthy and has its place in our lives. We want our children to fear picking up a snake. But there is a big difference between rational fear and the spirit of fear. Rational fear will keep you from jumping off a high building, it can save your life. A spirit of fear can paralyze you from living your life to its full potential. The spirit of fear is a demonic spirit which can take hold of the mind, emotions, and even the will of the believer. It is perhaps one of the devil's strongest weapons. We all know Jesus has commanded us to share the gospel with every creature, but many are gripped with the fear of rejection.

Can a person be freed from the spirit of fear? Absolutely. So how?

- First, be honest with yourself. Are the fears you have healthy or does fear grip your life and control most of your decisions?
- The spirit of fear is real. But so is the spirit of power, love, and sound mind which comes from the Lord.
- Ask the Lord to deliver you from the spirit of fear. Ask others to pray for you. When you sense the spirit of fear working in your life, rebuke it knowing it's not of God.
- Thank the Lord for the spirit of power, love, and sound mind and receive them by faith.
- Thank Him He is always with you; therefore, you don't need to be afraid.
- If you have things in your life that can promote fear, seek to eliminate them.

January 14: Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Sufferings as opposed to glory. The present time as opposed to the future time. The meaning behind this verse might be better understood if we use the imagery of a set of balancing scales. If a person wanted to buy 2 pounds of flour, the merchant would put 2 lbs of weights on one side and then pour flour into a sack on the other side until the scales balanced.

In Paul's situation, on one side of the scales he placed all the sufferings he had experienced as a follower of Christ, and they were numerous and very severe. But on the other side he laid the glory that he/we will have revealed to us in the future. When he did this, he said there is no comparison. It is as if the sufferings of this age weigh no more than a feather when compared to the unspeakable glory that is to come. Paul wasn't making light of his sufferings or the sufferings of other Christ followers. They were real, they were painful, and they brought deep affliction. But Paul had seen a glimpse of the future glory, and as hard as the current sufferings were, when they are compared to the future glory, they are not even worthy to be compared.

In this year, and in this month, we will experience some suffering and pain. Sometimes it can seem as if it will never end, and it may even seem above our ability to bear. But this is the truth. This life is but a vapor that is passing like the lifting of the morning fog. On the other side is an eternal weight of glory greater than anything we can imagine.

January 15: Psalm 2:4-5 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. [5] Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure:

The idea of relative truth has become popular in American culture. Relative truth means what may be true for one person, especially in the area of moral values, may not be true for another. So relative truth means there is no absolute truth. Each person can establish their own set of truths and values, or the lack thereof. One doesn't have to think long before realizing how irrational and dangerous this view is. The idea of relative truth is not new nor is it American in origin. In the garden God told the absolute truth to Adam and Eve. The serpent came along and convinced them that the truth God proclaimed was relative. It wasn't the best for them. As followers of Christ, we are in a constant war against the lie that we can choose the truth we think works best for us. This is a growing lie, both in society and in the church.

The idea of relative truth is the tragic mistake of the rulers of the world in Psalm 2. They had deceived themselves into believing they could join forces and take counsel together against the LORD and against His anointed. They decided to create their own truth. Their relative truth is going to soon face God's absolute truth. He sits on His throne and laughs at their foolishness, knowing the day is coming when He will show forth His victory and pour out His wrath on them.

Although relative truth has always been around, we live in a world that now openly attacks and ridicules any ideas of absolute truth. Up until the 1960's, most public schools included instruction from the word of God and the 10 commandments were often used as a guideline for our society. Not only is that no longer the case, but anyone who would promote such narrow-minded thinking is often represented as a danger to society.

We must choose daily if we will allow others to determine truth for us or if we will choose the absolute truth of the Lord. The day of judgment is coming. Will you be found on the Lord's side or on the side of those determined to overthrow His counsel. As those who call ourselves His followers, we need to encourage one another to follow The Way, The Truth, and The Life.

January 16: Ephesians 5:18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit..., Romans 8:9 But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.

Before addressing Ephesians 5:18, it is important to make clear that according to Romans 8:9 every person, who is saved, has the Holy Spirit living in them. When a person is born again, they are born of the Holy Spirit. Salvation is impossible without the conviction and regeneration of the Holy Spirit. However, many sincere Christ followers hold to the view that when the Holy Spirit enters at salvation, the person is automatically filled and there isn't anything else to seek.

