

Daily Devotions

Monday, Feb. 22 – Giving Up

Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God. Matthew 19:24

Scholars may debate Jesus' intention with this illustration from Matthew, but if you read the whole passage, you will see that a rich young ruler in the story was a good man who had been humble and giving. The problem was he wasn't quite ready to give up everything he had to follow Jesus.

So what is your "eye of the needle," that thing you can't quite give up to surrender your whole heart to God? Things you aren't quite willing to give up, or at least to give over to God's care and keeping.

The rich young ruler wanted to know what else he needed to do to follow Jesus, but he was disappointed when he heard the answer. What about us? We may think we have already done the things that Jesus would require.

Some have given to others, applied our hearts to charity, and attended church on a regular basis. As far as we can tell, we have been model citizens. So what stops us from taking that one last step to make a full commitment?

We don't know if the young ruler ever decided to do what Jesus requested, but we know we can decide. We can choose to follow Him so He can lead us into even more amazing possibilities, or we can choose to hold on to what we've got. We might have our own heroic stories, our own prize trophies that we're not willing to risk. After all, we've done enough. Who defines what is enough?

Remember the poor widow who put two mites into the collection box. She was considered extremely generous because she gave everything she had to God. She didn't hold anything back. With an open hand and an open heart, we find the way to all that is still possible.

PRAYER:

Father, Lord of the Possible, remind me to always be prepared to give up anything You've given me in favor of Your blessing and Your direction. Only You know my whole story and what You've planned for me to do next. I praise Your name! Amen.

Tuesday, Feb. 23 – *Compassion that Forgives*

So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, “Please heal her, O God, I pray!”
Numbers 12:13

Miriam had dared to speak against Moses. But Moses was not only her brother, he was a prophet of the Lord. God took this offense so seriously that He caused Miriam to be covered in leprosy. It certainly was not always the case, but in this instance her illness was a direct result of her sinful actions.

Moses’ immediate reaction was to cry out to God on her behalf. He prayed that Miriam would be healed of her affliction. Moses expressed such humility in not only forgiving the original offense, but also pleading for the consequences of that offense to be removed from her.

How many of us have seen another individual dealing with the unpleasant ramifications of his or her behavior and failed to feel any compassion?

Perhaps we thought to ourselves, “Well, that’s what he gets”. Maybe we even fail to pray for our own healing because we feel that we deserve whatever it is that has happened to us.

There are two things that make all the difference when it comes to a seemingly undeserved healing.

First, God is a merciful God, and His mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:23).

Second, prayer is a powerful thing.

The prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much good (James 5:16). Let’s pray for the healing of those around us.

PRAYER:

Father, God of mercy, I pray for those around me, that they would know Your peace, healing, mercy and love. May they experience the joy I have since Jesus became the Lord of my Life. Move on our family and friends we pray in the Name of Jesus! Amen.

Wednesday, Feb. 24 – A Firm Foundation

Everyone who [practices] these words of mine . . . is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

Matthew 7:24

As many as 34,000 homes in one US state are at risk of collapsing due to faulty foundations. Without realizing it, a concrete company pulled stone from a quarry laced with a mineral that, over time, causes concrete to crack and disintegrate. The foundations of nearly six hundred homes have already crumbled, and that number will likely climb dramatically over time.

Jesus used the image of building a home atop a faulty foundation to explain the far riskier danger of building our lives on unsteady ground. He explained how some of us construct our life on sturdy rock, ensuring that we hold solid when we face fierce storms. Others of us, however, erect our lives on sand; and when the tempests rage, our lives tumble “*with a great crash*” (Matthew 7:27). The one distinction between building on an unshakable foundation and a crumbling one is whether or not we put Christ’s words “*into practice*” (v. 26). The question isn’t whether or not we hear His words, but whether we practice them as He enables us.

There’s much wisdom offered to us in this world—plus lots of advice and help—and much of it is good and beneficial. If we base our life on any foundation other than humble obedience to God’s truth, however, we invite trouble. In His strength, doing what God says is the only way to have a house, a life, built on rock.

Whose wisdom, insights, or opinions do you listen to the most? How can you better build your life’s foundation by putting Jesus’ words into practice?

PRAYER:

Father, so much of what I experience feels unsteady and temporary, a life built on sand. I want to live a solid life. Help me to obey You. Amen!

Thursday, Feb. 25 - Freedom

If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

John 8:36

Twenty long years passed before British journalist John McCarthy, a five-year hostage during Lebanon's grueling civil war, met the man who negotiated his release. When McCarthy finally met U.N. envoy Giandomenico Picco, McCarthy simply said, "Thank you for my freedom!" His heartfelt words carried great weight because Picco had risked his own life during dangerous negotiations to secure freedom for McCarthy and others.

We as believers can relate to such hard-won freedom. Jesus gave up His life—enduring death on a Roman cross—to secure spiritual freedom for all people, including each of us. Now as His children, we know "it is for freedom that Christ has set us free," the apostle Paul boldly declared (Galatians 5:1).

