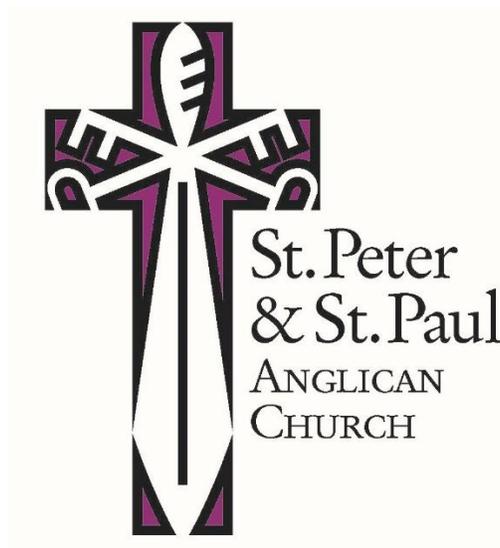


Good News Daily

Devotional Readings for each day covering the Bible every two years.

August 2021



Sunday, August 1

Psalm 96 *Great is the LORD! He is most worthy of praise! He is to be feared above all gods.* (v.4 NLT)

I once read a quote that said, “Where you stare, you steer.” It means where I fix my gaze, that is the direction my mind, thoughts, and life will go. I asked myself, “What are my thoughts and mind staring at?”

In 2020 we had a worldwide pandemic. There was much cultural unrest about minority group oppression and violence related to protesting. The political fervor was one of almost polar opposition on every issue. My gaze—my thoughts and emotions were definitely on worldly matters and issues. I was a jumbled mess at times!

This verse brought to focus that world events can often turn into a “god” and an unhealthy mind set. It is God Himself I need to fix my gaze on. He is the one to be feared and respected. He is the one I choose to stare at. He will steer me in right and peaceful paths. Where is your gaze today?

2 Samuel 6:12-23; Psalm 93; Romans 4:7-12; John 1:43-51

Monday, August 2

Mark 8:11-21 *But the disciples had forgotten to bring any food. They had only one loaf of bread with them in the boat. As they were crossing the lake, Jesus warned them, “Watch out! Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod.” At this they began to argue with each other because they hadn’t brought any bread.* (vv.14-16)

Whenever I read this passage, I actually chuckle! I can picture these grown men, arguing over who forgot to bring the food and whose fault it was that they only had one loaf of bread! And then I envision the frustration on Jesus’ face as he listens to them arguing like children.

The disciples were missing the whole point. Jesus was trying to impart a spiritual truth, not chastise them about food. But his friends were entirely focused on physical food and bread.

How often I can be focused on what I think God is saying to me, rather than what He is truly trying to teach me. I’m thankful God is patient with me. Like Jesus did for the disciples, He shifts my understanding and hearing to spiritual truths He wants me to learn. May I have ears to hear.

2 Samuel 7:1-17; Psalm 80; Acts 18:1-11

Tuesday, August 3

Psalm 78:1-39 *For they did not believe God or trust him to care for them.* (v.22)

Sometimes when I read the Bible, I think to myself, “How could the people think like that?” How could the Israelites experience God’s miraculous deliverance from Egypt but not believe he could provide them bread or meat?

And then quietly, the Holy Spirit taps me on the shoulder and says, “You do that too.” *What? Me?* Sure enough, I can think back to prayers or expectations. God has answered hundreds of my personal prayers. But then some days I pray and speak to God like He hasn’t answered the way I wanted or expected. Or even answered my prayer at all.

This is a crafty tactic of the enemy: “Don’t believe God. He can’t be trusted. He might have cared in the past, but He doesn’t now.” All lies of Satan.

Believe God, not the enemy. God can be trusted. He is able and He cares. Who will you choose to listen to?

2 Samuel 7:18-29; Acts 18:12-28; Mark 8:22-33

Wednesday, August 4

Mark 8:34—9:1 *“Is anything worth more than your soul?”* (v.37)

In my opinion, I would love to have a chronological book of just the words that Jesus spoke. He was a man a few words, but the ones he spoke were powerful and life giving. That is how I feel about this short passage here in Mark.

