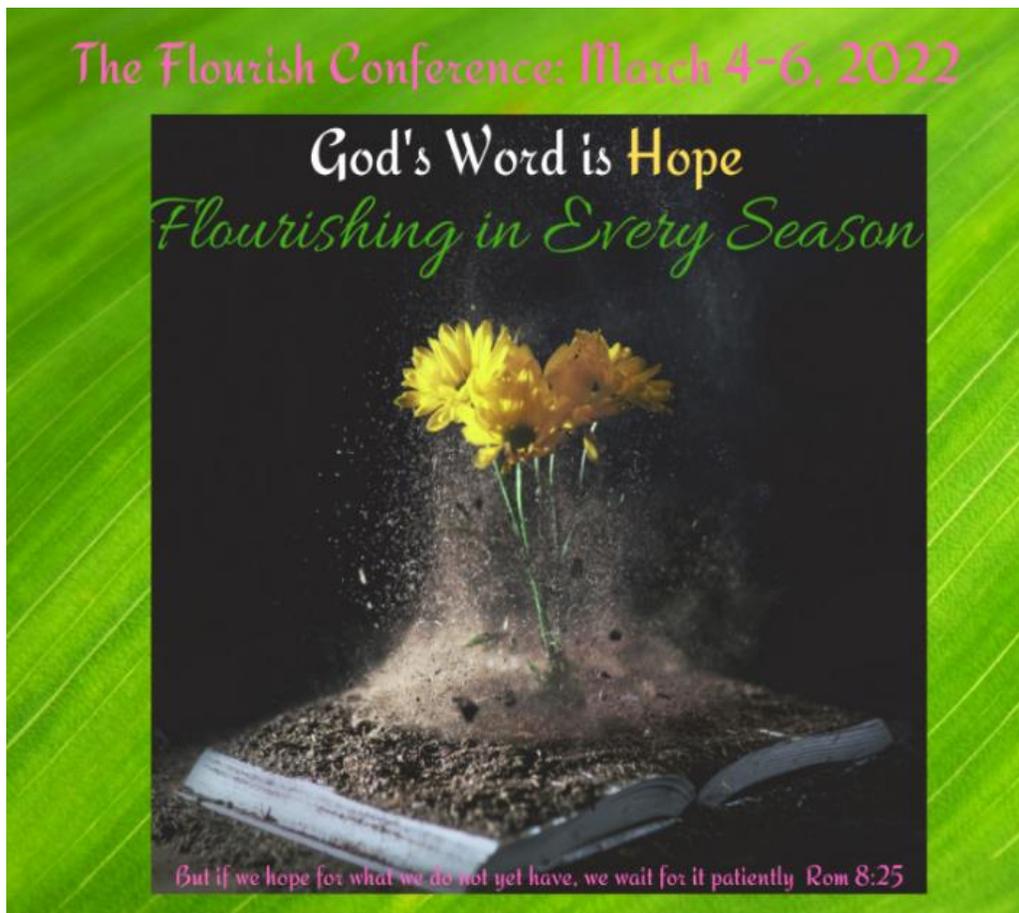




30-Day Devotional Guide

Compiled by the 2020/2021

Flourish Conference Committee



Mark your calendar for 2022!

INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the Flourish Committee, we welcome you! We're elated that you would spend a portion of your day with us!

As many of you already know, the reason this 30-Day *FLOURISH* Devotional came into existence was due to the notorious COVID-19. In 2020, our world experienced the sweeping ramifications of a simultaneously deadly and mild virus. While our Women's Ministries of the CGGC (Churches of God, General Conference) Denomination was fortunate to have held our annual Flourish Conference in-person for the 2020 year, we were disappointed to announce the decision to postpone our scheduled 2021 Conference until the following year.

Despite this past year, God is still present with us, still loving His children, and still moving and working in the hearts & lives of people all over the globe. And He continued to speak to our Flourish Committee. As we prayed over this decision to postpone, we asked Him, "How can we still shine His light of hope and joy? Surely our great God is not limited by, much less surprised by, the events of the world in 2020 or any other year for that matter. Use us."

From those times of pouring out our hearts came the answer—create a Devotional for our ladies and anyone else who needs courage from the Lord. We've prayed over this labor of love and continue to pray for you, dear friends; many by name while others are prayed for by the Holy Spirit within us. Once you've completed these devotions, would you consider passing on the packet and/or sharing it with others on your social media sites? For our God is indeed a God of HOPE! Below are a few verses from the eighth chapter in the book of Hebrews. I encourage you to read the entire chapter to capture the depth and width of God's rich words of hope.

