

ABIDE

2019

A 21 Day Devotional
for Prayer and Fasting

WHY WE PRAY AND FAST?

This is and has been the Father's work from the beginning—to bring us into the home of His heart.

— George Macdonald

We are a forgetful people who, at times, need to be reminded. Reminded that, because of the work of Christ, we are always at home in the infinite love of the Father. This is why we pray. This is why we fast.

We need to be reminded that the Good News of the Gospel was never an invitation to a church service or to a tradition, to a building or an event, but always, first and foremost, to Himself. This is why we pray. This is why we fast.

And yet, this 'never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever love' that God has poured out through Christ Jesus, isn't just for you, or me. It is for our neighbors. It is for our co-workers. It is for the grumpy guy at the gym or the overwhelmed single-mom at the supermarket. This is Good News, not just for you and me, but for all of us.

That is why, as a community of churches, we are linking arms, once again, to seek God's face together. We are sitting under God's Word together. Praying together. Fasting together. For, we know that together, the kingdom of God will not be stopped. That together, the forces of darkness will not prevail. That together, we can fulfill the prayer of King Jesus, that we would be one, just as He and the Father are one. This is why we pray. This is why we fast.

Oh God, grow our awareness of your love to us, as well as your love through us. May we be the roads you choose to travel this next year to demonstrate your 'never stopping, never giving up' love. Help us to live as ONE Church, ONE Body, ONE Family, through this 21-day journey of prayer and fasting. Let it not be just a destination, but a catalyst towards lives that will never be the same. In the Heartland, as it is in Heaven. In our homes, as it is in Heaven. In our hearts, as it is in Heaven.

-ABIDE Pastoral Team

***Prayer Prompts:** at the conclusion of each day's reading, consider the following as you go to our Father in prayer—

- That these truths would become real to me and my family
- That these truths would become real to the body of Christ in the Heartland
- That God would bring revival to my own heart and the churches of the Heartland
- That our not yet believing neighbors would be drawn to Christ through our faithful love and gospel witness

Bible Versions used in this devotional:

ESV English Standard Version

KJV King James Version

NASB New American Standard Bible

NIV New International Version

NLT New Living Translation

MSG The Message

TPT The Passion Translation

Day 1:::January 7, 2019

God sets the lonely in families, He leads out the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.
—Psalm 68:6 (NIV)

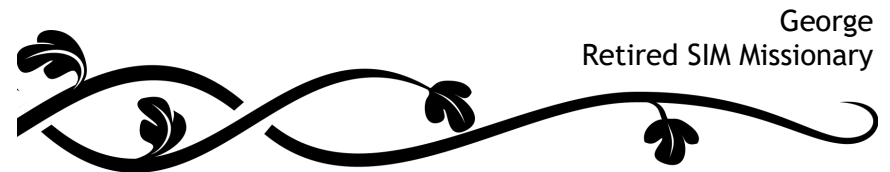
There are three types of people mentioned in this verse: the lonely, the prisoners, and the rebellious. The first people in the verse are the lonely: *God sets the lonely in families*. The family is the greatest institution in the world. Why would someone be lonely in the American family? How about a family with an absentee dad, a working mom and dad, cable television, social media, not eating together, not attending church together. Many people are lonely because they build walls and not bridges. Building Christian community is a good way of combating loneliness. Making family a priority is another good way of combating loneliness. Families that pray together and play together stay together.

The second type of people mentioned in Psalm 68:6 are the prisoners. The verse says, *He leads out the prisoners with singing*. One time I visited a prison ministry with church friends as they had invited me to preach to the prisoners. I expected to find discouraged men who had no hope in life. Before I spoke the message, the prison choir sang. They were one of the best most heartfelt exciting choirs I had ever heard. There were people who, although incarcerated, were free. They lost their physical freedom but gained their spiritual freedom in Christ and loved to sing about it. The apostle Paul writes, *Speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord* (Ephesians 5:19).

The third group of people mentioned in this passage are the rebellious. Psalm 68:6 says, *...but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land*. God desires our obedience to His will, and that may include some tough "sun-scorched" (desert) experiences. We grow more in the tough times than in the good times. An Arabian proverb says, "All sunshine makes a desert." A dangerous place is outside the will of God. Betsie Ten Boom, who died in Ravensbrück concentration camp in 1944, said, "The center of God's will is our only safety." Pray we will stay obedient and safe in the will of God.

Successful Christian living means following Christ and abiding in Him. But it is not a simple task. It takes discipline, commitment, and sacrifice. But whatever God requires from us is worth it in the end.

*Prayer Prompts (page 3)



George
Retired SIM Missionary

JOURNAL

Day 2:::January 8, 2019

*Trust in the Lord and do good;
dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.*
—Psalm 37:3 (NASB)

This verse in the thirty-seventh chapter of Psalms calls to mind the attitude and posture of a gardener, who cultivates rows of vegetables or neatly-trimmed beds of flowering plants. They “dwell in the land”, so to speak, with their fertilizer and seed catalogues and trowels and loppers. Gardeners know about cultivating.

I myself? Well, I am a cultivator of many things: the messy piles on my desk, the stream of dirty dishes in my sink, the tall stacks of books on my nightstand (and the end table, and the floor...). I cultivate friendships and creativity and gratitude. However, outside of my two small children, I do not cultivate living things. I am on my fourth fern in two years. It’s an asparagus fern and seemed the least likely to die.