Reading just verse 37, and answering it honestly, could change my life and yours dramatically. If I began my day with this thought and acted accordingly to put this verse into action, how would my day look? How would your day look? Would you and I need to change anything? Possibly everything?

What is more important than my soul? Breakfast, schedule, work? Errands? Do I put my family before my own soul? On some days, one would wonder if the importance of my soul mattered at all to me. Jesus is asking again this day, “Is there anything worth more than your own soul?”

2 Samuel 9:1-13; Psalm 119:97-120; Acts 19:1-10

Thursday, August 5

2 Samuel 11:1-27 *In the spring of the year, when kings normally go out to war, David sent Joab and the Israelite army to fight the Ammonites. They destroyed the Ammonite army and laid siege to the city of Rabbah. However, David stayed behind in Jerusalem.* (v.1)

A while ago, I volunteered as a helper once a week in a kindergarten classroom. It amazed me that the teacher always knew where each of the sixteen students was and what they were doing.

The children were quite young and were easily distracted. It was common for them not to listen to directions. Often, I would find them wandering off and doing something they shouldn't have been doing.

Several times I would hear the wise teacher ask them, “What are you supposed to be doing?” Or, “Where are you supposed to be?”

This is the question I hear God asking in this passage. David was not where he was supposed to be. He was not doing what God had intended. It caused him great trouble and others suffered because of his sin.

Are you where God wants you to be?

Psalms 83, 145; Acts 19:11-20; Mark 9:2-13

Friday, August 6

Mark 9:14-29 *So He said to them, “This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.”* (v.29 NKJV)

In my opinion, fasting is a spiritual discipline many people are not particularly fond of. Who wants to purposely make themselves feel hunger? It is physically uncomfortable and unpleasant. Yet, I have personally experienced strongholds in my life that were torn down only after a time of prayer and fasting. Uncomfortable? Yes. Necessary? Absolutely.

Jesus speaks about fasting not as *if* we should fast but *when* we should fast. I believe fasting is a scriptural discipline that has spiritual benefits and power. Jesus is revealing the truth of this power in these verses in Mark.

Don't let your stomach rule your spiritual life. Let the power of God rest on you as you yield to His power available through fasting along with prayer. You may be surprised by the results.

2 Samuel 12:1-14; Psalm 88; Acts 19:21-41

Saturday, August 7

Psalm 90 *Let us, your servants, see you work again; let our children see your glory.* (v.16 NLT)

One of my recurrent prayers is that God would give me eyes to see. Eyes to see Him, where He is working in my life, and to keep my eyes focused on Him.

I want to be a person who can look and see the hand of God more than the works of the devil. I need supernatural power to do this! How easy it is to see with human eyes and all that is wrong with myself and the world.

These verses are going to be a prayer of mine. That God will enable me to see Him at work in my life and my family's lives. I want my children and grandchildren to have eyes of faith too. Lord, may it be so according to Your word: "Let us, your servants, see you work again; let our children see your glory." Praise be to You, our Heavenly Father.

2 Samuel 12:15-31; Psalm 87; Acts 20:1-16; Mark 9:30-41

by Pamela Newton

Sunday, August 8

Romans 15:1-13 *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.* (v.13 NRSV)

Paul acknowledges that there are strong and weak believers in the church at Rome and he calls upon the strong to aid in building up the weak. Our church today can likely be described in a similar way. I have taken up both positions. Sometimes I feel strong in my faith, sometimes times I am weak.

Today, maybe more now than ever, we have a situation in which it is necessary to be steadfast and encouraged by Scripture to maintain our hope. I miss the familiar ways of worship and fellowship in this time of pandemic that formed a large part of my faith's strength. That has been taken away.

Now is the time for the strong to put up with the failings of the weak. Forgive each other as we have been forgiven by Christ's work.

2 Samuel 13:1-22; Psalms 66, 67; John 3:22-36

Monday, August 9

Mark 9:42-50 *"Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."* (v.50)

This is the "stumbling block" passage. If something is a "block," cut it out and throw it away. Jesus is being *real* with his flock. Let me go down my block checklist. Hand: yes, check; Foot: yes, check; Eye: yes, check. All stumbling blocks, all checked. More failures than success.