24For in this hope we were saved; but hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he can already see? **25**But if we hope for what we do not yet see, we wait for it patiently.

28And we know that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose.

31What then shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

37No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. **38**For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, **39**neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Blessings!

Lynn Kaufman, Director of The Flourish Conference

The Flourish Committee:

Nancy Scott, Jamie Welsh, Kathy Foor, Jenn Rodriguez,
Amy Wilt, Kelly DeVincent, Molly Weaver, Kathy Odegard

P.S. We can't wait to gather together once again in Findlay, OH for this annual women's weekend sponsored by the CGGC Women's Ministries!

Leaders of Excellence

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.”

~Ephesians 5:1 (NAS)~

Do you consider yourself a leader? Most people don't. And yet, when asked if they view us as a leader, family members or friends quickly answer with an enthusiastic “Yes!” How is it possible to have these two opposing viewpoints?

Crack open any dictionary, and you'll find similar definitions to this, “One who leads or guides. One who is in charge or command of others.” Examples of a leader might include a policeman, a teacher, or a manager. Yet, being a leader does not require that you have a title. Many leaders influence others without a title in front of their name. Surprisingly, some leaders don't officially supervise anyone, and yet, they have tremendous influence. I find that synonyms for words can provide us with a fuller comprehension of that word. In this instance, “to influence” also refers to having leverage, making an impact, or inspiring.

So how does this help us in determining what a leader is? We usually focus on who's following us. But being a leader might even be more about who we are following—who we are modeling ourselves after—than who follows us. While this is contrary to the current social media culture's way of life, it rings true for those who follow Jesus Christ.

A Definition of Biblical Leadership

I recently discovered Mike Ayer's book, *Power to Lead: Five Essentials for the Practice of Biblical Leadership*. The following is an excerpt from it and concisely captures the heart of a biblical leader:

“Biblical leadership is distinctly different from that described and defined by the world. The distinctions above help Christian leaders understand the unique way the Bible describes one person's influence upon another, the motivation behind that influence, the eventual outcome of that influence, and the source of power to guide and sustain that influence. This is biblical leadership!”

Mike describes a biblical leader as a person of **character** and **competence** who influences a **community** of people to achieve a God-honoring **calling** through the power of **Christ**. At the heart of leadership are two core foundational ingredients: **character** and **competency**. Character refers to our integrity, motive, and intent=trustworthiness. Competence refers to our capabilities, skills, and knowledge=respect.

Ideally, both are essential in leaders. But, if I ever have to choose between the two, I'd vote for character over competency. Why? Because the skills needed for competency can be taught and studied. But character is the heart of who we are deep in our core. It's the values and ethics we live by in public and in private when no one else can see but our Heavenly Father.

How do you think God views your character these days? Maybe you need a tune-up or perhaps a complete overhaul. In whatever condition you find your character, daily return to the One who created you and let Him restore your heart.

By being more concerned about who YOU are following and modeling your life after, you'll discover you have a life worth emulating. And, it will be for the *right* reasons—to point them to the One who can rescue, restore, and renew their hearts and help them become one of His beloved children, people of character as well as competency.

Author: Lynn Kaufman

A Woman's Life - A Balancing Act

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

~Philippians 4:6-7 (NKJV)~

Have you ever felt like you are struggling to keep your head above water? As a mother of 6 active kiddos and wife to a pastor, I can relate to that statement more than I'd like to admit. The constant: laundry, dishes, messes, chauffeuring children to and from sports, homeschooling, and church duties some days have me just trying to survive. OK, let's be honest, *most days*, I'm just trying to survive. We all are in different seasons of life, but I know that we can all relate to the feeling of being stressed, overwhelmed, and unbalanced.

The Bible gives us hope by telling us that we can lay all of these stresses, worries, and burdens at the feet of Jesus because He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). I don't know about you, but that has to be one of the best feelings—knowing that I can lay it all at the feet of Jesus because He cares for me. He cares about lil ol' me...mind blown! And He cares about you!

So how do I go about releasing these burdens to Jesus, you might be asking? That is a great question. The Bible tells us exactly how to attain freedom from our burdens. It says to let your request be known to God by prayer and supplication, and in doing so, God will give you peace, a peace that passes all understanding. What a relief it is that we don't have to fret over these burdens anymore, and we can go on praising Jesus for our answered prayers.

Lord, help us to lay down whatever worries, stresses, or burdens we may have. Help us to leave those burdens there and not try to pick them back up. Jesus, we thank you for your peace, the peace that you have everything under control so we don't need to worry about it, and we praise you for answered prayer.