Sometimes I think farmers and gardeners have the advantage when examining verses such as this one...they KNOW about abiding and cultivating because their hearts and bodies are fully involved in such things. But the Psalmist isn’t excluding any of us here, green thumb or not. This whole chapter is ripe with action words that we can grab onto: do not fret, trust in the Lord, delight yourself in the Lord, commit your way, trust, rest in Him, wait for Him, do not fret...

We are invited to practice abiding in many ways. We are invited to cultivate faithful hearts by trusting in the Lord, finding our home in Him.

When we refuse to fret and worry, we find our home in God.

When we make a conscious choice to trust Him, we find our home in God.

When we refuse to esteem our own wisdom, but commit our ways and choices, we are making our home in the Lord, cultivating and nurturing a faithful response to the God of the Ages.

We who dwell in the land of business agreements and family crises, we who cultivate the busyness of children in school and at the ball fields, we who lay our weary heads down on pillows that probably need to be washed again soon...we are invited to live from a deeper place.

Moses, in the ninetieth Psalm, wrote, “Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations”. We make our homes in many ways and places. But our truest home isn’t the house we saved for or the promotion we earned or at home with the children for which we prayed. Our truest home is in our Maker.

Trust in the Lord. Do good. Cultivate faithfulness.

Where are you making your home these days? The Father is inviting you to make your home IN HIM.

*Prayer Prompts (page 3)

Sarah
Wife, Mother, Writer



JOURNAL

Day 3:::January 9, 2019

*How blessed are those who dwell in Your house!
They are ever praising You. Selah.
—Psalm 84:4 (NASB)*

How wonderful is it to find your home? Whether you are house shopping or looking for a friend in whom you can share life or returning from travels...It is good to *know* home, to be home. In this wonderful Psalm we are called, in verse four, to sing praise to our Father Who has become our Home, our dwelling place.

God our Father, in and through Christ Jesus, is our only hope of rest - of Home - and we are to continually praise Him for His kindness in calling us to Himself and then, make our Home in Him.

Home is where we reside, where we are settled, where we can “muse and think over the things” of our lives (Webster's Dictionary). In God, we are safe forever. Subsequently, as we think on His great mercy and grace to us, we not only find our true Home, but we have reason to 'ever praise!'

Charles Spurgeon tells us that “communion is the mother of adoration.” As we dwell and rest in Him, we sense our call to *adore Him*. Our hearts can press hard into Him and KNOW He alone is worthy of praise and adoration.

As “dwellers” in His house, our response must be gratitude and so, we “are ever praising” Him. How is this “ever praising” expressed in our lives? Certainly in private and corporate worship through prayer and song. But what about in our daily lives? How does this 'ever praising' show up in the mundane and ordinary hours of our days?

Cultivating gratitude is a discipline of obedience to God. We give Him praise when we humble ourselves. We give Him praise

when our lives are for others. We give Him praise when we don't have to have our own way.

We give Him praise as we yield to Him, “seeking His face before we seek His hand” (Daniel Henderson).

When we ... don't grumble or complain. Philippians 2:14

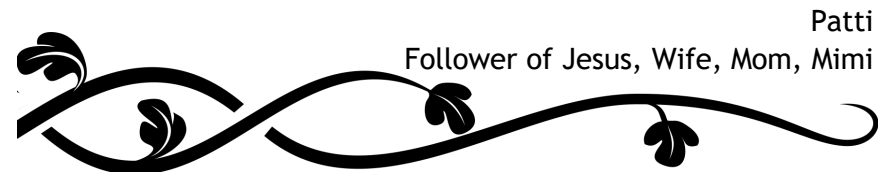
When we ... are kind one to another. Ephesians 4:32

When we ... forgive as we have been forgiven. Colossians 3:13

When ... in everything, we give thanks. 1 Thessalonians 5:18

As we continue to make Him our home, walking in the sure knowledge that we have become His temple (1 Corinthians 3:16), our “ever praising” will increase and we will know the joy of walking in the abundance of His grace and mercy.

*Prayer Prompts (page 3)



Patti

Follower of Jesus, Wife, Mom, Mimi

JOURNAL

Day 4:::January 10, 2019

A single day in Your courts is better than a thousand anywhere else! I would rather be a gatekeeper in the house of my God than to live the good life in the homes of the wicked.

—Psalm 84:10 (NLT)

The psalmist has no doubt that an abundance of riches, fame or friends cannot compare to being in the temple experiencing the Lord's presence. He'd rather take a lowly position in God's house than experience all the good things that the wicked could offer.

In verses 5-7, we see that people had to go through the "Valley of Weeping" (which could relate to a season of hard times, struggles, illness, or lack of basic needs) to get to God. Upon entering the temple, they found joy, strength, deliverance and refreshing.

As Christians we sometimes rely heavily on our self sufficiency, our minuscule strength, and intellectual reasoning to solve personal struggles. Sometimes prayer and seeking God's face is our last resort.

A dysfunctional marriage, a bad financial situation, a bad report from the doctor, or a loss of a dear loved one may be your "Valley of Weeping" at this moment. But I would strongly suggest that you choose to be steadfast in planting yourself in God's house and growing strong in God's presence, rather than acting upon selfish promptings and vain imaginations of the flesh or the world.

Let your "Valley of Weeping" to get to God become a "Mountain of Decision" to seek God's face consistently.