But Jesus closes this passage with a promise and a call to live my life as he intended for me. A real discipleship, in spite of all my shortcomings and half-hearted endeavors, is possible. All I need to do is stay "salty." I know my faith is a gift. That gift provides me the power to recognize and consciously make the effort to avoid stumbling blocks and serve my neighbor in love.

2 Samuel 13:23-39; Psalm 89:1-18; Acts 20:17-38

Tuesday, August 10

Mark 10:1-16 *Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"* (v.2)

This is a tough lesson for anyone to teach or preach on. As soon as the word divorce is mentioned, the pain begins. I was a child of divorce. And this passage brings into view the hurt and brokenness that come, even when a divorce appears to be the best among all available options. Later in this passage, his disciples again ask about the matter. Jesus then describes post-divorce behavior as adultery.

I sometimes see myself as "a bride of Christ" waiting patiently for the groom to arrive at any hour. However, in that waiting period, I am prone to "divorce" myself from my true spouse. And so begins an attachment to another "husband." It may seem extreme to identify non-sexual attachments in one's life as adultery, but sin comes in all shapes and sizes. And anything that splits the relationship between myself and Christ is a danger to be avoided.

2 Samuel 14:1-20; Psalms 97, 99, 100; Acts 21:1-14

Wednesday, August 11

Mark 10:17-31 *They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."* (vv.26-27)

All the commentaries I looked at for this passage in Mark agree. This lesson sucks. There is a great deal of theological accommodation (a management of the message) that takes place in the preaching of this story. And it is a stark message. Jesus is leaving no wiggle room. Even the disciples are “greatly astounded.” And I can’t even begin to wrap my head around this as an “economic” plan for the world.

But Jesus tells the truth, all the time. And he acknowledges that, for a person like me, it is impossible. Look, I fail to understand this kingdom principle. Perhaps impoverishing oneself gives a different perspective. But I know that there are many people who are falling into poverty and not for the sake of Christ. And we as a church work hard to prevent that from taking place. I cannot keep myself sin-free, nor can I be the real disciple of Christ full-time.

Thank You, God, for my faith and trust in You that all things are possible.

2 Samuel 14:21-33; Psalms 101, 109; Acts 21:15-26

Thursday, August 12

Acts 21:27-36 *When Paul came to the steps, the violence of the mob was so great that he had to be carried by the soldiers. The crowd that followed kept shouting, “Away with him!”* (vv.35-36)

What a dramatic episode in Paul’s story. I can only imagine the courage it took for Paul to enter the temple that day. I think he had a pretty good idea of the lies which had been told about him and spread among the people of Jerusalem.

In my mind’s eye, I visualize the pandemonium that ensued. Riot is the appropriate description. With my real eyes, I see broadcast images of similarly upsetting violence taking place in American cities. No civility, or reason, or accommodation; just anger, emotion, and intolerance.

Two sides with the Romans in the middle. How about Antifa and the Proud Boys with the Police in the middle. What a crazy time, huh?

Holy Spirit, you were active and present then; please make your presence known to me in my collective and personal life today.

2 Samuel 15:1-18; Psalm 105:1-22; Mark 10:32-45

Friday, August 13

Acts 21:37—22:16 *“I asked, ‘What am I to do, Lord?’ The Lord said to me, ‘Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do.’”* (v.10)

I have always liked the story of Paul’s conversion. It was overwhelming and complete in its effectiveness. One moment, he is the persecutor, and the next, he is the persecuted. What appealed to me was the certainty of Paul’s conversion, and the fact that Paul didn’t have to work this one out for himself. I think of the big, red “easy” button.

For me, I work on my faith all the time. I know it is a gift, but I can’t stop myself from behaving like I have to earn it. Like I need to do something good because each small failure puts me back to the starting block. And so it goes. Sin is inevitable. I cannot live the life which I imagine is the one God has set out for me. Instead, I live a life of starts and stops. It is exhausting really. Like Paul, I have been told everything that has been assigned to me, I find it in the Bible. But it takes real work to make things clear for myself.