If being filled at salvation is automatic, Scripture wouldn't command that we be filled. Furthermore, the Greek structure of this verse actually says, "Be you continually being filled with the Holy Spirit." It's not a one and done event. The purpose of this devotion is not to prove a point. Whatever views you may have concerning the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit, the hope is that this devotion, as well as the next couple about the Holy Spirit, will create in you a growing hunger to seek after all the Holy Spirit wants to do in and through you.

One of the sad realities in Christianity is that often believers are more interested in proving they are right on matters concerning the Holy Spirit, than they are in examining their own lives to see if there is genuine evidence that they are walking in the Spirit.

Father, make me hungry for, and open to, all you want to do in my life. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

January 17: (This is a follow-up to yesterday's devotion.)

Ephesians 5:19-21 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, [20] giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, [21] submitting to one another in the fear of God.

Verse 18 of this chapter gives us the command to be continually being filled with the Holy Spirit. Many Christians believe that certain spiritual gifts are evidence that they, or someone else, is Spirit filled. However, these verses that follow the command to be filled, speak more about the lifestyle of the Spirit filled believer, and not their gifts. When someone is filled with the Spirit there will be an overflow, or an outer flow, of what is in them.

1. There will be an overflow which speaks/sings words of faith, encouragement and praise for God to fellow believers.
2. There will be a song/s in their heart to the Lord. It won't be singing just because it's time to sing. It will be a song of praise in the heart that must be released to the Lord.
3. The life and heart of the Spirit filled believer is one from which thanksgiving naturally flows.
4. Then it mentions the Spirit filled believer submits to others in the fear of the Lord. This may not be something which normally is thought of as a virtue, or action, of the Spirit filled believer. However, the life of the Spirit filled believer will be one which represents the character of Christ. Christ chose submission to the cross, not because He had to, but because He walked in the power and leading of the Spirit.

Before ending today's devotion, let's consider the teaching of Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

Spiritual gifts are used at certain times and in certain situations. The fruit of the Spirit is appropriate at all times and in all situations.

January 18: Today's devotion goes along with the last two days about the ministry of the Holy Spirit.)

Oftentimes a Christ follower holds views about the Holy Spirit, as well as other things, not because of what the Scripture actually says, but because of the tradition in which they were raised. As you consider each of these Scriptures, invite the Spirit of God to have His will and way in your life.

*Acts 10:38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. **If Christ needed the anointing of the Holy Spirit, how can we need anything less?***

Acts 4:31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

John 14:25-26 "These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. [26] But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. **We cannot truly understand the things of God apart from the Holy Spirit.**

John 16:7,14 Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper (the Holy Spirit) will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. [14] He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. **(Consider what a powerful statement Jesus makes in verse 7)**

Romans 15:13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

January 19: 1 Peter 5:5 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

In the Christian faith there are foundation doctrines; meaning they aren't up for debate. They are foundational to the Christian faith. The holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the deity of Christ, and the only way to salvation are but a few. There are probably better ways to say this, but it would seem that humility is an absolute foundational virtue in the Christian life. **Humility is never out of season.** It is a great protector of the human heart. It is also a protector of those with whom we interact. Humility and pride are polar opposites. Today's verse teaches that humility is something with which we can choose to clothe ourselves. Since that is the case, we must also be able to choose to clothe ourselves with pride.

This verse contains a four-word statement which should cause us to have great fear about having pride in our lives. "**GOD RESISTS THE PROUD.**" What a terrifying idea to know that when we choose pride, God actually opposes us. In the Greek dictionary the word for resist is defined as setting an army in an array against. The very opposite of pride is humility. Instead of looking up humility in the dictionary, we can see it demonstrated throughout the life of Christ, especially at the cross. *Philippians 2:5,8 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, [8] And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.* Jesus didn't go to the cross because He was forced to. He went because He chose to, that we might be saved. Humility is when we choose to give up our rights in order to serve. It's when we don't have to have the last word or prove that we're right. When the child of God chooses humility, the Father chooses to pour out grace upon them. When a family, or a church family, practices humility with each other, God's grace will be demonstrated abundantly.