Thoughts to meditate on:

1. What burdens have I been carrying around that I need to lay at the feet of Jesus?
2. Have I resisted the urge to pick them back up and carry them again?

Author: Kathy Odegard



Round-Up for God's Glory

"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"

~Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV)~

I lived in Montana for about 10 years in my 20s and early 30s. Every fall, the ranchers would go out on either their ATVs or on horseback—which I always thought was the coolest way—and round up their cattle for winter. We are talking about thousands of acres of land they would need to cover to make sure they gathered all their livestock. Winters in Montana are brutal with bitter cold (-40 and -50) and snow. Cattle can't survive on their own all winter long. Snow would soon cover their food, and their water sources would be frozen solid. The rancher had to move them to where he could tend to them and make sure they had what they needed. There is no way that the rancher can do this by himself, so he would employ family, friends, and hired hands to help him get the job done. Each helper had a specific job to do to safely move the cattle to where the rancher can take care of them.

I can't help but compare that to the life of the church. We, as Christians, are called to go out into all the world and make disciples, teaching them to follow Christ. Essentially, we need to go "round-up" people and bring them to Christ, where they can be fed and watered. Jesus was talking about this when he gave the great commission in Matthew Chapter 28. Every Christian needs to do their part in bringing people to Christ, but this is something we can't do alone; we need others to help us, just like the rancher needs others to help move his cattle. We need a group of like-minded people with everyone doing what they have been called to do to build the Kingdom of God. We need to be outwardly focused, and so do our churches.

Lord, give us a heart to round up the lost. Help us to see who we can show the love of Christ to and give us the courage to share you with them. I pray that you give them a softened heart and open ears to hear what you want them to hear.

Thoughts to meditate on:

1. Am I doing my part to "round -up" people for Christ?
2. How can I use my calling or my talents to help my church "round-up" others for Christ?

Author: Kathy Odegard



Secrets of the Victorious Christian Woman

“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”

~Romans 8:37 (NIV)~

We are told that no one can be against us when God is on our side. Paul says that we are “more than conquerors” because of God’s love for us. The word used there in the original Greek means to more than triumph over something. Not only that, it is a rare intensive verb form to show even more emphasis. The English language just does not do justice to how much we triumph over our troubles through God’s love and power in our lives.

This thought of being “more than” alludes to Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross. Our words and imaginations do not do this justice. Because God’s love and power are so amazing, we overcome so much we do not even realize, let alone understand.

Being a victorious Christian woman is an amazing part of who we are as women. God’s moving mountains and molehills for us; nothing coming against us could ever stand. God is a powerful presence, and His love is engulfing our essence, our spirit, our body—and we are guarded, held close, and reinforced in everything we do. Fear not, dear Sister in Christ; He holds us firmly and gently in His hands and helps us be victorious over all our obstacles.

We can celebrate the security and hope we have in Christ because of what God has done for us and because of the complete certainty of His love for us. What are you doing in your life to celebrate that and live it out every day?

Author: Molly Weaver, Flourish Intern, Winebrenner Theological Seminary



Bon Voyage

*“The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strength to your bone; and you will be like a watered garden,
And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.”*

~Isaiah 58:11 (NIV)~

Single, married, or widow—no matter your season of life—you are on a journey with God. Our scripture today promises that the Lord as your Captain will continually guide you in the way you should go and teach you all things through the Holy Spirit. God will guide you in All things, in All ways, through All places, and throughout All circumstances of life.

Let's begin each day as if we are heading on a great adventure. Bon Voyage is used to express good wishes to someone about to go on a journey. With God as our captain, each day is a journey. Let us daily ask God to help us as we love Him, love people, and do something about it.

Let this be our prayer. *God, please help me to go where you want me to go, do what you want me to do, and be who you want me to be as I try to please you on this day of my journey.*

Bon Voyage. Payers and blessings to you!

Author: Sharon Ulrich



Growing in God's Garden

“If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for God’s temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.”

~1 Corinthians 3:17 (NIV) ~

Quarreling and jealousy are damaging to God’s holy temple, which is the body of believers. Those who try to stand against God will not stand—He will take them down. “You together are that temple.” Sisters-in-Christ, we are part of the temple—the body of believers, the one Church.

Paul tells us in Corinthians that we are all members of one body, and that body is made up of many parts. Every single part is important; not one part is unimportant. Just as we are all important, we all need to work together because a body cannot function if its parts are not in unison. We know how hard it is to walk after we stub our toe on something. It is the same in the spiritual body of Christ. If one part is hurt in any way, it does not function well.