2 Samuel 15:19-37; Psalm 102; Mark 10:46-52

Saturday, August 14

Psalms 107:33-43 *Let those who are wise give heed to these things, and consider the steadfast love of the LORD.* (v.43)

I am full of trust that the Lord has the best in mind for me. Regardless of my weakness, there is a promise of love and understanding. I cannot seem to find that in any other place in my life. Oh, there is a lot of love among my friends and family, but there is a limit to that. This psalm explains to me the abundance and totality of God’s objective for my life. He has given me a “spiritual roadmap” to follow. And that includes encouragement to continue along the way. It can be difficult.

The way is not smooth and there are detours and off-ramps leading me astray. I wait and search for the signs that keep my spirit alive. And because I want to be wise, I give heed to these things.

2 Samuel 16:1-23; Psalm 108; Acts 22:17-29; Mark 11:1-11

by Larry Standish

Sunday, August 15

Galatians 3:6-14 *Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because “the righteous will live by faith.”* (v.11 NIV)

Most of us are law-abiding citizens, aren't we? We know we shouldn't steal or murder. We should pay taxes and not drink and then drive. But, what about those little yields instead of halts at the stop sign? Or going a few miles over the speed limit when we are in a hurry. Or making photocopies of personal emails and documents on the office copier. When the clerk gives us back too much change, do we pocket it?

The Holy Spirit nudges us to act the right way and do the right thing. He helps us resist the temptation to fudge a little here and there. But even then, only one man, who walked on earth, lived without sin. And he died for ours.

Before we judge others, let us remember we all have fallen short (Romans 3:23). Our faith reminds us that we all need Jesus, and he is the only way we are made righteous enough to kneel before the throne or be worthy to gather the crumbs under his table.

2 Samuel 17:1-23; Psalm 118; John 3:30-47

Monday, August 16

Psalms 106:1-18 *Then they believed his promises and sang his praise.* (v.12)

They say seeing is believing. For the most part, isn't it true? It isn't until we experience Christ breaking through into our lives that we then grab hold of faith. Even if raised in the church, at one point we must accept Jesus as our personal Savior and confirm the faith that we have been taught as children.

The Hebrews were no different. God had spared them from plagues and given them freedom from slavery, but it wasn't until they were stuck between death by spear and drowning that they believed His intervention on their behalf was real.

Some people must reach the end of their own strength before they ask for help. It is human nature to do it ourselves, thank you very much. But when we witness God's almighty power, it changes our way of thinking.

May we be a people who believe without seeing, as Jesus told Thomas in the Upper Room (John 20:29). Then we will be truly blessed.

2 Samuel 17:24—18:8; Acts 22:30—23:11; Mark 11:12-26

Tuesday, August 17

2 Samuel 18:9-18 *“You are not the one to take the news today,” Joab told him. “You may take the news another time, but you must not do so today, because the king's son is dead.”* (v.20)

Although the Israelite armies had achieved a great victory, Joab knew King David needed time to mourn because his son, leading the enemy, had died during the battle. Despite his past actions, the fact Absalom was David's son mattered more.

No matter what a person does, who they are—or were—is even more important in the eyes of their loved ones. Wrong actions often do not reduce the sorrow, hurt, or helplessness of those left behind. The person may have been a mass murderer but somewhere someone is grieving over them. They should not be blamed for their relative's actions, but instead should be extended sympathy.

We need to give people time to work through their emotions and honor their right to have them. Pray with them and over them. Sometimes, just being there to hand them a tissue, hold their hand, or listen is the better path. The rest can wait.

Psalms 120, 121, 122, 123; Acts 23:12-24; Mark 11:27—12:12

Wednesday, August 18

Acts 22:23-35 *The commander went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" "Yes, I am," he answered. (v.27)*

This passage might seem a bit confusing. Paul, who writes that he only boasts of Christ and not himself (2 Corinthians 10), suddenly uses his clout to get out of sticky situation. However, Paul worked within the parameters of the law. And that law stated a citizen of Rome had certain rights. He didn't ask for a special concession, only that he be treated justly.

In many places in the world, Christians face persecution for stating their beliefs. They have no laws to protect them. In fact, by proclaiming Jesus as their Savior they may be breaking laws. However, like Paul, they have a defender that goes beyond the laws of human governments.

