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DAILY LIGHT

On my 90th birthday in February someone sent me a daily devotional booklet titled Daily Light for Every Day. (I misplaced the birthday card that accompanied the gift so have not been able to express my appreciation. I hope that whoever sent the book will read this and receive my thanks.)

This little booklet is simply a compilation of Scriptures on a common theme for morning and evening, and it was originally compiled in 1794 by Samuel Bagster of London, England, during his daily family devotions. Anne Graham Lotz has provided an updated volume in the New King James translation. Anne wrote: “My grandmother gave a volume to my mother when she was a young child in China. In fact, my mother can never remember a day in her life when she has not read it. My mother gave me my first volume on my tenth birthday. I have read it every day since. I gave a volume to my children on their tenth birthdays, and it has become a regular part of their daily devotions. To this day, one of the sweetest blessings for me is to know each morning and evening when I read Daily Light, that my parents and children, wherever they might be, are reading the same thing.”

Following is the “Morning” part of the daily readings for June 15th, the day I am sitting at my computer:

June 15, Morning: **The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us.** * 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. Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. * The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant. * There is a God in heaven who reveals secrets. * Indeed these are the mere edges of His ways, and how small a whisper we hear of Him! * No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. * If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth. *Deut. 29:29; Ps. 131:1-2; Ps. 25:14; Dan. 2:28; Job 26:14; John 15:15; John 14:15-17.*

In the back of the book are a large number of devotionals pertaining to: “**Seasons of Life** (Infancy, Youth, Adulthood, Middle Age, Old Age, Parenting, Empty Nest, Singleness); **Special Occasions in Life** (The Birth of a Child, Marriage, Birthdays, Baptism, Graduation); **Sufferings in Life** (Divorce, Death, Illness, Relocation, Depression, Pain, Rejection, Persecution, Infertility, Grief, Loneliness, Loving a Prodigal); **Success in Life** (Promotion, Achievement, Reconciliation, Recovery from Illness, Prosperity); **Struggles in Life** (Injustice, Addiction, Failure, Fear, Disappointment, Memories, Temptation, Anxiety); Etc.”

Following is the reading addressing “**Failure**.”

Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; when I fall, I will arise. * Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God. * Then he drank of the wine and was drunk. * David did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. * You are Peter...and I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. * Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came to him, slaying, “You were also with Jesus of Galilee.” But he denied it before them all. * The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand. * He who has begun a good work in you will complete it. * I...do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers...that you may know...what is the exceeding greatness of His power

toward us who believe. * Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

Mic. 7:8; Gen. 6:9; Gen. 9:212; 1 Kings 15:5; Matt. 16:18; Matt. 26:69; Ps. 37:23; Phil. 1:6; Eph. 1:15, 18; Jude 24.

FAITH – (I)

When the Bible talks about faith it is talking about faith/trust in the God revealed in the Bible. There are many misconceptions about faith in the world and even in the church:

Misconceptions about Faith:

- Any form of spirituality. (Oprah is a proponent of New Age religion. She is a person of great faith.)
- A resolute belief that something good is going to happen to them. (If you just believe, then good things will come your way. This represents faith that your own desires will come to pass, and it is a form of faith but not Biblical faith.)
- A ticket to health and wealth. (God wants everyone to be rich and healthy. Just believe, and don't confess anything negative. Similar to the bullet above.)
- Faith is pretending to believe what you know is not really true. (Hold on to "blind faith" even though you don't really believe it. It pleases God.)
- Faith is the way we get God to do what we want.

None of these constitutes Biblical faith, which involves confident action in response to what God has made known. *By faith we understand that the entire universe was formed at God's command, that what we now see did not come from anything that can be seen.... It is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.* (Hebrews 11:3, 6) **Faith is the way God gets us to do what He wants.**

Hebrews 11 lists some of the "Heroes of the Faith" from the Old Testament. When you study this chapter you see that because of their faith some people get rescued, get healed, and achieve great success in life. Others (who also have faith and also live godly lives) get mocked, beaten, tortured, put in prison, and killed.

Faith is sometimes rewarded sooner and sometimes later, but people of faith can anticipate the rewards because of their confidence in God's character. Remember Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the book of Daniel. When the king had them cast into a fiery furnace, they said: *We know that God can rescue us if He chooses to do so, but even if He doesn't rescue us we will not bow down and worship your idol!* (Paraphrase)

What does it mean to live by faith? It means that, in our various circumstances, we live out our belief ...*that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him....* and we live in obedience to His revealed will in the Bible and His revealed will to us individually.

BELIEF – (II)

Study notes in the NLT Study Bible point out that "believing" occupies a central place in John's Gospel. John doesn't use the noun faith that appears frequently elsewhere in the NT (In Matthew, Mark, Acts, Romans, Hebrews, James and Peter). John prefers the verb *believe* to emphasize that faith is not static like a doctrine but dynamic, requiring action. John says that "believing" is the trait of all true disciples.