January 20: Matthew 4:3 Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

At the close of Matthew Chapter 3, Christ is baptized by John the Baptist. As He comes up out of the water, the heavens open, the Spirit of God descends on Him like a dove and a voice comes from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased." As Chapter 4 opens Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Chapter 4 tells of 3 temptations. The 1st and 2nd temptation began with the devil saying, "If you are the Son of God..." This isn't just some religious leader that the devil is seeking to tempt. Indeed, it is the Son of God! The last words Jesus hears before the wilderness experience is from His Father announcing "This is my beloved Son in Whom I'm well pleased." Yet, the devil tries to attack Him at a place of His identity. **IF YOU ARE.**

Let's consider how this relates to us. If Satan is willing to try to make the Lord Jesus doubt Himself, think of what all He is likely to try with us. We are not to live in fear of the evil one but we are to recognize that he is real, he is the father of all lies, and he is the master deceiver. Seeing he came to Jesus with - IF YOU ARE, we need to recognize we shouldn't be surprised when we are bombarded with lies.

If God really loved you...
Nobody really cares about you...
If you really were a child of God...
If you really had faith...

1. We shouldn't be surprised when the enemy attacks through our thoughts.
2. We must tell ourselves the truth of Scripture.
3. We must follow our Master and not give in to the devil.

Are there things you are entertaining in your mind that would seem to be coming from the devil? Reject them and choose the Lord's truth.

January 21: Revelation 1:17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last.

John the apostle was on the Isle of Patmos, living in exile because he was a faithful follower of Christ. He was in the Spirit on the Lord's day when he suddenly heard and saw the resurrected Lord. From reading the gospels we learn that John was most likely Jesus' closest friend. He was part of the inner circle and was referred to in John 20 as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

The verse above tells us John's reaction when he sees the glorified Christ. It wasn't to give Him a hug or to offer Him a cup of coffee. No, he fell at His (Christ) feet as though he (John) was dead. This wasn't John falling out of respect, he was literally gripped with the terror of seeing Christ in all of His glory. John became like a dead man. The response of John's Friend, Lord, Master, and Glorious God was to lay His hand on John and say, "Do not be afraid."

When we read of John's reaction, it should cause us to ask ourselves if we have lost our reverence and awe for Christ. Have we become way too chummy and comfortable with Him? Some will protest and respond, "but Jesus said He calls us friends." That is very true. John was Jesus' special friend, but when John saw Him in His glory he still fell at His feet as though He were dead. Many lost people speak about how them and the man upstairs have an understanding. What will that understanding be like when they see Christ in all of His glory? But it is normal for lost people to act lost. What about the child of God, what should be our response? John falls at His feet like a dead man. When Isaiah saw Him in His glory, he cried out, "Woe is me for I am undone." This word is often translated as perish.

Lord, forgive us for treating you in an unworthy manner. May we experience Your glory and be transformed into completely committed followers of Christ.

January 22: Do not let your adornment be merely outward-arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel- [4] rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. 1 Peter 3:3-4

The 2 verses above were written to wives in the context of marriage. However, these verses contain powerful instructions for all of us. Go back and slowly read the passage again asking the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to understand how these truths relate to your own life. These verses speak of the outer person and the inner person. We very much live in a world that focuses on the outward person: how pretty or handsome someone is, what talents a person has, what material possessions one owns, how smart a person is, what circles someone moves in, what standing they have in the world, and numerous other things which seem to impress the people of the world. Others often set our value by these outward things. Sometimes we ourselves associate our value with the aspects of the outer person. However, this passage tells us what is very precious in the sight of God. It isn't the outward person, but the inward person. This doesn't mean that the outward appearance doesn't matter to God. It just drives home that the reality of who we really are is determined by the inner person. While the world's focus is on the outward appearance, the Holy Spirit is teaching us we must have a hidden inner life.

Strengthening our inner person doesn't happen by accident. In order to have an inner hidden person that is very precious in the sight of God, we must be intentional about how we order our life.