The gospel of John also teaches of freedom in Christ, noting, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

FREE, HOW?? In Jesus, we experience freedom not only from sin and its hold on us but also from guilt, shame, worry, Satan's lies, superstitions, false teaching, and eternal death. No longer hostages, we have freedom to show love to enemies, walk in kindness, live with hope, and love our neighbors. As we follow the Holy Spirit's leading, we can forgive as we've been forgiven.

For all of this, let's thank God today. Then let's love so others will know the power of His freedom too.

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for my freedom. Thank you Father for setting me free from spiritual death and releasing me to love. May each day prove to be a new opportunity to Love like you Love and serve others the way Jesus would. Amen!

Friday, Feb. 26 – Surrendering Fully

Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

Matthew 19:21

Over several years, a British couple living in West Africa developed a strong friendship with a man in their town and many times shared the love of Jesus and the story of salvation with him. Their friend, however, was reluctant to relinquish the lifetime of allegiance he had to another religion, even though he came to recognize that faith in Christ was “the greater truth.” His concern was partly finances, since he was a leader in his faith and depended on the offerings he received. He also feared losing his reputation among the people in his community.

With sadness, he explained, “I’m like a man fishing with my hands in a stream. I have caught a small fish in one, but a bigger fish is swimming by. To catch the bigger fish, I have to let go of the smaller one!”

The rich young ruler Matthew wrote about in Matthew 19 had a similar problem. When he approached Jesus, he asked, *“What good thing must I do to get eternal life?”* (v. 16). He seemed sincere, but he didn’t want to fully surrender his life to Jesus. He was rich, not only in money, but also in his pride of being a rule-follower. Although he desired eternal life, he loved something else more and rejected Christ’s words.

When we humbly surrender our life to Jesus and accept His free gift of salvation, He invites us, ***“Come, follow me”*** (v. 21).

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for offering Your Son as payment for my debt of sin. I desire to get to the place I can surrender wholly to You. Getting to a place in You that I have no desire to ever leave. In the Name of Jesus I refuse to go back! Amen.

Saturday, Feb. 27 – God Has A Plan

“I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember Your miracles of long ago.” Psalm 77:11

“Memory keeps gratitude fresh and gratitude keeps faith fruitful.”

I’m certain there are things in your personal life you’re believing God for, and I want to encourage you that just as God was faithful to His Word to fulfill the promise of a Savior, He will be faithful to do for you what He said He would do!

What has God done for you? Today? This week? The last 10 years? God said He would always be with us — that He would never leave us (Hebrews 13:5). *He is the Friend who sticks closer than a brother* (Proverbs 18:24). In fact, we are joined to the Lord. We are *one spirit with Him* (see 1 Corinthians 6:17). He truly is as close as the mention of His Name! Thoughts from the enemy come to try to make us unsure and cause us to lose our footing. However, although thoughts may bombard us at times, those thoughts do not and cannot change the truth of God’s Word! They don’t change His will, His plan, or His faithfulness.

We all have stories of His faithfulness in our lives. When we choose to remember them, we are blessed by them again and again. Best of all, remembering helps us in tough times. We remember that times have been tough before and that God helped us through them, and we know in our hearts He will do it again.

Therefore, when things are tough, it is important to remember God’s faithfulness and blessings.

PRAYER:

Father, life is hard right now, but I know that You are good. Remind me of Your faithfulness and renew my heart with Your joy. Lord, You have always been faithful. I thank You that even in my present situation; You are going to be faithful again. Please help me recall all the times in the past when You delivered and rescued me from other situations that also looked hopeless. Thank You for helping me keep those awesome experiences alive and fresh in my mind and heart. Thank You for always being faithful to me! In Jesus’ Name, I pray, Amen!

Sunday, Feb. 28: What Love Looks Like

No one has ever seen God, but if we love each other, God lives in us, and His love is made perfect in us.

1 John 4:12

He who is filled with love is filled with God Himself.

Want to know what love looks like? Look at God. Consider His sacrifice, His patience, His comfort, His faithfulness, His generosity. God's creativity in expressing love is so great that it's almost incomprehensible.

Consider how your love stands up next to His. Don't get discouraged. You're not God. At times, your love still falters and fails. But God's love is at work in your life. He's helping you love others in the same wonderful way He so deeply loves you.

Let God's creative compassion inspire you to love others well. Ask for His help in knowing the best way to express your love so that it meets needs, builds relationships, and warms hearts. Then, take a moment to sit back and enjoy His love for you.

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for Your amazing love that teaches me how to love other people. I want to love others the way that You love them. Help me find ways to reach out to them and express my love in the way that people need it the most. Father, as I evaluate my own heart, I realize that I have allowed distractions and the cares of life to dull my passion for You. Somewhere along the way, I became more focused on working for You than walking with You. I repent and turn away from the prayerlessness and hardness of heart that led me to this state. Renew a steadfast spirit within me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation; lift me up from the place where I've fallen; and uphold me by Your generous Spirit. Teach me afresh to reverence You and to truly love You by being a doer of Your Word and not merely a hearer only. In Jesus' Name, I pray, Amen!