Eventually, citizen or no, Paul would be imprisoned and executed for his faith. The Romans, who stated no citizen could undergo a humiliating punishment or death, would behead him.

Ultimately, we cannot place our faith in human laws, but in the Truth of God. And if Christ is for us, Paul would later write from prison, who is against us? (Romans 8:31).

2 Samuel 18:19-23; Psalm 119:145-176; Mark 12:13-27

Thursday, August 19

Mark 12:28-34 *Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him... (v.28b)*

Some of the religious leaders and scholars of the day would ask Jesus questions to trap him. But this man asked because he honored Jesus. In other words, his questioning was sincere. Jesus told him he was not far from the kingdom of God (v.34).

There will always be people who will try to dispel our faith or trip us up. They will nit-pick. They will argue. Their intentions are not honorable.

However, some question out of an open desire to know more about Jesus. Their hearts have been softened. The door Jesus had been knocking upon opens a crack. We all at one time or another were in this category even if we were brought up in families of faith. At one point, we whispered our questions and believed the Lord would answer.

Doubt is not the absence of faith. We should ask questions. Our Lord doesn't mind an open and honest discussion. Have the faith that God will answer when the time is right, and possibly in a way you may not have anticipated.

2 Samuel 19:1-23; Psalms 131, 132, 133; Acts 24:1-23

Friday, August 20

Psalms 140 *Let burning coals fall upon them; may they be thrown into the fire, into miry pits never to rise. (v.10)*

Yipes. Not a very loving and forgiving response, David.

Passages like this clash with my New Testament understanding of how I should live as a follower of Jesus. After all, are we not to help lead everyone to salvation? To forgive and even love our enemies? To judge not less we be judged (Matthew 7:1)?

For me, however, there is comfort in passages such as this. If anything, David felt comfortable enough in his faith to be honest with God and express his feelings. I admire him for that, and I believe God did as well.

Daddy will stand by while we have our temper tantrums. Sometimes, wise parents realize the emotions must come out first before reason kicks in. God knows how we are wired. He made us.

Like David, we should feel confident to approach Him with our thoughts and emotions, even if they are unloving at the time. It is better to emote to our Father in prayer first than lash out to others in haste.

2 Samuel 19:24-43; Psalm 142; Acts 24:24—25:12; Mark 12:35-44

Saturday, August 21

Mark 13:1-13 *“Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to be fulfilled?”* (v.4)

Pandemics, floods, earthquakes, violence, secularism, and persecution... many Christians believe we are in the end times and it will get even worse before Jesus comes. Not everyone can agree on the sequence of the end times. Camps of eschatology are divided. Will we escape the wrath, have to endure some of it, or have to grin and bear it until the end when Christ appears? They have fancy names such as Postmillennialism, Amillennialism, and Premillennialism.

There is one thing for certain: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. Believers have eternal life and nothing here on earth is so intolerable that it can destroy true faith. The devil will not win the war, even though he may take credit for the outcome of skirmishes.

Jesus stated that we should watch out so that no one deceives us. The issue is not when and how but that it will happen, in God’s time. Our focus should be to remain in the faith and live each day in clear conscience as if it was our last on earth.

2 Samuel 23:1-7, 13-17; Psalms 137, 144; Acts 25:13-27

by Julie B Cosgrove

Sunday, August 22

Psalms 146 *I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.* (v.2 NIV)

David was passionate, incredibly blessed by God, and honored by his people—yet susceptible to temptation. Throughout the Bible, there are many references to death. Death in this case means “separation from God.” In this passage, David is referring to the period of time when he ran away from God, caused by the guilt of his transgressions. Once David repents and asks for forgiveness, the mercy he receives from God is undeniably gracious.

Have you ever strayed from God? I have and I experienced a deep sense of agony. In Romans 8:1:2 it reads, “Therefore there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.” Father God, thank You for sending the gift of Your Son to reconcile us to You.

2 Samuel 24:1-2, 10-25; Psalm 147; Galatians 3:23—4:7; John 8:12-20

Monday, August 23

Psalms 1 *But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.* (vv.2-3)

The tree being continuously nourished by the streams of water surrounding it and then blossoming when in season is symbolic of our relationship with God. God plants us where He wants us and forever feeds us.