While we are all human and have feelings that can be hurt and grudges held, we must recognize those feelings and attitudes, and work to not hold an account of the wrongs. When we accepted Christ, our lives were wiped clean. He holds no record of the wrongs we do, so why do we? We should not be doing this. We should be loving, caring, and working together to uplift each other for God’s glory.

The partisanship that comes from quarreling and jealousy can only be damaging and unworthy of something holy. As part of the body of Christ, we are called to work together. How can we bring harmony and appreciation into the tension that can take over? How can a small ripple affect the larger body of Christ?

Author: Molly Weaver, Flourish Intern, Winebrenner Theological Seminary



We are Sisters

"A friend loves at all times and a brother is born for a time of adversity."

~Proverbs 17:17(NIV)~

In the Old Testament, we see an emphasis on family and friendships. In the New Testament, we see that connection is even deeper—we are part of the same body. Our faith makes us sisters of Christ, heirs to the Kingdom of God.

Having a couple of close friends is so important, but having some who are sisters, family—those relationships will get you through times of adversity. Having a few close friends or sisters is important. It is easier to build those few close relationships than to have several surface acquaintance friendships.

We see this type of friendship with David and Jonathan. They were best friends, brothers even, although Jonathan's father, King Saul, tried to murder David. Their friendship was stronger and deeper than a death threat. That is the type of relationship we are talking about, one that the bond is stronger than anything, one that can withstand any test that arises.

Thoughts to meditate on:

1. Who are your sisters? Who are your acquaintances?
2. What relationships are healthy, beneficial, and life-giving?
3. Do you have any that are not meeting this view of friendship and sisterhood?
4. What can you do to have a couple of close friendships with sisters-in-Christ who can stand with you in adversity, and love always?

Author: Molly Weaver, Flourish Intern, Winebrenner Theological Seminary



Symphony of Joy

“Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.”

~1 Peter 1:8 (NIV)~

Joy can be found everywhere. We can trace the source of our joy to our relationship with Christ. In times of doubt and concern, we can always find joy if we look for it. I am not talking about being a “Pollyanna” who never acknowledges the trials of life and sees the good and the joy in everything.

“Pollyanna” is the name of the main character in a movie of the same (1960, starring Hayley Mills) and is based on a 1931 novel by Eleanor H. Porter. Pollyanna, a very pragmatic young lady, believes life’s most difficult problems can be overcome with a positive attitude. Ultimately, this outlook focuses on the positive and does not consider the difficulty that one faces. I support the idea that we can find something that is positive, regardless of the situation. Yes, there are situations where it will be extremely difficult to find a positive, but there are glimpses of God and His providence in everything.

We are still seeing the effects of COVID-19. While our lives may have stopped and 2020 may have been chaos, there were many positive aspects. We learned more about our families, new ways to care for our neighbors, and new ways to worship our Lord. In looking at this past year, for me, finding joy and living in the joy of Christ made the shutdown bearable. What was something good that happened each day, weekly, or even moment-by-moment? Many times, finding the joy, the positive, even something that is slightly better than “tolerable” is all that is needed. We see moments captured that are funny—taking a picture and catching someone in a sneeze or blinking—and it makes the image silly enough for that moment to turn something hard into something a little easier to handle. A well-timed joke or a penny on the ground can be God giving a little joy in our lives when we need it the most, a “silver lining” in the darkness.

Thoughts to meditate on:

1. Do you look for the joy in the hard times and the chaos?
2. Where do you find joy?
3. Where is Jesus in that joy?
4. How are you living in a symphony of joy?

Molly Weaver, Flourish Intern, Winebrenner Theological Seminary



Ewe-niquely Ewe in Jesus

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”

~John 10:27 (NIV)~

Many times, the Bible compares us to sheep. You might not think this is very flattering since sheep are known to be pretty foolish, fairly helpless, and can get pretty smelly—but at least they are kind of cute and fluffy. In this scripture passage, as Jesus is interacting with Jewish religious leaders, he lays out a good test to know if you are one of his sheep:

His sheep listen to his voice.

Sheep recognize the voice of their shepherd, listening intently for it among the noise. Sheep also know when they hear a voice that is not their shepherd’s voice—and they run away from it!

He knows his sheep.

A shepherd knows his sheep. He knows they belong to him. Our Shepherd knows us even better than we know ourselves.

His sheep follow him.

Shepherds lead their sheep; they don’t drive them. Shepherds go on ahead and show the way, and because the sheep know who their shepherd is, the sheep respond to this relationship by being willing to follow their shepherd.