January 23: Romans 12:4-5 For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, [5] so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

If you hear the term “church membership,” what comes to your mind? For many the idea of “church membership” is only associated with what the church should do for them. These people don’t seem to sense any responsibility that goes along with being a member. Often, they don’t serve, they don’t attend, they don’t give, they don’t pray for the church, and they don’t feel a need to know about, or help with, the well-being of the other members. But, thank the Lord, there are many Christ followers who take very seriously the idea, and responsibility of being a “church member.”

The 2 verses above do a wonderful job of describing membership.

- The body, the local church, is made up of many members.
- All the members don’t have the same function. In our human body, we have many members. Thank God these members don’t all have the same function. In the human body, we need different members to do different functions. God saw fit that we have feet & hands. We have eyes to see, but in God’s wisdom we also have ears to hear and a mouth to speak. And if any of the members aren’t operating properly, it negatively affects the entire body. Every member is important!
- While the human body, and the church body, are made up of many members, we/they ARE all members one of another.

Now go back and read the 2 verses at the top once again. In light of this description of membership, would you be considered a “church member” in the eyes of God? If not, God allows fresh starts. You are important. Choose to be an active part of the body.

January 24: *Yesterday’s devotion talked about the meaning of “Church Membership.” Today’s devotion is a further picture of what church membership should include.* Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, [25] not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Some Christians, including pastors, quote the first phrase of Hebrews 10:25 to say the Bible says it’s wrong not to attend church. While what they are saying isn’t wrong, what is wrong is that reasons listed in these verses are excluded. We aren’t to attend church just to check a box and so there can be a bigger crowd in the service. There are more reasons to gather for worship than those listed in these verses. Yet, those listed here point back to yesterday’s devotion talking about the importance of being a participating member of a local church.

Let us consider one another. Let us take notice of one another and actively seek ways to stir each other up to walk in love and good works. If we see Sunday mornings, or other gatherings, as a time we are to show up to just be a spectator, we have missed a big part of what our gatherings should be about. Each of us is to come looking for ways to encourage other members in the faith.

Verse 25 goes on to teach that we are to exhort one another. And then notice the next phrase, and so much more as we see the day approaching. The Scripture points out in several places that the closer we get to the end, the harder the spiritual battle will be. We need each other. You need others and others need you. It is really a very selfish thing when a child of God only joins others for worship when it is convenient for them to do so. While it is possible that a Christian may be able to worship God without being in the church building, it seems those with that attitude largely ignore the command of encouraging others in the faith. In addition, there are numerous Scriptures that teach we must be part of corporate worship to obey the Lord.

Please go back and read the 2 verses at the top. Are you walking in obedience to them? If not, today is the day to commit to obedience.

January 25: (Today's devotion goes along with the theme of yesterday's) Matthew 18:15 "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.

The past 2 devotions were about "church membership" and how we are called to serve together as a church body to fulfill the purposes of God. The local church isn't about an individual, but about many members working together to fulfill the call of Christ.

Anywhere people are together, even in the church, there are going to be disagreements. Many Christians think this should never be the case. Something happens, they get offended and often choose to leave instead of walking out the commandment to seek reconciliation. *Colossians 3:13 says, bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.* Bearing with one another literally means to put up with one another. The Christian faith doesn't mean we won't ever have difficulty getting along with another Christian. The Christian faith allows us to practice the Christian graces of forgiving, love, patience, and accepting those who are different from us.

It is a denial of the gospel when Christians choose to quickly break relationships and walk away instead of seeking to heal the relationship. The heart of the gospel is reconciliation. The sinless Son of God came to this planet to reconcile sinners to the Father. The offended sought reconciliation with the offender.

Today's passage comes out of Matthew 18:15-20. Here Jesus is giving clear instructions on how we are to deal with offenses. The ultimate purpose in following Jesus' teachings is that relationships between Christians can be healed. Sadly, this passage may be one of the most disobeyed in Scripture. All types of excuses are given by people for why they don't do what Jesus says. Many name reasons for why it won't work. The call of the child of God is to live in obedience to Christ and not make excuses.

Let us pray that we all be convicted of living in obedience to what Jesus taught in this passage.