One of my greatest joys in this world is to look back at my life and see how I have grown in times of anguish. This has been achieved by devouring God’s word and relying fully on Him. Once we reap the harvest of God, it becomes our responsibility to spread the seeds of His joy. “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord” (Ephesians 5:8-10).

1 Kings 1:5-31; Psalms 2, 3; Acts 26:1-23; Mark 13:14-27

Tuesday, August 24

Psalms 5 *In the morning O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.* (v.3)

Every day is an adventure with God. Part of my morning prayer is, “Father God, please guide my path in the direction I need to follow today, and permit me to be a blessing in someone life for Your glory.” A prayer such as this works in many ways. My stress level is reduced dramatically when I let Jesus carry me through the day, prioritizing all the details for me. In this harried world we live in our “to do” lists get longer and longer, drawing our focus away from God. He has

given us the Holy Spirit through His Son Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the power of God given to all who are “born again.”

The other day, as I was calculating the time it would take to run my errands, the phone rang. I hesitated and something inside urged me to answer it. It was a friend who was struggling and needed encouragement. I took the time to listen and then ventured out to do my “to do” list for the day. As I was driving, the traffic ahead was halted, there had been a terrible accident involving many automobiles. If I hadn’t stopped to listen to my friend in her time of need, I could have been one of those vehicles. Proverbs 3 says, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in everything you do, and he will direct your paths” (vv.5-6).

1 Kings 1:38—2:4; Psalm 6; Acts 26:24—27:8; Mark 13:28-37

Wednesday, August 25

Psalm 119:1-24 *Blessed are those who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart.* (v.2)

Walking with Christ and living according to his word does not come without sacrifices; a small price to pay considering the ultimate sacrifice Jesus endured for us. In my experience, I have had to make sacrifices in my associations with people. God has either altered a relationship slightly, removed me from the situation temporarily, or even permanently. As disheartening as that may seem, or feel, God does this because He loves me. It is for my benefit because some relationships can potentially lead me astray—away from the teachings of Jesus. If Jesus convicts me to take this course of action, I obey. I have learned that if I don’t listen, I wind up being hurt more than I would if I had initially followed his leading. To cope with a situation such as this, I pray, read my Bible, and wait patiently for matters to be resolved. The glorious results and the lessons received are always greater than the sacrifice.

1 Kings 3:1-15; Acts 27:9-26; Mark 14:1-11

Thursday, August 26

Psalm 18:1-20 *The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.* (v.2)

Throughout the psalms, there are many references to God being our shield, rock, and fortress. A few years ago, I decided to visit my parents who lived 13 hours away from where I live, with our two young children. Due to his work schedule, my husband could not take time off to accompany us.

I knew I could not make this trip in one day, and I was certain God would protect us from any perils along the way. During our lunch break the first day of our road trip, I was pleased with the hospitality and kindness we received at the restaurant. Our waitress went above and beyond the call of duty, and several other staff members helped us as well.

When I pulled off the highway to find a hotel for the night I had two choices. Directly in front of the entrance of my first hotel choice was a police car. I rolled down my window and the police officer rolled his and said, “Are you planning to stay here tonight?” Yes, I replied, wondering about his concern. This hotel was quite a reputable chain. He said, “You would be safer at the hotel down the road.” I thanked the policeman profusely, and praised God for his mercy. The children and I were, once again, showered with kindness at the hotel where we stayed the night. The next day we arrived safely at my parents’ house. God is always our Almighty Protector.

1 Kings 3:16-28; Acts 27:27-44; Mark 14:12-26

Friday, August 27

Psalm 16 *I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.* (vv.7-8)

David is thanking God for His gracious provision and care. As Christians, we are able to live our lives with a sense of security and confidence through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. As the days of my life go by, I feel more and more fortunate I received a call from God and recognized it. Nothing saddens me more than to see someone who is not cognizant of God’s presence in our world. For this is reason I am compelled to share the “Good News” of Jesus Christ with others. I pray such as, “Lord, allow me to be an instrument of Your word to someone today. I hope to glorify you in an inoffensive manner, and exemplify Your love through my actions and language.”