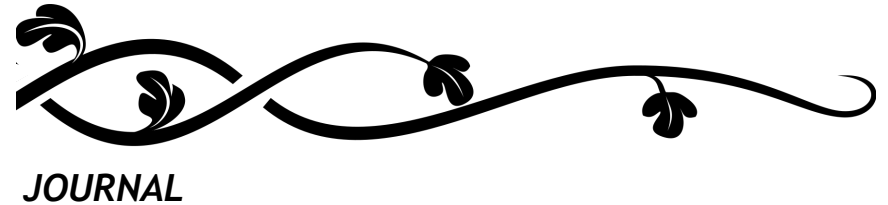
*Prayer Prompts (page 3)



JOURNAL

Day 5:::January 11, 2019

*Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me
all the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.
—Psalm 23:6 (NASB)*



Sometimes the trouble of this world overwhelms a believer to the point they may feel rejected and abandoned not only by friends and family members, but also by God. Many times David was weary to the point of death as his very life was in jeopardy from King Saul.

The context of Psalm 23 reveals King David's experiences as a shepherd boy in his earliest years. Having a deep concern for his sheep, David describes the Lord as his Shepherd.

In this Psalm, David has complete assurance that the Lord's promises included: provisions, rest, guidance, protection, restoration, comfort in the midst of fear, pain, sufferings and injury, honor and a generous display of hospitality.

Finally, we see in today's scripture God's promise is to provide mercy, lovingkindness and grace, while David's commitment is to dwell in God's presence not only in this life, but forever. Remember, nothing is too hard for God. Will you also make a commitment to abide in Him regardless of your life's situations and rely on His promises to you?

*Prayer Prompts (page 3)

Joann
Retired

Day 6:::January 12, 2019

*“Look! I stand at the door and knock.
If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in,
and we will share a meal together as friends.”*

—**Revelation 3:20 (NLT)**

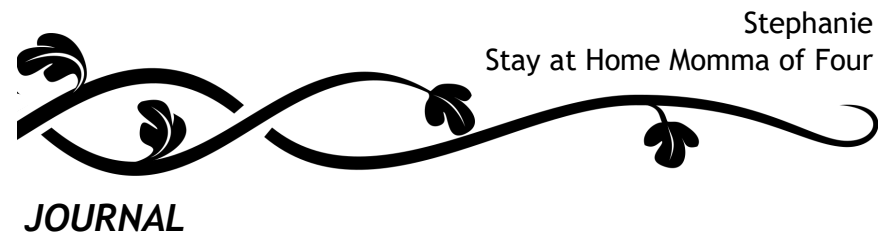
There is nothing this broken world can offer us compared to our unbroken and completely worthy Savior, but we have to “open the door” and let Him in instead of putting Him on the back burner and letting the things of this world take priority in our lives.

In this message, Jesus is reaching out to the Church in Laodicea. Take note, this was a message for the church. This was specifically for believers that were no longer living on fire for God. Jesus is warning of the consequences of living “lukewarm” by trying to rely only on ourselves and being easily distracted by the supposed riches of this world. Here, He is taking the time to correct the church and His followers. He corrects us because we are so precious to Him and He wants us to sit with Him on His throne (Revelation 3:21), but again, we have to open the door.

Besides the literal meaning, an open door in scripture also meant an opportunity to do something. In this verse, Jesus is saying that we have to realize the opportunity in front of us, before it’s too late. The choice is ours to make: continue chasing the desires of this world or open the door to Christ and the freedom he has to offer. Jesus also says that if we choose to open the door that He will share a meal with us “as friends.” This wouldn’t be like you and me going and grabbing lunch. In those times to share a meal with someone was an outward display of a love or a reconciled relationship. That is what Jesus offers us. His love is unfailing, no matter how long we ask Him to wait while we are busy with the things of this world. He will be there, ready and willing to reconcile the relationship.

Jesus does not say that he will stop pursuing us if we don’t answer Him. He’s not like the vacuum salesman going door-to-door, only concerned with those that answer. Instead, Jesus lavishes us with an undeserving grace and He waits. But the more we become like the world, versus being the light of the world, the harder it will be for us to hear those nudges from the Holy Spirit asking us to let Him back into our lives.

*Prayer Prompts (page 3)



Stephanie

Stay at Home Momma of Four

JOURNAL

Day 7:::January 13, 2019

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

—Hebrews 11:8-10 (ESV)

I love the story of Abraham, and how he left his home by faith to be obedient to the calling of God. He didn't know where he was going or what would happen along the way. He just knew God told him to go and he was obedient. Can you imagine being Abraham? Can you imagine packing up your family and possessions, loading the car, and just heading out? No directions, no known destination, no idea of how long it will take to get there? Can you imagine what those around you would think? But that's exactly what Abraham did. He had placed his hope in God and trusted Him to direct his steps. Like Abraham, it is our faith and belief in Jesus Christ that delivers us from sin and allows us to be heirs in the inheritance of eternal life.

Through the entire chapter of Romans 4, Paul writes about the faith of Abraham. He says that Abraham's faith was counted to him as righteousness before God. His obedient actions demonstrated his faith in God. It wasn't what he did for God or his obedience to God, but his faith that earned him his inheritance. He was "fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was counted to him as righteousness" (Romans 4:21-22).

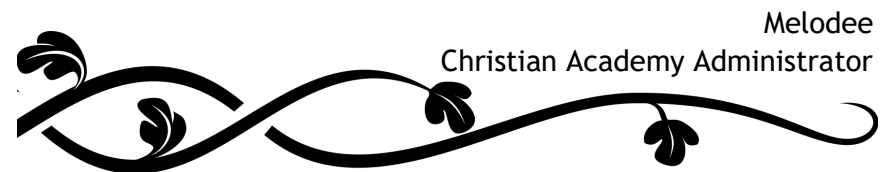
In our passage today, we see three things about Abraham's faith. First, Abraham's faith extended to his family. Isaac and Jacob were linked with him as heirs. Through Abraham's faith, his son Isaac learned to have faith in God, and through Isaac's faith, his son Jacob had faith in God. Deuteronomy 6

is a command to parents to teach their children diligently the works and laws of the Lord so that they can teach their children, and so forth. The Christ we demonstrate in our homes is the Christ our children will follow. Share your faith with your family. Pray for them, love them, and serve them. When we abide in Christ, our family should be the first to see and benefit from the fruits of our relationship with Him.