Living “ewe-niquely ewe” in Jesus means knowing both who you are and whose you are. Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” God has “eweniquely” created each of his sheep and has ordained “ewenique” things for each sheep to accomplish.

Trust the Shepherd, and obey his leading. Rest in the truth that He knows you, and you belong to Him.

Lord, help me to hear and follow Your voice. I praise You for knowing me and creating me.

Thoughts to meditate on:

1. Examine your life for any voices that are not from your Shepherd- and run away!
2. What do you need to surrender to be able to trust the Shepherd’s voice and be willing to go where He leads?

Author: Amy Wilt



It's a Party

*"And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.
For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is
found.' And they began to celebrate."*

~Luke 15:23-24 (ESV)~

Many simply refer to it as the "Prodigal Son"—the story of a Father's youngest son that demands his share of his father's inheritance *now*. He receives it and turns his back on his father and his family. This son had everything—a loving father, a good family, a nice home, riches, and an even wealthier future inheritance—but he turned his back on all of it to satisfy his selfish, earthly pleasures now. He quickly uses it all up and decides to return home, figuring he'll beg to be hired as a servant. Instead, his father welcomes him home and throws a party in his honor, much to the chagrin of the oldest son.

That is one of three similar parables found in the fifteenth chapter of Luke. All three tell the tale of something that's been lost and then found, of a sinner who repents and turns back to God. Make no mistake about it—in each instance, the heavens indeed "PARTY!" and rejoice greatly for every convicted sinner that repents and returns home.

Which son do you resonate with—the youngest or the oldest son? Did you ever consider that both sons are prodigals? We often see this more easily in the younger son, but the oldest son was as well because he believed that by staying home and working, he had earned his inheritance (eternity in heaven).

Both were wrong about how to obtain their father's favor. Are we also confused? Do you see that each of us are also prodigal sons? Do we assume we deserve God's grace and a place at His feet forever? Have we thought ourselves to be more deserving, to be egotistical and arrogant? "Search my heart, oh God, and know my heart..." (Psalms 139:23)

Come home to your forever Father. Let His Word wash you clean every day so that you not only have the knowledge of God, but you have a relationship with Him and are known by Him.

Author: Lynn Kaufman



Need a Faith Lift?

In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

~Ephesians 3:12 (NIV)~

We've had a pretty tough year! How is your faith holding up? Here's a good test. Are you worried and anxious about all that is going on, or are you at peace, trusting that God will work things out? You see, when we worry, we are not trusting God. Trusting God is a reflection of our faith. Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. (Hebrews 11:1) Faith comes from hearing the Word of Christ. (Romans 10:17) Even a little faith can move mountains! (Matthew 17:20)

Does your faith need some bolstering up these days? Draw near to God (Hebrews 4:16) and spend time in His presence, allowing His Word to remind you how faithful He is. We can choose to believe His Word because He who promised is faithful and what He says, He will do. (Hebrews 10:23). Ask the Lord to strengthen you and to open your eyes to see Him at work in your situation. Let your confidence be in Him, not in your faith, but may your faith grow as you see the faithfulness of God. There is no one on earth we can trust more completely than our great God!

Author: Kathy Foor



Hope for the Heart

And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

~Romans 5:5 (NIV)~

I think we can all use a bit of hope right now. Hope for a brighter tomorrow. I can't think of a scripture that brings more hope to me than Lamentations 3:21-23, which says, "Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: The faithful love of the Lord never ends; His mercies never cease. Great is His faithfulness; His mercies begin afresh each morning." How wondrous is it to think that God loves us with an unending and unconditional love?

God can give us the peace that we desperately need to continue to hope and dream. Things that look hopeless He can turn around so that we can look back on them and wonder why we ever worried about it in the first place. So, when you find yourself in need of hope, I encourage you to reach out to God in prayer. He will give you the strength that you need to get through any obstacle.

I encourage you to reach out to a friend who may also need a little hope. We are better together and can build each other up. Just like He has placed others in your life to give you strength and hope, He has also strategically placed you into the lives of others so that you can bring them the same hope.

And hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. (Romans 5:5)

Author: Jennifer Rodriguez



Friends Forever

No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

~John 15:15 (ESV)~

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

~Proverbs 17:17 (ESV)~

Have you ever had those days where you do not want to be around anyone? You have had a long day, you're tired, and all you want to do is kick off your shoes and relax. Then as you sink into your chair, the phone rings, or a text comes through. It's your friend, and she needs you.

