

FINISH



STRONG

Week 3
October 15-21, 2017

**Devotionals challenging you
to “live & give” generously!**



HARDY STREET
BAPTIST CHURCH

SUGGESTIONS FOR FAMILY DEVOTIONS

Family devotions can often seem more like chaos than church. Remember: your goal is not perfection. You might think of your goal as something more like “holy confusion.” You just want to add a sense of God’s holiness to your busy household. Here are a few simple suggestions.

1. Choose a consistent time and place. Whether it’s at breakfast around the table or in your children’s rooms just before bedtime, having devotions at the **same** time and **same** place is the best way to be consistent. Choose the best time for your family and then don’t worry if you miss a day here or there.
2. Have different family members read the Scripture and devotion each day. This will give everyone a feeling that they’re a part of **deciding** to have family devotions.
3. After reading the devotions, take a minute to pray together. Talk to God about the needs in your family... the church...the world... your friends... those who need to find Christ... your work... your school...etc.
4. Be yourselves! It’s O.K. to laugh. Noise is not only allowable during devotions... it is probable. If you allow your children to be themselves during times of devotion it’s amazing how much more they learn. What you think is bouncing off of them is actually sinking deeply into their souls.

“You must love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and might. And you must think constantly about these commandments I am giving you today. You must teach them to your children and talk about them when you are at home or out for a walk; at bedtime and the first thing in the morning.”

Deuteronomy 6:5-7 (TLB)

Loving God with All of my Soul

“You don't have a soul. You are a Soul. You have a body.”

~ C.S. Lewis

Loving God with my soul means becoming a servant...
meeting the needs of others as an act of obedient love to Him!

Sunday, October 15- Service

BECOMING A SIGNIFICANT SERVANT

“Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years.” James 5:17 (NIV)

How do we live the most significant life possible? **We serve our way into significance.** For most of us the words “significant” and “servant” do not go together. There is a man in the Old Testament book of Kings who can show us the way. His name... Elijah! One of the most significant things about Elijah is that he was like us. He was a man of awesome miracles, of powerful actions, and the book of James reminds us that he was just yet like us. Since he is like us we can learn from him some lessons about being a significant servant.

Servant Lesson #1: God is willing and able to meet all of my needs.

Significant servants make that confidence the launching pad of their lives and ministries. God is ABLE - He has the power. God is WILLING - He has the love. In 1 Kings 17 Elijah learns this lesson beside a brook in the desolate Kirath Ravine.

In order to teach him this lesson God does for Elijah what He regularly does for His servants. **He reduces life to the basics.** Elijah certainly was down to basics! All he had was the water the Lord sent and the food that God delivered... via the “Raven Parcel Service.” God used a raven to bring food to Elijah. God has help where we least expect it! He provides in ways that go beyond our narrow expectations. That’s what we learn when life is reduced to the basics.

The “basics” are simply this: **a place of complete and total dependence upon God.** In that place God reminds us: we depend on Him alone for all of our needs. Why does God put us in such places? Reducing life to the basics helps to refocus upon God. We recognize again just how dependent upon God we really are. Not our paycheck, not Pensions, not the Microwave or McDonald’s or Mastercard. God is the Father who graciously supplies all of our needs.

Pray this Servant’s Prayer: Everything in my life is there because you bring it to me Lord. I’m totally dependent upon you for everything! Every drink of water, every breath, every bite of food.

Family Activity: Make up some “God gave us this” stickers on post it notes and have your kids stick them all over your house to look at today.

Monday, October 16 - Service

BECOMING A SIGNIFICANT SERVANT, Part 2

Servant's lesson #2: Outer victories mean nothing if I do not win the inner battle.

You'd think that ch. 18 of 1 Kings contained the biggest battles of Elijah's life. He battled the powerful king Ahab, he battled 450 false prophets! But in chapter 19 he faces an even bigger battle, the battle within himself. He won the battles of 18 fairly easily, yet almost lost his life in the battle with himself. In 1 Kings 19 Elijah gives clear expression to the kinds of inner battles which God's servants will inevitably have to face. See if you can relate to any of these feelings he expressed. "I want to run." We often feel like running after a great victory. The combination of physical and emotional fatigue make us feel like escaping when everyone else is celebrating. When we're run down we want to run away.

"I've had enough." The feeling is, "I've reached my limit..." "I'm all alone."

The greatest inner battle is the battle of loneliness. When you decide that you're all alone the inner battle is lost.

The inner victory for Elijah was won on 6 different fronts. God told him:

You need **rest!** (v. 7)

You must **worship!** (v. 8)

You can **tell someone!** (v. 9-10)

You need a **fresh encounter with God!** (v. 11-13)

You are **useful** (v. 15-17)

You **aren't alone!** (v. 18)

Let's focus for a moment on the idea of a fresh encounter with God. Elijah, who had always seen God in the fire and the storms, heard God this time in a gentle whisper. You might feel desperate to hear God's voice right now. Keep listening!