Second, Abraham demonstrated a steadfast faith. He lived as a nomad in a foreign land, living in tents. He wasn't swayed by the gods of this land. He faithfully served God. We live in a sinful and idolatrous world. We must not conform to this world but be transformed through our faith to live a life that is pleasing and pure before God. When we abide in Christ, He becomes our strength and resolve to stand firm against the flaming arrows of Satan.

Third, Abraham was looking beyond that earthly city to his eternal home, one designed and built by God. Abraham looked to the invisible, the promise awaiting him, and he moved toward it. This world is not our home. We hear that, and sometimes say it, but do we believe it? Can you look beyond the visible to the invisible, to the promise awaiting you in glory? When we abide in Christ, He gives us the hope of a future home, our true home, our inheritance.

*Prayer Prompts (page 3)



Melodee

Christian Academy Administrator

JOURNAL

Day 8:::January 14, 2019

*Do you not know that you are God's temple
and that God's Spirit dwells in you?*
—1 Corinthians 3:16 (ESV)

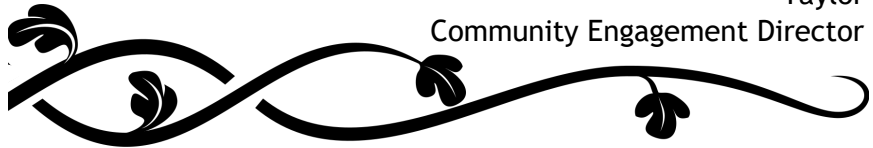
This section of Paul's letter to the church at Corinth was written to address the problem of divisions in the church and to rebuke and challenge the believers. Culture at this time put a lot of weight on who your teacher was, even within the church. Paul very directly addresses this issue explaining that we are all but vehicles for God's work building His kingdom. It is our natural instinct to admire the teachings, lifestyle, and work of God's people. We forget that it is God within them that has empowered and equipped them for their walk and work. God is the foundation in the life of a believer and through the work of the Holy Spirit and the community of believers, that foundation is built on. Paul explains that what is built on that foundation will be tested by fire and only the work of the Lord will endure. Paul is clear that what he has become, is only by the grace of God, and the same spirit that has transformed his life also lives within every believer. It is the responsibility of each believer to work out their own salvation by choosing every day to abide in Christ.

Major Ian Thomas, in his book "The Saving Life of Christ" encourages believers to make the personal choice to abide in Christ by explaining the burning bush phenomena. Moses was amazed at the sight of the burning bush, the power of God. However, he was content to stay a spectator of that power, assuming that he was not equipped to do that to which God called him. Moses forgot, that as a believer, he had all he needed because what he had is what God is. Think of the burning bushes in your life. For the believers in Corinth, it was Paul and Apollos, their admirable teachers. May you not stand back and remain a spectator of the burning bushes around you,

the lives of believers where the mighty power of God is evident. The person who has clearly gone from spiritually dead, defeated, and barren, is now raised to life and set on fire. Do not think that these people have a special call on their life, that is not for the ordinary person, not for someone like you. Do you not know that YOU are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in YOU? God wants to do more than just give you strength. He wants to BE your strength. He wants to do more than give you victory. He wants to BE your victory. The Gospel changes everything.

*Prayer Prompts (page 3)

Taylor
Community Engagement Director



JOURNAL

Day 9:::January 15, 2019

*Therefore, there is now no condemnation
for those who are in Christ Jesus.
—Romans 8:1 (NIV)*

“God, I offer myself to thee - to build with me and to do with me as thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy power, Thy love, and Thy way of life. May I do Thy will always!”

It is possible that some of you are looking twice to find the reference I omitted. I mean you can almost hear Paul reading those words to himself from a jail cell in Ephesus ... or maybe it was David hidden away in a cave on the run from Saul, facing adversity at every turn and crying out in prayer to God for deliverance. Can you hear him - “God, I offer myself to thee”? You can’t quite put your finger on who or where, but you know it’s in the Bible somewhere - right?

Okay, please turn to page 63. Oh - you don’t have that one do you? Well it is page 63 of the second edition of what is commonly referred to as the “Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous”. Let’s hear it again, but this time picture a man or woman so desperate for healing that they have been pushed to their knees with the weight of their mistakes or heartaches. They need IN - into a place of comfort and safety, a place where they can live free from the judgmental glances or whispered rebuke that has always surrounded them. Picture yourself at that moment when you cried out to Jesus for an eternal hope or can I even suggest picture yourself now - hurt and beaten down, numb to everything around you. You need IN also - don’t you?

“God, I offer myself to You - build me and to do with me as You choose. Relieve me of the constantly nagging reminders of my failure, that I may better do Your will. Take away my difficulties, and remind me that victory over them will bear

witness to those I would help of Your power, Your love, and Your way of life. May I do Your will always, reminded that nothing - not where I have been or what I have done leaves me separated from you! Thanks for inviting me to the IN crowd!”