In the Gospel of John, the verb translated "believe" is often followed by the Greek preposition *eis* ("into"). No parallel exists for this in ancient Greek usage. For John, faith is not a status, but an investment in the person of Jesus. Faith means accepting who Jesus is and what he claims to be. Faith constitutes a commitment to let Jesus' call change the way we live. **Faith is the work God wants from us** (John 6:29) as we abide in Jesus' word, as we love him, and as we obey his commands (8:31, 15:1-17, 1 John 5:10).

FAITH IS PHYSICAL – (III)

- Biblical faith is not a feeling, it is an action. Faith is shown by the things you do and say.
- Faith is a heart issue. The things you do and say demonstrate what is in your heart.
- “Stretch out your hand,” Jesus said to the man with a withered hand. “Stand up and take up your mat,” He said to the paralyzed man. “Go and confess to the priest,” He said to the leprous men. Their actions of obedience were faith actions.
- Baptism is a public action/expression of an inward conviction.
- “Give a tithe.” Jesus said, *Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*. We reverse it and say that we will give if our heart leads us to do so. Your heart follows your treasure. Don’t wait for God to tell you to tithe. He has already clearly told you in His word. Will you be obedient (have faith) or not?
- James said, *Show me your faith by what you do*.
- Doing comes out of believing. You are living your faith every day. What you say you believe is irrelevant if your actions are contradictory. That is the reason the Bible says again and again that we will be judged by our deeds, by our words and actions.

DOUBT- (IV)

Some wise words about doubt from James McDonald as he was teaching on Numbers 13 and 14, the story about the 12 spies that Moses sent into the land of Canaan. You will remember that 10 of the spies had a bad report, they saw the giants in the land, the walled cities, the chariots, and they became fearful and unbelieving. Joshua and Caleb saw the enemies, but they believed God would give His people victory as He had promised:

- Doubt is often called reality.
- If God has made you a promise, either you are going to trust Him or not.
- “Life is 10% what happens to you, 90% how you respond to it.”
- When surrounded by doubters (Numbers 14), doubt comes easily. Who you spend time with is important.
- Even in church not everyone has faith. We have to fight to have a heart full of thankfulness, contentment and love.
- Doubt is: **contagious**. Don’t let people say just anything about God or about trusting God. Don’t listen.
- Doubt is: **passive**. Don’t just stand there and let things happen by default. Faith is active.
- Doubt is: **self-focused**. Doubt feeds our tendency toward self-protection.
- Doubters can be found everywhere. People of faith must be sought out. Pick your friends. Say to that new acquaintance who is spouting words of fear, anger, unbelief: “Sorry, Jack, but you didn’t make the cut.” (Say it silently by choosing to disassociate with Jack.)
- It’s a short journey from doubt to despair. Are you going to choose to trust God and obey Him or not?

FAITH AND PLACEBO – (V)

In the recent past I have read several reports about placebos. (Webster defines “placebo” as: “A harmless, unmedicated preparation given as a medicine to a patient merely to humor him, or used as the control in testing the efficacy of another, medicated substance.”) Webster apparently needs to reconsider his definition because medical tests are showing that in many cases the placebo has an observable healing effect on patients. In fact, placebos sometimes do better than medications!

The Daily Sentinel, Grand Junction’s daily newspaper, had a headline in its “Health & Wellness” section on June 13th: “Sugar Pill Beats 2 Drugs in Migraine Trial for Children.” Following is a summary of the article:

“Neither of the two drugs used most frequently to prevent migraines in children is more effective than a sugar pill, according to a study published in The New England Journal of Medicine. Scott Powers, lead author of the study and director of Headache Center at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center, said the evidence was clear. A migraine is a neurological illness characterized by pulsating headache pain, sometimes accompanied by nausea, vomiting and sensitivity to light and noise. It’s a common childhood condition, affecting up to 11 percent of 7 to 11-year olds and 23 percent of 15-year-olds. At 31 sites nationwide, 328 migraine sufferers ages 8 to 17 were randomly assigned to take amitriptyline, topiramate or a placebo pill for 24 weeks.

“The aim was to figure out which drug was more effective at reducing the number of headache days, and to gauge which one helped children to stop missing school or social activities. The results among all the groups were similar: 61 percent of the placebo group reduced their headache days 50 percent or more, compared with 52 percent of the children given amitriptyline and 55 percent of those who took topiramate. The drugs also produced side effects in some children such as fatigue, dry mouth, and tingling in their hands or feet. A few of the cases were severe. One child on topiramate attempted suicide, while three taking amitriptyline had mood changes including threatened suicide.

“A team of physicians, including Dr. David Gloss, of the American Academy of Neurology, is revising the academy’s guidelines on Pediatric migraines and planning to assess nondrug approaches.”

What conclusion should we reach regarding these reports? In my opinion these reports affirm the truth that God has created mankind to live by faith. That is, what we believe has an effect on our minds, emotions and bodies. I have read studies that say that listening to a diagnosis by a doctor (an authority figure in a white coat), going to a hospital, having surgery, taking medicine, is a strong mental and emotional experience and that we are programmed to believe (“science proves!”) that it will have a healing effect. Likewise, acupuncture has been shown to have a healing effect and to alleviate pain, and in my opinion the philosophy and/or science behind acupuncture is nonsensical. But for centuries certain cultures have been programmed to believe that it is effective.