January 26: Pray without ceasing. 1 Thessalonians 5:17

All Christ followers would admit that prayer is important and that it should have a more important place in their life. However, most of the same people would probably also say they struggle with how to pray or for what to pray. The Scriptures record many prayers and the book of Psalms is filled with the prayers of God's people. It can be extremely helpful to pray the Scriptures. All 12 verses of Psalm 143 are a prayer of David where he is praying for himself. Listed below are the first 6 verses of the Psalm. Use this as a guide to pray for yourself, or another person if the Lord leads. Read through the verses to get a feel of the intent of David's prayer. After that go back through the verses seeking to make them personal to your life.

Psalm 143:1-6

Hear my prayer, O LORD, Give ear to my supplications! In Your faithfulness answer me, And in Your righteousness. [2] Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, For in Your sight no one living is righteous. [3] For the enemy has persecuted my soul; He has crushed my life to the ground; He has made me dwell in darkness, Like those who have long been dead. [4] Therefore my spirit is overwhelmed within me; My heart within me is distressed. [5] I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your works; I muse on the work of Your hands. [6] I spread out my hands to You; My soul longs for You like a thirsty land. Selah

In verse 3 David prays: "For the enemy has persecuted my soul; He has crushed my life to the ground; He has made me dwell in darkness, like those who have long been dead." *David is in a place of despair.* He's not concerned that his prayer sounds proper. He is pouring out of the depths of his soul to his God.

Your enemy might be a real person. It might be a sin you are struggling with. It might be depression, anxiety, or some other struggle. It might be an attack directly from the evil one. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you use the Scriptures to aid you in your times of prayer.

January 27: Today use the last 6 verses of Psalm 143 to guide you in your prayer time. As you read these verses, and then pray back through them, seek to enter into the emotions and honesty with which David is praying. David's not praying general prayers. He is praying very specifically. Deliver me, Teach me, Lead me, Revive me. In the short prayer of these 12 verses, David speaks to God about his heart, soul, and spirit. He tells God his difficulties. He asked the Lord to deal with his enemies, he declares the Lord's righteousness, and declares his trust for the Lord. He was being vulnerable and therefore intimate with God. That is what the Lord wants from us. Enter in with your spirit, heart, soul, mind, and emotions.

Psalm 143:7-12 NKJV

Answer me speedily, O LORD; My spirit fails! Do not hide Your face from me, Lest I be like those who go down into the pit. [8] Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning, For in You do I trust; Cause me to know the way in which I should walk, For I lift up my soul to You. [9] Deliver me, O LORD, from my enemies; In You I take shelter. [10] Teach me to do Your will, For You are my God; Your Spirit is good. Lead me in the land of uprightness. [11] Revive me, O LORD, for Your name's sake! For Your righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble. [12] In Your mercy cut off my enemies, And destroy all those who afflict my soul; For I am Your servant.

January 28: *Ephesians 3:14-16 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, [15] from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, [16] that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.*

The past 2 devotions we have used Psalm 143 as an example of how to pray for ourselves. Of course, we know we're also to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ, but often struggle with how we should pray. Ephesians 3:14-19 is a wonderful guide when it comes to praying for others. Although only verses 14-16 are written above, we'll use all the verses to list some things for which we can and should pray.

Vs 14&15 - Paul begins to pray by recognizing and honoring the One to whom he's praying. This is a proper way to begin any prayer.

Vs 16 - that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory. **He is asking the Father to grant his fellow Christians the things for which he asks.**

Vs 16 - that they would be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner person.

Vs 17 - that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith.

Vs 17 - that they will be rooted and grounded in love.

Vs 18 & 19 - that they may comprehend what is the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.

Vs 19 - that they may be filled with all the fullness of God.

WOW! What a powerful prayer. The next time you pray for someone, and want to feel confident that you are praying God's will, open to Ephesians 3 and pray these very things for them. Better yet, commit some of these points to memory so you can pray them at any time and any place.

January 29: Daniel 1:8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

Daniel was most likely a teen-ager when he, along with a large group of others, was taken from his home in Judea to live as a captive in Babylon. Growing up in Jerusalem, Daniel held to the beliefs of Judaism. He believed there was only one God, that the worship of any other god was evil, and because of his loyalty to his beliefs he followed certain dietary laws.