In Romans 8, Paul continues a conversation about the freedom that an abiding believer obtains from the GOD of the Universe! There are a lot of powerful words in Romans 8:1, but one of the most significant has to be the word IN. We were placed IN service the moment that HE grabbed us away from the other team, and we must remember that GOD’s end game has little to do with our insignificantly short gametime play. HE is most interested that we remain committed to being IN the team and not distracted by the remembrance of the people we used to play with in the past. They weren’t ever going to win anyway!

We lose our focus by being out of Christ Jesus, and the result is fear, confusion, and unhappiness. But GOD has called us to something much bigger than who we are or what we can offer. HE evaluates our success by our ability to endure patiently and develop the patterns necessary to complete HIS tasks diligently. HE evaluates our ability to ABIDE. We uniquely live IN HIS character and essence, and HE promises peace and comfort with that abiding!

*Prayer Prompts (page 3)

Rodger
Psychology Professor



JOURNAL

Day 10:::January 16, 2019

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.
The old has passed away; behold the new has come.
—2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)*

In today's passage, Paul is describing how the experience of our redemption appears. If someone is truly saved, they are in Christ and He is in them.

In Acts 9 when we read of Saul's conversion, we see an example of a sinner's true conversion. When we are saved, everything about us changes. Our very thoughts, desires, values and things we love change. We will still have sin and temptations in our life, but now we no longer love sin, but fight against it and repent of it.

In the next verse (2 Corinthians 5:18), we understand that it is all from a sovereign God and that through Christ we are reconciled to God and we are to proclaim the gospel. When we are truly born again, we no longer live for temporal things, but we live with an eternal mindset. We know that we are only pilgrims here and that our citizenship is in Heaven. As a new creation with a longing for Heaven we should pray as the 18th century theologian and preacher Jonathan Edwards, "Lord, stamp eternity on my eyeballs," and that we glorify God in everything we do and say.

*Prayer Prompts (page 3)

Carey
Citrus Industry



JOURNAL

Day 11:::January 17, 2019

...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith - that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
—Ephesians 3:17-19 (ESV)

I am commanded to abide in Christ, and I am tempted to think that it's something that I must do. That I have to take the initiative. That I need to struggle to keep myself in the right place. And yet...

The Apostle Paul prays for the believers at Ephesus, and he prays not so much that they will act, but that God will act in and through them. He prays that they might have a faith “rooted and grounded in love,” but the love is God’s. Everything in the passage is God’s. Paul begins in verses 15 and 16 by bowing his knee before a God who is above all things and before all things, and whose “riches of glory” are the well-spring of faith.

Paul prays that God will do what only God can do. That He will grant faith, that He will “strengthen the inner being” with His power, that He will “dwell in the heart,” that He will give comprehension of the incomprehensible, and that He will “fill with His fullness.” When Paul is finished asking, he praises (in verses 20-21) the God who is powerful enough to do all of these things and more.

Abiding in Christ should not be an anxious thing, as if I have to draw on my own reserves of power to keep me in His love and follow His commands. Christ has saved me by His power and for His glory, and He keeps me in the same way. Even if I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, He will hold me fast. And He who began a good work in me will be faithful

to complete it.

*Prayer Prompts (page 3)



Josh
APHS Teacher

JOURNAL

Day 12:::January 18, 2019

*Those who say they live in God
should live their lives as Jesus did.*

—1 John 2:6 (NLT)

Jesus didn't just talk the talk. He walked the walk. We can look back on His life and see examples in His daily life of how He demonstrated what it looked like to abide.

Three things come to mind when I read 1 John 2:6.

- 1) Jesus took the time to seek direction. We see Him in a relationship with the Father. There are many instances where Jesus took the time to retreat and spend time alone in prayer. In Luke 5:16 we learn that Jesus did this often.
- 2) Jesus realized His dependency on the Father. He tells us in John 5:19 that "He can do nothing by Himself. He only does what he sees the Father doing." Isn't it comforting to know that we don't have to grind out life on our own? As you and I spend more time in prayer and in the Word of God we will know more of the nature of God. We will become more sensitive to the things He tells us to do and sensitive to His guidance in our lives.
- 3) Jesus was obedient to the Father's will. As a result of spending time with the Father, Jesus heard through His time in prayer as well as being prompted as He walked through life; and He acted on the things the Father wanted to accomplish through Him (John 6:38).

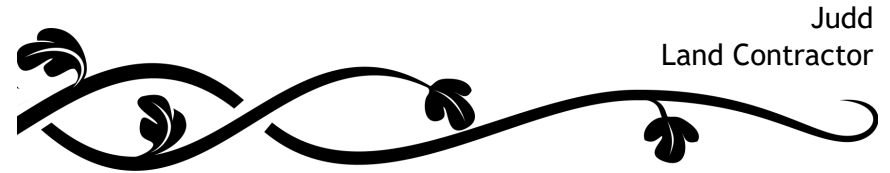
I am a planner, someone who is goal and task driven. Not so long ago there was a period in my life where I did not know where or what to do some days. I had to start out my day seeking God for direction. Through this He taught me a valuable lesson: there is no better place to be than total dependency on God. A lot of times that is easier to do when we are stripped of

our self-sufficiency. This a comforting truth in rough times but equally valuable during good times.

As we abide in Christ, and as we seek Him through prayer and His Word, and as we become dependent on His way, it is easier to be obedient to Him. If He gives us the direction then the pressure is off of us. He has already gone before us and we can rest in abiding in Him.

What would our homes look like if we were to invest in time with God? What would our workplace look like if we were dependent on God for our decisions? What would our neighborhood and community look like if we were obedient to God's promptings in our life?

*Prayer Prompts (page 3)



JOURNAL

Day 13:::January 19, 2019

Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God.