All of a sudden, you turn into the worst friend. You start to think about all of the things that you can do to get you out of helping her. You just got in the shower, or your kid is sick, or better yet, I'll say I didn't see her text. However, you know none of this is true. You get up, put your shoes back on, and let her know you are on your way.

God has called all of his children to be a friend to others. He has called us to love even when things get tough. He challenges us to sacrifice our comfort for the sake of His Kingdom and his children. A true friend is there for you no matter the circumstances. Challenge yourself to be there for others so they can see the love of Christ through you.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends."

Thoughts to meditate on:

1. Is Jesus calling you to be a better friend?
2. Can you relate to not wanting to help your friends in moments when you are tired?

Author: Jamie Welsh



Come to the Light

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

~John 8:12 (ESV)~

That moment caught my attention because I can think of countless times in my life where fear and doubt began to creep into my mind. I have experienced those times as an adult while witnessing the gospel, feeding the homeless in downtown Stockton, or even in the little things like taking on a major assignment at work. Although those times seemed dark or dim as I allowed my mind to make up a story of what "might happen" in those situations, the light has always shown through with triumph. My son's traumatic experience was one where he overcame his fear and showed bravery, a lesson he has not forgotten. Sometimes we find ourselves in random places or on adventures that we didn't plan. Those adventures may seem scary while darkness attempts to creep in. However, when we persevere and demonstrate childlike faith toward the Lord, His light shines brighter and brighter while fear and doubt become dim. Sometimes we need to grip the Lord's hand tighter.

I can vividly remember when my husband Tim, my son Nathaniel and I went on a road trip to Apple Hill in Placerville, CA. We always tend to stop in some random location that we never intended on that day. While we were on our way, I watched for our turn on the GPS and spotted this little tourist attraction called the "Gold Bug Park and Mine." I saw that this place was kid-friendly, so we stopped and took our chances on this tourist attraction. Much to our surprise, it was a fun spot for little ones to play, gem mine, and pan for gold. Nathaniel was having a blast running around and picking up rocks and throwing them into the stream. Tim noticed the park had a mine that you could walk through, so we decided to venture in and check it out. Sweet little Nathaniel, who was three at the time, was so excited as we entered and was curious about what he would see. As we ventured further and further in, the light to the outside became dimmer and dimmer. Nathaniel's look of curiosity quickly turned into worry and fear. He began to scream and asked to leave the cave immediately. He could not see anything and explained that the cave made him feel scared. I remember that my husband knelt next to him and told him he had nothing to fear. He assured Nathaniel that Jesus would protect him and guide him even though the cave seemed dark and dim. Nathaniel raised his brow, wiped his tears, and begrudgingly continued into the cave. As I walked with Nathaniel, he began to grip my hand tighter and tighter, but he never asked again to leave. As we made our way out, Nathaniel let out a sigh of relief and exclaimed in triumph, "I made it through with the help of the Lord!"

Thoughts to meditate on:

1. What moments in your life can you recount where darkness crept in?
2. What is your cave where you need to exhibit childlike faith?

Author: Jamie Welsh



Spa for the Soul

But let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands.

~I Peter 3:4-5 (ESV)~

Who doesn't love a spa day? I know that I do. I am the woman that lives for a spa day. I often will make my appointments, coerce my friends to tag along, and plan all the little details. What massage should I order? Should I get my nails done? What should I have for lunch? I dig into all the details to make this the best day for my comfort. Well, if you are like me and you thrive on a good spa day, COVID-19 has not been your friend. I often find myself saying on repeat: "I just need a massage." I have looked for every black market (reputable) massage therapist, hairstylist, manicurist, etc., to tend to my every need during this pandemic. I have gone to great lengths these last nine months to find a way to obtain the relaxation that I crave.

While preparing to write this devotional and praying through these scriptures, I found myself convicted by this message. My longing for a Spa day is something that I have obsessively thought about as a way to rejuvenate my soul. My lack of being pampered and my constant complaining of how tired I am has brought me to the realization that I am a little spoiled. My job has become much more demanding of my time since the beginning of the pandemic. I am finding myself scraping and clawing for as much time as I can with my kids, time with my husband, really just time. So, I sat and contemplated how much time I have been seeking a Spa day with the Lord. In all transparency, not as much as I should be. I am often opting for naps rather than having a Spa date with the Lord. I know that women all too well know what it's like to juggle a full-time job, kids/family, homeschooling our children, etc. I am by no means saying that being tired is not a characteristic that we women share from time to time and that a Spa day is not in order once in a while! I am saying that we must be careful not to depend on luxuries to fulfill our spirits. A Spa day will relax your mind for a day, while a spa day every day with the Lord will replenish your soul for eternity.