Now he finds himself some 1600 miles from his homeland. It's not just the miles that made this so difficult. Babylon not only didn't recognize his God, but they worshiped numerous gods, as well as kings who demanded worship. Daniel was selected to be part of a small group to serve the king. This meant Daniel would have the opportunity to eat better food, drink better drink, and live a more luxurious life-style than most of the other Jews who were now captive in Babylon. What would have been wrong with Daniel doing this? Daniel didn't ask to be taken captive. Perhaps he could have reasoned; well since I'm here I might as well make the best of it. My God is just looking out for me. When it came to Daniel's trust in his God, he wasn't looking for the easy path. This young man was truly committed to his God no matter the place or the situation. What a powerful statement: **But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself...** Daniel made a commitment that, no matter what came his way, he was going to serve his God. Daniel's name means God Has Judged. Daniel said "I'll trust God with the outcome." Notice it says, Daniel purposed in his heart. This wasn't a decision Daniel made after reaching Babylon. He had purposed long before, maybe even as a boy, that he would live for his God. His commitment wasn't a shallow, quickly made decision. He had purposed in his heart - in the deepest recesses of his being, that he was committed to being a follower of God despite the cost.

Lord, help me to dare to be a Daniel.

January 30: *If you haven't read yesterday's devotion, please do so. Today's devotion serves as the 2nd part.* Daniel 5:29 Then Belshazzar (the king of the Chaldeans) gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Daniel is made the number 3 ruler of the greatest nation on earth. Daniel wasn't a native of Babylon, he was a Jew. He came to the nation as a slave, now he is number 3 in power? How did this happen? Much of what happens in the book of Daniel, including Daniel's promotion, seems to have a direct correlation to Daniel 1:8, Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself... One might wonder if it weren't for Daniel's commitment expressed in that statement, if there would be a book of Daniel? When a person carefully reads the book of Daniel it is truly amazing how his God uses him. It's certainly worth pointing out that Daniel was God's instrument in a land that, for the most part, was hostile to the things of God. God used Daniel to speak into the life of the wicked King Nebuchadnezzar, and the last words of the king that are recorded are in Daniel 5, where this earthly king lifts up powerful words of praise to the King of kings. We also read of how God used the influence of Daniel to cause other kings to recognize they weren't god but, indeed, there was a God to whom they must bow.

God used Daniel to interpret dreams which no one else could. His dreams didn't just speak to the people of his day, but they speak loudly to us today with the assurance that our God is sovereign, that His plans and purposes will be carried out, and we can rest in the assurance of His victory. God also used Daniel's character to offer hope and courage to all who have sought to truly follow Him throughout the centuries.

Father, help us to be like Daniel and choose you over the comforts of the world. Help us to be a godly influence and example just like Daniel. In Jesus' Name, Amen

January 31: Psalm 131:1-2 LORD, my heart is not haughty, Nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters, Nor with things too profound for me. [2] Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, Like a weaned child with his mother; Like a weaned child is my soul within me.

This Psalm is accredited to King David. In this Psalm David names at least 5 things he has done. Although this Psalm was penned some 3,000 years ago, the things David chose to do are wonderful advice for us today. Before we go any further with this devotion, please go back and slowly read the passage again seeking to take in what he is saying.

It isn't unusual to find ourselves saying, "I just don't understand." We live in a world where moral absolutes are greatly adrift and people, even some behind pulpits, say we must be tolerant. We hear of decisions being made, which seem to be negatively affecting all society and which have no rational. We wonder why people in leadership don't seem to get it. We say, "I just don't understand." The biblical mandate commands that we do all we can to be light and salt in our world. We must pray, stand for truth, vote and let our voices be heard.

However, even when we do all this, the truth is, there will always be things beyond our ability to understand. David spoke of great matters and profound things. It is within most of us to want to understand why certain things are being done. Perhaps we think if we have logical answers we'll feel better.

The Spirit of God, speaking through His servant David, says to us, you won't have peace by having all the answers and understanding the mysteries. You will have peace by learning to trust in me, and to rest in me as a young child does in the arms of their mother. Because we live in a world where information abounds, it is easy to become frustrated by that information. Perhaps we must choose to intentionally shut out some of the noise of the world and choose to calm and quieten our soul in the presence and peace of our Daddy God.