—Colossians 3:1-3, NLT

Back when I knew everything in middle school, one of my youth leaders asked me to define faith. I quickly touted Hebrews 11:1: “Faith is being sure of what you hope for and certain of what you do not see.” It was easy then, both to quote and to believe. It was before I had been exposed to the doubt, shattered expectations, and disappointment I know now. It's easy to be sure before you've been tested, but that's not the essence of faith. Faith demands being sure that God is, and that He is good, even when you can't see the good.

How do we attain such elevated vision—vision that isn't clouded by our trials and circumstances and the everyday stuff of life? How do we keep our eyes set “on the realities of heaven” when the only reality we see is dirty laundry, scary diagnoses, and problems at work?

Setting our sights requires dogged focus. Isn't it interesting that God gave us two eyes, but they can only focus on one thing at a time? [I know many of you just tried to prove me wrong, and I'm laughing because I tried it, too.] Seriously, you can't do it. We weren't designed to be able to do this! In this passage, Paul isn't telling believers to do one more thing; he's encouraging them to do the same thing in a different way—to change the *direction* of their gaze, to refocus on what's *most* important. Millions of things, even important things, clamor for our attention, but are we attentive to the weight of eternity and all it offers for the present moment?

We set our sights on heaven when we choose to sing a hymn while we wash the dishes. We readjust our focus when we gather with like-minded believers, but also when we disperse into our community bearing the Gospel so others catch the same vision. We adjust our vision when we dig into God's Word, and let those timeless truths roll around in our minds and write themselves on our hearts. We get a glimpse of heaven when we pray those one-sentence prayers that get us through moments we don't think we can survive. A million little glances turn into second glances, and those glances soon begin to lengthen, until we are altogether fixated upon the very face of God in the middle of our mundane.

Let's not miss out on the One most worthy of our focus and all He has for us today. It's not a matter of if He's present; it's a matter of if we are paying attention.

*Prayer Prompts (page 3)



Chelsea
Office Manager

JOURNAL

Day 14:::January 20, 2019

*I have been crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live;
yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live
in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God,
who loved me, and gave himself for me.*
—Galatians 2:20 (KJV)

What does it mean to be crucified and yet live? When we look at this scripture, we see that Paul is making a crucial point on how we understand our lives as Kingdom citizens. Paul’s reminder that we have been crucified with Christ gives us the promise that, not only were our sins paid for, but our sin nature was crucified with Him as well. Just as he laid down his life for me, I can lay down all of my errors, my wickedness, my ignorance, and my addictions with the confidence that his finished work on the cross is more than sufficient to set me free.

Many passages throughout the New Testament speak to this hopeful assurance that we can have in the completed work of Jesus. Romans 6:6 says, “We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.” Here is yet another great reminder that our “flesh” no longer has power over us, but the power is now with the life of Christ in us. We see this truth expressed as the Galatians 2:20 passage goes on to say “...And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God.” This clear reminder affirms that, though we still “live in the flesh” in this world, our fleshly impulses, temptations, greed, pride, or even hate no longer rule over us but instead Jesus rules in us through our faith in Him.

Our faith stands on his unfailing grace and completed work. This faith in Him is our direct link to Christ who loves us so much that He gave himself for us—ALL of us—even for a “sinner” like me (Romans 6:11). Our relationship with Jesus assures us that His victory is ours. Nothing and no one can

stop us from reaching the destiny that He has lovingly laid out for us.

*Prayer Prompts (page 3)

Sharnesea
Owner/Operator—Lawncare



JOURNAL

Day 15:::January 21, 2019

Then Jesus turned to the Jews who claimed to believe in him, if you stick with this, living out what I tell you, you are my disciples for sure. Then you will experience for yourselves the truth, and the truth will free you.
—John 8: 31, 32 (MSG)

Jesus taught many lessons to those who would follow Him. They needed to understand that true discipleship had nothing to do with association, position, or mere belief. Some in the crowd believed they were disciples because of their association with Abraham. They failed to realize that it was Abraham's faith in God that gave him courage to move to a land of which he knew nothing. He trusted God at his Word. His actions demonstrated that what he said he believed, even when it looked impossible.

So many times, we hear, "I believe the Bible, I believe Jesus, and I am a Christian." Yet, the lifestyle does not reflect those words. True believers/disciples hear the Word, believe the Word, and keep the sayings and teachings of the Word. Jesus said *stick* (adhere, remain, continue, hold onto, don't let go) *to* my Word. Believe it, trust it, live it! Then *you* are my disciples, for sure!!

As disciples, our character, conduct, and lifestyle must illustrate who we say we are if we are to be free, live free, and help to set others free. It's truth in the Word that liberates our character, conduct, and lifestyle so that we become a living testimony. Even in the midst of adversity, we will be able to give a Word that sets others free.

*Prayer Prompts (page 3)

Tina
Nurse Manager



JOURNAL

Day 16:::January 22, 2019

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,
teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom,
singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*
—Colossians 3:16 (ESV)

Ever read through a passage of scripture only to forget those precious words an hour later? We're all guilty. Our minds so quickly move to the next agenda without remembering the joys of the scripture we've read earlier in the day. In this verse, Paul puts forth a challenge to dwell on the precious words of God. As we do, our mouths overflow with wisdom and our hearts overflow with praise.