Thoughts to meditate on:

1. What is your spa day?
2. What do you fill your time with that doesn't feed your soul?
3. What is God calling you to pursue to rejuvenate your spirit?
4. How is God calling you to be a Holy woman like in this scripture?

Author: Jamie Welsh



A Royal Retreat: Daughters of the King

And, "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

~2 Corinthians 6:18 (NIV)~

Everyone loves a good Cinderella story, right? Who wouldn't want to fall in love with a prince, get married to him, and become a princess? One look at our fairytales is evidence of this! As I am reflecting on this verse this morning, I am reminded of a little talk I gave many years ago to a group of ladies from my church about the different hats we women wear. I surprised them when I pulled a tiara from my little bag of props that I had brought! I then proceeded to tell them about the impact of understanding that you are a daughter of the King of Kings.

That makes you a princess, girlfriend! Oh, if we could grasp the importance of understanding that we are of royal blood because of the blood of Jesus who has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of Light.

If we are Kingdom people—and we are—then we are princes and princesses! Spend time today meditating (thinking deeply about) on what would change in your life if you understood this truth more fully. A member of the royal family is privileged with all the benefits of the Kingdom. A member of the royal family speaks with the authority of a ruler. A member of the royal family is confident with the full backing of the King. A member of the royal family also has many responsibilities—caring for matters of the Kingdom, carrying out the decrees of the King, and learning to rule in the realm. I think it is harder for us to grasp our role as princesses in the Kingdom of Light because we don't live in a monarchy.

Remember how difficult it was for Princess Diana to transition to the life of royalty. Perhaps her transition was hindered because of her acceptance into the royal family. In the natural world, even royals struggle with family dysfunction! This is not so in the Kingdom of God. When we are adopted into the Royal family, we are accepted and welcomed by the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! May we learn to live in the blessings and responsibilities of being Kingdom kids! It will change everything.

Author: Kathy Foor



A New You: Transformed by the Master

He said, "Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel.

~Jeremiah 18:6 (NIV)~

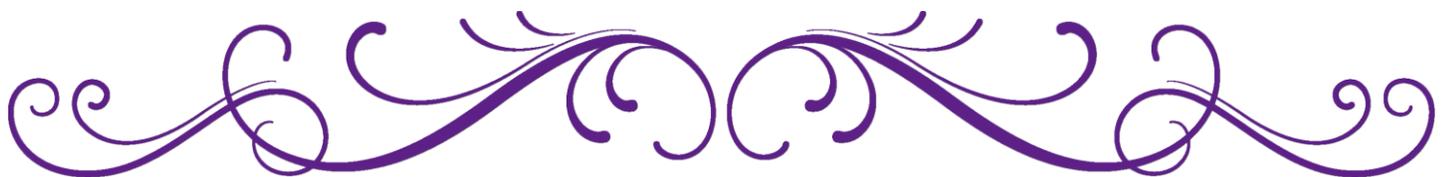
As women, we are often harder on ourselves than others are on us. I know that when I make mistakes in life, I often feel guilty. However, God doesn't want us to remain that way. He sent His son to die on the Cross so that all of our sins are forgiven. It's hard to believe how easily God gives us forgiveness when we are so unwilling to forgive ourselves. However, we must humble ourselves and ask His forgiveness and move forward learning from those mistakes.

Through His grace and love, He will transform our lives into something new. In fact, in Jeremiah 18:6, the Lord says, "Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does? Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel." Think about that for a moment. He can take all of our mistakes and use them for his glory, turning them into something wonderful.

When we repent of our sins and try to not repeat them, God can mold us into something that can help grow His kingdom and strengthen our relationship with Him at the same time. Don't let another day pass without asking Him for His forgiveness. There is nothing that you have done in your past that He won't forgive you for.

Dear God, I want to thank you for your forgiveness of my sins. Please help me to remember to share your good news with others. Amen.

Author: Jennifer Rodriguez



Growing Together

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

~John 15:5 (NKJV)~

I have a large, fire-red climbing rose bush on a trellis on my front porch that I absolutely adore. I had always wanted one, and when we moved here, I saw that trellis and knew I was going to get one. The first summer, I ordered one from one of the many seed catalogs we receive. I babied it to make sure the roots took. The first 3 years, I didn't prune it at all; I just couldn't bear the thought of cutting it back from this nice big bush full of branches that gave me beautiful red roses in early summer to a little, scrawny bush. After all, I helped it to get where it was.