I was recently engaged in a conversation with someone who boldly asked me if I thought Jesus was the answer. I was dumbfounded by the words that flew out of my mouth. I graciously replied, “Well, I have seen how my life has been transformed.” Then I shared the story of my salvation through Jesus Christ. I don’t know the outcome, but I believe God chose the person, the time, and the words.

1 Kings 5:1—6:1, 7; Psalm 17; Acts 28:1-16; Mark 14:27-42

Saturday, August 28

Psalm 20 *May he give you all the desires of your heart and make all your plans succeed.* (v.4)

This verse stirs my heart. I love to hear testimonies from people who unexpectedly happened on an opportunity, have accepted it, and been blessed by God beyond their imagination. Usually, while I am listening to this type of personal account, you can hear the excitement in their voice and see the glow on their face. They have finally found their true passion in life.

Two years ago, I was conjuring up businesses in my mind that would fit into my schedule and not take time away from my family. None of my ideas came to fruition. Then, months later, I was presented with an opportunity that fit perfectly into my lifestyle. I resisted at first, and then decided to run with it.

Within the last two years, I have been able to recognize how God has been preparing me for this career for years; even going back into the days of my youth. God knows our hearts better than we do. In the book of Proverbs 13, it reads, “hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is the tree of life” (v.13).

1 Kings 7:51—8:21; Psalm 21; Acts 28:17-31; Mark 14:43-52

by Julie Garcia

Sunday, August 29

John 8:47-59 *Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.”* (v.58 NRSV)

Jesus is in the midst of controversy, as he often was. He did not run from adversity, especially when there would be an opportunity to help those who challenged him understand who he really was. He held the greatest gift that anyone could give, and he wanted to give it to all.

Here we have one of the most important statements ever made by Jesus. If Jesus had simply wanted to imply that he existed before Abraham, he could have said, “Before Abraham was, I was.” But “I am” was a title for God (Exodus 3:14), which means that Jesus was clearly proclaiming his divinity.

This was a claim that demanded a response. It could not be ignored. The Jewish leaders therefore attempted to stone him for blasphemy because he claimed identity with God. But Jesus is God.

Jesus’ bold claim confronts us all. If we have considered Jesus less than God—perhaps someone second only to God, but less than God Himself—he is confronting us as well. He has a gift to give us; we have a choice to make.

1 Kings 8:22-30; Psalms 148, 149, 150; 1 Timothy 4:7b-16

Monday, August 30

James 2:1-13 *My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?* (v.1)

We tend, I suspect, to let ourselves “off the hook” by saying it is only natural for us to be more open to the affluent than to the poor. Perhaps we’re impressed by those who have wealth and influence, and, by comparison, disappointed with those who have failed to “make it” in this world. We feel sorry for those who are shabbily dressed, but we show more personal interest in those who are clean, neat, successful, etc. Perhaps we feel that they can do more for us, or want to think they are more like us.

The words of James make us squirm. We are probably all at least a little guilty of showing favoritism to one group of people over another. He causes us to question our motives.

A footnote in my Life Application Bible sums it up pretty well: “The royal law (v.8) is the law of our great King Jesus Christ, who said, ‘Love each other as I have loved you’ (John 15:12). This law, originally summarized in Leviticus 19:18, is the basis for all the laws of how people should relate to one another.”

2 Chronicles 6:32—7:7; Psalm 25; Mark 14:53-65

Tuesday, August 31

James 2:14-26 *So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.* (v.17)

It is faith alone that saves us. Paul wrote, in Romans (3:28), “For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works....” What, then, is James saying? Is he giving us a new gospel?

James is talking about how our faith is tested. Anyone can say they have faith, but saying it proves nothing. Although it is true that our good deeds can never earn us salvation, real faith results in a changed life that produces good deeds. True faith transforms our conduct as well as our thoughts.

James gives a couple of illustrations to make his point. Abraham was regarded by all Jews as the ideal man of faith, being willing to sacrifice his only son because he thought God had told him to do so. But James points out that it was in the doing that Abraham proved his faith. Likewise, Rahab proved her faith not by what she said but by what she did (Joshua 2).