First, let's look at how choosing to dwell on God's word overflows into our interactions with each other. Paul uses two words to describe some important interactions within the church: teaching and admonishing. The word "admonish" simply means to warn or advise. Most of us wouldn't consider ourselves teachers, but any time a friend opens a conversation with "What do you think I should do?", you have been given the opportunity to teach and advise. We then often find ourselves filling the conversation with answers that contain our opinions rather than the wisdom of God. One reason for this is a lack of the word of God consistently dwelling in our hearts. Reading God's word is important, but allowing that word to remain inside our minds to shape the way we live is essential. Paul knew that unless the church was intentional to have the word of God indwelling their advice to one another, they'd end up exhausted trying to muster up their own wisdom. When the truths of the Bible indwell our hearts, God's wisdom spills out our mouths as we understand our own inadequacy to give wisdom.

Second, choosing to dwell on God's word results in songs and praises to our Father. Consider this quote from Warren W. Wiersbe:

There is (according to Paul) a definite relationship between our knowledge of the Bible and our expression of worship in song. One way we teach and encourage ourselves and others is through the singing of the Word of God. But if we do not know the Bible and understand it, we cannot honestly sing it from our hearts.

What a truth! When we come together in singing, our worship should have preceded the service as we've spent time dwelling on the truths of God's word by ourselves. We must be careful not to show up to church hoping that the music will prepare our hearts to learn something from the scriptures. Our songs of praise should have a focus of giving our God glory for who He is and what He's doing. We can't fully understand who we are praising without time spent dwelling on His word prior to the service.

As the end of our passage states, these two principles should be lived out with a thankfulness in our hearts toward God. What a wondrous gift to have the wisdom of God written and available to us. Let His word dwell in your heart and impact your actions today.

*Prayer Prompts (page 3)

Rachel
Youth & College Ministry



JOURNAL

Day 17:::January 23, 2019

*Whoever keeps His commandments abides in God,
and God in him. And by this we know that He abides in us,
by the Spirit whom He has given us.*

—1 John 3:24 (ESV)

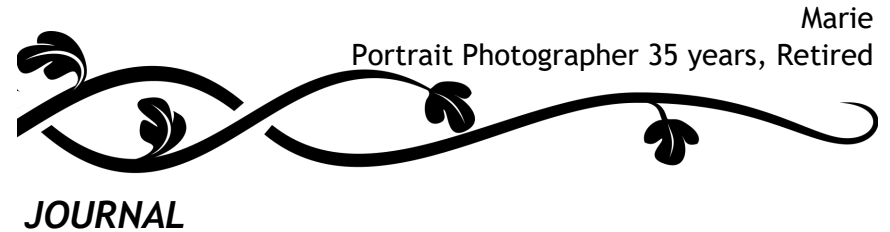
As you read the above verse again do you see the verbs “keeps” and “abides?” They are in present tense, written many years ago for God’s people. We talk about social media being in “real time,” as it happens, or right now. Do we immerse, abide and involve ourselves deeply in the Word of God? God is the same yesterday, today and forever. His Word is in present tense for us today. God wants us to obey and remain in fellowship with Him daily. Our assurance of this promise is revealed by the Holy Spirit He gave us.

Our love and belief in Jesus Christ brings to us an assurance of our standing with God. By keeping God’s commands and demonstrating the love of Christ to our fellow Christians we can be confident that we rest in the presence of God. Jesus writes in John 14:23, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we (God and Jesus) will come to him and make our home with him.” Finding our home in God brings us the peace that passes all understanding and the Holy Spirit living in us confirms this.

Home in God—home is where we go to fill-up our hearts with the endless love and knowledge of Christ’s sacrifice. Home is where we re-charge with the fuel of hope and forgiveness. At home in God is so comforting, like being wrapped in a snuggly warm blanket, nourished and cherished by a loving Father even when things are upside down. Sometimes I need to mentally climb into God’s lap, as He wraps His arms around me, gently rocks me and whispers, “I’m here, it will be okay.” Communing with fellow saints gives you opportunity to share how being at home in God looks and works for you.

One small act of love today can change your whole day and someone else.

*Prayer Prompts (page 3)



Day 18:::January 24, 2019

*If you keep my commands, you will live in my love,
just as I have kept my Father's commands,
for I continually live nourished and empowered by his love.*
—John 15:10 (TPT)

Keeping His commands is not just keeping the rules, it is about *building a relationship with the Father*. His love is where we gain strength to resist the temptations that the enemy throws at us each day.

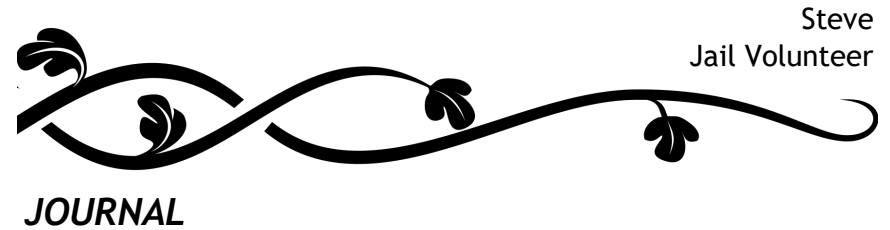
A group from First Sebring goes into the Highlands County Jail every Friday to present Alpha. It is a faith based series that helps to turn around the lives of those who have fallen into the traps of the world. What a joy it is to see men and women come to Christ and build their faith. We see tears of joy, repentance, faith building and a commitment to live a Christ-centered life. Each week we emphasize the importance of feeding their new found faith.

Then, upon release, we offer to pick them up for church so they can continue to have their lives nourished and empowered. John 15:9b says, “You must continually let my love nourish your hearts.”

Some will come for a couple of weeks and others never come. The result in so many cases will be returning to jail or worse, heading for prison.