Elijah didn't hear God the 1st or 2nd or even the 3rd time. But he was faithful to be where God wanted him to be and eventually heard God's still small voice. What do you need to hear God whisper?

Pray this servant's prayer: Lord, I want to serve you for the rest of my life. I pray that you would give to me the wisdom to rest when it's needed, the desire to place a priority on worship, the courage to tell You about the problems I face, the inner confidence that I am useful to you and the assurance that I am never alone in serving you. I pray that I would regularly hear you speaking to me in fresh, new ways.

Tuesday, October 17 - Service

THE SERVANT'S SURVIVAL STRATEGY

“You can be sure that the more we undergo sufferings for Christ, the more he will shower us with his comfort and encouragement.” 2 Cor 1:5 (TLB)

The world is full of survival manuals and instructions. You need them whenever you go into unfamiliar territory. A jungle survival manual to tell you that boa constrictors aren't just giving friendly hugs. A parent's survival manual to tell you about diapers and diet and discipline. 2 Corinthians is a Servant's Survival Manual containing a Servant's Survival Strategy. Chapter 1 in the manual is, “How do servants deal with burdensome problems?” There are three steps, none of which can be ignored.

God pours out His comfort.

He cannot help Himself, it's His character to comfort. He is the God of compassion. He is the Father of all comfort. The word comfort here means “to come alongside and help.” This is much more than a card in the mail! God promises Himself to comfort His servants in difficult times.

We are filled with God's comfort.

God makes comfort more than a word on a page, He makes it real in our lives. God's comfort comes in reaction to our circumstances. This is why worry is so devastating: we're trying to find the comfort before we've faced the circumstance. God's comfort causes us to look back after the trouble is past and say, “I don't know how I survived that.”

Our comfort from God overflows to others.

We are comforted, so that we might comfort others. We may always be able to figure out the reasons why a problem comes into our lives. But we can always see God work the miracle of transforming our sufferings into other's comfort. God's comfort is so magnificent that when He pours it out on us there is always enough that it overflows to others.

Family Discussion Question: What is one place in your life where God's comfort has or could overflow from you to others.

Family Activity: Show your children how God's comfort overflows by filling up a

glass with a gallon pitcher of water. Talk about the fact that because God is bigger than us He always has more help to give us than we will need.

Wednesday, October 18 - Service

GIFTS FOR SERVING

Who is the most important worker in the restaurant? The owner: the one who plans what the restaurant will serve? The master chef: cooking everything to perfection? I'll give a vote for the waiter. Without her or him you'd never enjoy what the owner planned, never eat what the chef prepared. Never discount the value of good service!

Who is the most important worker in God's kingdom? The preacher that everyone notices? The leader who gets the applause? I'll vote for the unnoticed servant. Without him or her 90% of what gets done in God's kingdom would go lacking. We'd have teachers teaching to empty auditoriums, leaders with no one to lead. Never discount the value of a good servant!

One of the great joys of heaven will be in seeing, really seeing, the great impact and value of servants who have gone without fanfare in this world. Great servants like Stephanie Wills - longtime secretary to Billy Graham. Or like Cleveland Gillespie, who heads up our FBCOB janitorial crew. Or like literally *hundreds* of volunteer servants who make First Baptist Church what it is.

The greatness of service is only released as we choose to use whatever gifts God has given us for His glory. The greatest tragedy in God's kingdom is a gift that is undiscovered or unused or underutilized.

The great violinist, Nicolo Paganini, willed his marvelous violin to Genoa - the city of his birth - but only on condition that the instrument never be played after his death. It was an unfortunate condition, for it is a peculiarity of wood that as long as it is used and handled, it shows little wear. As soon as it is discarded, it begins to decay. The exquisite, mellow-toned violin has become worm-eaten in its beautiful case, valueless except as a relic. The moldering instrument is a reminder that a life withdrawn from all service to others loses its meaning.

Family Discussion Question: Recognize the gifts that God has given to those in your family. Beginning with the youngest, focus on one person at a time. Have each person in your family affirm their gifts by saying, "You are really good at..." or "God has given you a gift for..."

Thursday, October 19 - Service

WHAT DOES A SERVANT LOOK LIKE?

“After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.” John 13:5 (NIV)

There is a feeling in the thirteenth chapter of John that we are there for one of the most significant events in history.

What’s your picture of the atmosphere in the upper room where Jesus and his disciples met the night before Jesus died. Maybe hushed tones and a holy glow come to mind. Let me shatter that vision with a hefty dose of reality. We come in to excited noises. The disciples are expecting Jesus to make His move to take over soon, and they’ll go with Him to the very top. They talk about what that will be like. You can just imagine them dreaming. Suddenly the volume increases. No longer excitement, but argument.