I am not suggesting that western medicine and medications are bogus, but I am suggesting that faith is a significant part of all healing - - because ultimately it was God who created and sustains our minds and bodies and God who heals them. It seems clear that what people believe has an effect on people and on societies. The Bible and the historic Christian faith reveal a God who claims to be the Creator, Redeemer. Healer, etc. Believing in Him, trusting in Him, obeying Him, is the most important decision we can make in this life

THE BIBLICAL CANON

The Biblical canon is those texts or books which a particular religious community regard as divinely inspired. Google “Old Testament Canon” and “New Testament Canon” and you will see what a complex subject this is.

For instance, “Some scholars argue that the Hebrew canon (the O.T.) was fixed during the Hasmonean dynasty (140 B.C.), while others insist it was not completed until around 200 A.D.” And the scholarly arguments go on for pages and pages.

Also, there is no consensus as to when the New Testament came into its final form. By the end of the 1st century the epistles of Paul, 1 Peter, and the 4 Gospels were largely formed. By the early 200’s the 27 books of the New Testament were in use widely, but there was much arguing about James, Jude, 2 Peter, Hebrews, and Revelation. The first church council that accepted the 27 books was the Synod of Hippo, held in North Africa in 393 AD.

So, how did the Bible come to be in its present form? The community of faith decided, by listening to God, which books were to be included in the Bible. The criteria that were used to decide which books belonged in the New Testament were:

- (1) written by an apostle or someone connected with an apostle (e.g. Mark was accepted because of his connection with Peter. Mark is seen as the teaching and preaching of Peter. Luke had a personal connection with Paul.)
- (2) accepted by a majority of the churches. (The 27 books in the N.T. were accepted and used by all major Christian communities by the end of the 300’s.)
- (3) understood as containing orthodox doctrine. (Many early books were circulated (the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha) that contained inconsistent teachings that contradicted teaching in the 4 Gospels, Paul, Peter, etc.)

The Roman Catholic Church accepts books known as the Apocrypha as part of the Old Testament canon: Sirach, Baruch, Tobit, Judith, 1 & 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Esdras, Enoch, etc. The Apocrypha was never accepted by the early church and was not approved by the Roman Catholic Church until a Pope included it in their Bible in the 1500's. These books are never quoted in the New Testament and they fail in all of the criteria listed above. They contain material that contradicts material in the accepted canon. They were rejected by Martin Luther and all of Protestantism.

Having said all of that, I want to confess that I have always had a personal problem with one of the books in the Old Testament, The Song of Songs, or Song of Solomon. I am troubled by this little book (and don't read it when I read through the Bible) because its message is obscure and its author is suspect. If it has a story line, it escapes me and most others. Early rabbis had a problem with this book. Many perceived it as an allegory: the man and woman represent God and Israel. Early Christian interpreters identified the man as Christ and the woman as the church or as a Christian. Some believed the man was "active intelligence" and the woman was "passive intelligence," and their union was "mystical ecstasy." Modern interpreters mostly see the book as romantic poetry concerning the gift of sexual intimacy, although there is much disagreement.

If this last interpretation is true, I have to ask, Why are we taking holy sexual advice from a man who had 700 wives and 300 concubines? (I can't deny that he was an expert, except for the "holy" part.) And who fell into idolatry and caused the nation of Israel to fall into division and civil war? Besides that, the Song of Songs is not quoted or even alluded to in all of the New Testament.

As I have thought about my attitude toward this little book, I have concluded:

- That I need to humble myself and repent. We are not to judge the Bible but to be judged by it, even parts that we don't understand.
- I readily admit that the Bible is honest about the fallibility of the human authors of Scripture and the infallibility of the divine Author.
- I am totally convinced that the Bible is the infallible word of our mighty, supreme God.

WHEN WE STAND BEFORE GOD

Three years ago (January, 2014), I told you about a certain conversation I had during a short ministry trip, and that experience continues to come to my mind. I think it was very important. So I am going to repeat it and hope you agree:

A couple of months ago while ministering at a small church in Pagosa Springs, Colorado, I met an unusual man named Mike Lucero. Mike's life as a follower of Christ has been remarkable, to say the least. He told me that not long ago as he was praying, suddenly he saw a vision of a cemetery and one of the tombstones had his name on it. Then God asked him, "Mike, what do you want to have written on your tombstone as the summary of your life?" Mike thought for a few minutes and answered: "He was a faithful husband, a faithful father, and above all a faithful Christian."

God said, "Do you know what I want to be on your tombstone?" Then words appeared on the tombstone beneath Mike's name: "**He fulfilled his purpose.**"

In my opinion, this is a profound revelation from God, and I think it is worth much reflection and prayer on our part.

God Bless

Glenn

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