When you stop to think about it, our lives are not much different. There is a constant pull on us to slip back into old bandage to which we were never meant to return. This real life story I share with you today speaks to the continued importance for all of us to abide in Christ. By growing in our relationship with Him through His word and daily prayer, we will not easily be entangled by the yoke of bondage (Galatians 5:1).

*Prayer Points (page 3)



Steve
Jail Volunteer

JOURNAL

Day 19:::January 25, 2019

Anyone who wanders away and does not remain faithful to the teaching of Christ has no relationship with God.

But those who remain in the teaching of Christ have a wonderful relationship with both the Father and the Son.

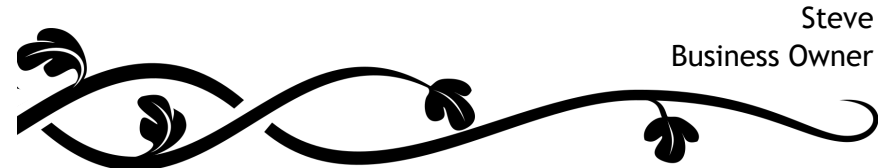
—2 John 1:9 (TPT)

With today's social media platforms, we have many "friends" or "followers" but few close relationships. How is it possible that, with so many "followers," loneliness is rated among the most common social problems? We mostly post the good things going on in our lives but keep secret our troubles, shame and disappointments. To be able to share intimacy, we need to spend personal quality time to really know someone's heart and what's really happening in their life. Without intimacy, we begin to drift away, only "liking" on birthdays or anniversaries. Hearing later that someone passed away, divorced, or lost a child, we regret that we weren't there to comfort them or hold their hand.

It's like that with God. The teachings of Jesus were to show us the Father. Jesus knew the Father intimately and He wants us to know Him, too. He wants us to know how much Father loves us. He wants us to know that Father hears our prayers. He wants us to know that Father wants to spend time with us. He wants us to know that we can bring Father our disappointments and pain. He wants us to know that Father wants to dream with us and reveal things to us. He wants us to know that Father does not withhold good things from His children. He wants us to know that Father wants us to prosper and be in good health as our soul prospers. The only way that we can maintain a relationship with Father is to spend quality, intimate time with Him in His Word and in prayer. Whenever God speaks, it's always incredible! His words release such life and power. Just think about it: the Creator of the universe is longing to reveal secrets to you. You are invited.

If you have "unfollowed" Him or only give Him a "like" on His birthday, He is waiting for you to crawl up in His lap, lean back, catch up, and listen to His heartbeat.

*Prayer Points (page 3)



Steve
Business Owner

JOURNAL

Day 20:::January 26, 2019

Hebrews 4:14-16

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

—Hebrews 4:14-16 (NIV)

What is the Spirit trying to tell us in these verses? At first, I thought this would be easy to explain, but I was wrong! Before I was finished, I found myself in at least nine other books of the Bible and some commentaries.

In verse 14, the writer is alluding to the fact that after Jesus' death and resurrection, He ascended to heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. Because His sacrifice is all sufficient, He is able to make intercession for us and "save us to the uttermost." Therefore, we should hold on tightly to our faith and never lose hope.

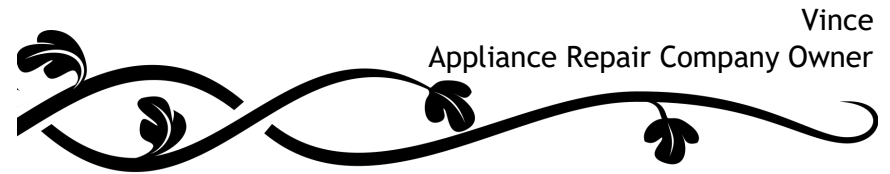
Verse 15 makes it clear that Jesus KNOWS what it's like to be one of us. He was a man and experienced human weakness. He also experienced temptation at a level none of us ever will. He took the full force of the devil's power, but He did not sin. Jesus has "walked a mile in our shoes".

Finally, we come to the point. For those who believe on Jesus' name, the throne of God is no longer a place of judgment, but a place where we can receive grace and mercy. As sons and daughters, we can now freely enter into the very presence of God to seek His help and forgiveness.

I would have never learned all this from a simple reading of Hebrews 4:14-16. My point is this: if you really want to understand

what God is trying to teach you in His word, you have to spend time reading and studying it. Time spent daily in God's word is essential for us all, and there is no substitute for it. We must abide in the Word.

*Prayer Prompts (page 3)



Vince
Appliance Repair Company Owner

JOURNAL

Day 21:::January 27, 2019

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

—1 Thessalonians 2:13 (NASB)

It is an amazing thing that the God of the universe speaks to us mortals. He makes Himself known to us through His word. He teaches us how to live. He tells us of His Son who paid for our sin so that we could be forgiven and live with Him through all eternity. He has delivered us from the penalty of sin, the power of sin, and some day He will deliver us from the presence of sin. The Bible is full of rich promises, blessings, and Christ Himself.

Since God speaks to us, we need to hear what He says. We can do that by reading His word. But knowing what He says is not enough. We need to do what He tells us to do. There is a legend that speaks of Jesus returning home after His work on earth is done. Angels asked, “Is it finished?” When Jesus replied, “yes”, they asked, “who will make it known?” Jesus replied that His disciples would. “What if they fail?” they asked. Jesus said, “There is no other plan.”

Lord, “make me a match that can kindle a fire.”

—Corrie Ten Boom

*Prayer Prompts (page 3)

Jenny
Retired Counselor



JOURNAL