Which would be the greatest?! The argument really began when they walked into the room. No one took time to wash the other’s feet. With thoughts of greatness on their minds, they had no time for an activity usually assigned to slaves. The fact that greatness is measured with the yard stick of service had not yet registered with them.

There sits Jesus, hardly noticed as the others argue. No one sees Him get up and walk to the other side of the room. A few notice as he takes off His robe and pours a basin of water. Stunned silence overtakes them all as Jesus comes to each disciple and begins to wash his feet.

Jesus washed their feet. God in human flesh washed dirty feet. Scrubbing dusty toes - now that’s love made practical! Real love is an **action**, not a **feeling**. Everything was ready for someone to serve: the pitcher was there, the wash basin was there, the linen cloth was there. It just took a person to take it up.

We hear Jesus say, “You should wash **one another’s** feet.” What does it mean to wash the feet of a disciple today? Ask yourself, why did Jesus wash the disciples feet? It wasn’t a religious ceremony, that’s for sure! He washed their feet because their feet were dirty!! How do you wash other’s feet? What does that mean? **DO something that somebody else needs.**

Family Discussion Question: Who in your own family needs their feet washed today? (Pause here for a few comments from your kids about whose feet smell!) Seriously: who has a practical need that you could all be a part of meeting?

Friday, October 20 - Service

SERVING AT HOME

"You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature ; rather, serve one another in love." Gal 5:13 (NIV)

If one of God's most important calls to us is the call to be a servant, doesn't it make sense that we need to incorporate that service into our daily lives. That means being a servant where we work. That means being a servant in our own homes. If we don't serve those with whom we spend the most time, those whom we love the most, then servanthood is half hearted at best. How can I be a servant at home? Here's a few ideas suggested by Galatians chapter 5.

Survey your Home - Ask yourself: is my home a place of indulgence or service? You see, an opportunity to serve is also always an opportunity to indulge. Nowhere is that so true as in the home. Nowhere is our human tendency towards selfishness seen so clearly as in the home. What are you doing with your opportunities? Are you taking advantage of your family? Of their work by your laziness? Of their forgiveness by your anger? Of their giving by your taking?

Surrender your Heart - Servants surrender their heart to the guidance of God's Spirit. What makes me into this servant type of person? God's Spirit! Some specific surrenders need to happen in your heart for your home to become a place of service. Wait a minute, you might be thinking. Isn't this church stuff. What does the Holy Spirit have to do with my family? Everything! Eph. 5:18 tells us, "Be filled with the Spirit," and then spends the rest of the chapter talking about what that does in our families! Being filled with the Spirit gives us the power to make those specific surrenders that make a family strong. He enables us to surrender our plans and our agendas and our desire to have OUR needs met in order to love others. Your family life does not have to be determined by how you were raised, not if you surrender. It does not have to be governed by how it has been, not if you surrender. It does not have to be limited to what it is now, not if you surrender.

Family Discussion Question: Where is it difficult for you to surrender yourself to God's daily direction?

Children's Activity: Use a white flag to illustrate to your kids the idea of surrender. Talk about how waving it shows that you're giving up what you want to give someone else what they need. Use some practical illustrations like which TV show you watch or who gets to sit in the best seat in the car.

Saturday, October 21 - Service

SERVING ON A DONKEY

"He answered: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' ; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Luke 10:27 (NIV)(Read the story of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-36)

Jesus parable of the good Samaritan is a parable about the service that springs from love. The story is so simple that we often miss its incredible applications for our everyday lives. It is the story of three different types of people... three different responses to needs.

Those who create needs. - The robbers in this story created the needs that the Samaritan would eventually meet. How did they become such takers rather than givers? Their actions were the result of a single attitude: "My needs are more important than your needs." Or, to say it in a word, they were selfish. Self-centeredness creates an avalanche of needs... it always has. For example, some people think the church and its programs exist to meet their needs...not the other way around! That's why the Lord so clearly says to us through Paul "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Phil 2:4)

Those who ignore needs. - The Levite and priest just "passed by." It was easier to pretend the need didn't exist, although it meant that the man would probably die. Ignoring needs is so easy. This is where the majority of us struggle. Why do we ignore others needs?

Fear: We're afraid we might get hurt Judgment: We have judgmental attitudes. Busyness: We're too busy with life's details. (Ouch!) False purity: We're afraid of how their problems might affect us.

Those who meet needs. - The most striking thing about the Samaritan was that he made the choice to meet another person's need. That meant personal sacrifice. His sacrifice was built upon his compassion. His compassion overcame fear and apathy. His compassion made him willing to care. His willingness to care came with a cost. It cost him the price of an inn. It cost him his time. It cost him his comfort, he walked while the man rode his donkey.

Family Discussion Question: Do you find it difficult to pay the price to love? To give up plans and time, comfort and resources? Children's Activity: Act out the story of the good Samaritan... it's OK for one person to play several parts!