Perhaps James makes us squirm once again as we consider whether our faith is evident in our good deeds.

1 Kings 8:65—9:9; Psalms 26, 28; Mark 14:66-72

Wednesday, September 1

James 3:1-12 *And the tongue is a fire.* (v.6a)

This time, James really makes us squirm! His teaching concerning the tongue reminds one of that old Southern expression, “Now he’s quit preaching and gone to meddling.”

James uses illustrations of how certain small things can have power far exceeding their size (the bridle in a horse’s mouth, the rudder of a ship). “So also is the tongue a small member, yet it boasts great exploits” (v.5).

And then there is that remark about fire. When I was a small boy, we had a large field of sage grass next to our house. I had tried to trample down the grass in the middle of the field to make myself a hideout, but I was having trouble getting the grass to cooperate. Then I had a great idea; all I had to do was burn away a small section of the grass for my hideout. Of course, the fire spread rapidly in all directions. By the time help came, the whole field had burned!

So it is with those nasty little things we say to another in secret. Maybe we don’t even mean any harm. But before we know it, our words have spread like wildfire.

1 Kings 9:24—10:13; Psalm 38; Mark 15:1-11

Thursday, September 2

James 3:13—4:12 *Who is wise and understanding among you?* (v.13a)

Is there no place we can hide from these scorching words of James? Now he questions our ambitious desires. He speaks of “selfish ambition” and the “bitter envy” that may have led us to the ambition in the first place. We thought we were just trying to “get ahead.”

If the television ads don’t get us, perhaps what our neighbors and friends have will. It’s easy to be led astray by the pressures of society and even sometimes by well-meaning Christian friends. We are told to “go for it,” “assert yourself,” “grab the brass ring.” In the world in which we live today, we can be drawn into greed and destructive competitiveness before we realize what has happened to us.

But in today’s passage, James gives us some comfort as well. He tells us that there is a “wisdom from above” (v.17) that we Christians can have. It isn’t worldly cunning that can bring us material success; it is godly wisdom that we can acquire by being in relationship with God and studying Scripture. That has eternal consequences. James also notes that Satan can lead us astray. And, again, he gives comfort by reminding us that we can resist the devil and he will flee (v.7).

1 Kings 11:1-13; Psalm 37:1-18; Mark 15:12-21

Friday, September 3

James 4:13—5:6 *Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring.* (v.14a)

There is a saying that yesterday is a cancelled check and tomorrow is just a promissory note. The only day we have is today. People who are in Twelve Step programs (like Alcoholics Anonymous) know that they have to live “one day at a time.” James says, “If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that.”

It doesn't seem to me that James is telling us to forget about planning ahead. There is nothing wrong with having goals in life. What I get out of this is that we really can only count on today, and we should live every “today” in accordance with God's will for us instead of being locked into long term plans of our own devising. Life is short. We shouldn't be deceived into thinking that we will ultimately get around to doing the things God wants us doing today.

If our planning and our goal setting has been for the purpose of making us rich, James has an added warning for us. Instead of building up treasures for ourselves on earth, we need to be building treasures in heaven (sacrificing on behalf of others and thereby building eternally beneficial qualities into our lives).

1 Kings 11:26-43; Psalm 31; Mark 15:22-32

Saturday, September 4

James 5:7-12, 19-20 *Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord.* (v.7a)

James ends his letter with several other pieces of advice. Using the farmer as an example, he encourages patience on our part. The farmer has to be patient; he can't force the crops to grow, but has to depend on God for the right kind of weather. We should stand firm in our beliefs, and continue to depend on the Lord.

And, we shouldn't grumble. The Christian life is no guarantee against the problems that life brings. As a matter of fact, as we become increasingly sensitive to the things God would have us do and to the needs of others, life can become much more demanding. We should rejoice in being God's ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20) instead of taking it out on others when problems surround us.

Finally, don't neglect to bring one who has wandered from the faith back into relationship with God. That is what being ambassadors for Christ is all about. It can require a lot of tact in showing “tough love” to one who has gone astray, but God will give us the words if we'll give Him our will.

1 Kings 12:1-20; Psalms 30, 32; Mark 15:33-39

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