We had an older gentleman in our church who was a master gardener, and his forte was growing roses. He grew some of the most beautiful roses around. He encouraged me to prune it, saying that it would make it full of roses the next time it bloomed. I remember standing by it with the pruning shears, afraid to make that first snip. I finally did, and when it bloomed, oh my goodness, it was the most beautiful climbing rose bush I had ever seen, full of big beautiful red roses.

In the first 8 verses of chapter 15 in the book of John, Jesus talks about the vinedresser or the pruner (which signifies God), the vine (which signifies Jesus), and the branches (which signify us as disciples of Christ). God will always initiate seasons of pruning in our lives. These are often initially unwelcome until we realize that God knows what He is doing. A wise response would be to allow God to come in and snip out the dead branches in our lives that keep us from being more Christ-like. Nobody likes the thought of being pruned. It can be a painful, embarrassing experience. I promise you, if you submit to God, allowing him to start working and snipping, you will blossom and bloom into a beautiful, God-fearing woman who is on fire for Christ—not unlike my fire-red rose bush that I was afraid to prune for fear of killing it. It produced more and better blooms after snipping out the dead areas, which only absorbed energy without producing flowers.

Christ wants the best for us. To have the best, we need to allow Him to work on, in, and through us.

Lord, we want to be used by you. We want to be more Christ-like, and we ask that if there are any areas in our lives that we need to allow you to snip out that you would do it, Lord. Show us these areas and help us to let go of them.

Thoughts to meditate on:

1. Are there areas in my life that I need to allow God to prune?
2. What can I do to remain united to Christ?

Author: Kathy Odegard



Espresso for the Soul

"...be filled with the Spirit."

~Ephesians 5:18 (NIV)~

Coffee—just hearing the word “coffee” probably evokes a distinct aroma in your mind. Most people either love it or hate it—there seems to be no opinion in between. Most people firmly land in one camp or the other—regarding both the taste and smell of these little brown beans. Personally, I really *want* to like coffee; Realistically, I think I just like creamers, flavored syrups, sweeteners, and especially whipped cream.

Some people rely on coffee each morning to make themselves feel alive. They are incapable of basic human functions and interactions until their morning caffeine buzz begins coursing through their veins. Once they get their first cup down, they can take on the world, or at least take on some menial tasks until their first break of the day.

Where does your power come from? What fuels you? Coffee might carry you through in the short term, but you’re going to need something a lot stronger to sustain you long-term. Relying on the power that comes from God’s Spirit indwelling you will revive you and energize you daily. Romans 8:11 says, “And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will also **bring your mortal bodies to life** through his Spirit who lives in you.”

If you’re going through life feeling unmotivated and unfulfilled, it may be time to examine if you are walking in step with the Spirit or if you are trying to make it through life on your own. When you walk daily with God, his Spirit guides you and empowers you. He provides you with the energy you need to fulfill the tasks he has called you to and ordained for you. Ask God today for the power of his Spirit—and he will fill your cup until it overflows.

Author: Amy Wilt



God's Design Her Genes

*"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful. I know that full well."*

~Psalm 139:14 (NIV)~

Do you ever stop to think about where you come from? There are plenty of apps and things that will show us our family history going back hundreds of years. However, what they don't show is that each one of us is actually royalty. We are children of the King.

So, what does it mean to be a child of the King? If we look at movies, the princess has been many things—some are good and some not so good. From most of the things I have seen, it's all about how they are perceived by the public. Let's talk about how we carry ourselves as Christians. Are you an example of His love no matter if you are out in the community or at home with your family? Remember, you may be the only Jesus that some people ever see.

If we look at our own lives, can we honestly say that we are living as royals? Are we acting in a way that shows God's love to everyone? The Bible says that one of the greatest commandments is to love one another as Christ loves us. So why then do we pick and choose which people we love? Doesn't God love us all?

Psalms 139:14 says, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful. I know that full well." If we know that all He makes is wonderful, why are we not sharing Him with everyone? My hope as you read this is that you will think of someone that you don't get along with and pray for them. Remember, God made you in His image. We need to let others see Him in us.

Lord, thank you for loving me no matter what. Please give me a love for others and show me how to love even those who are hard to love. Amen

Author: Jennifer Rodriguez



Unshackled: Grace-full

"We rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

~Romans 5:2b(ASV)~

When we are justified, we can (and should) boast in the hope of the glory of God. This is the encouragement we have when we face times of suffering. That suffering should not detract from our hope but rather strengthen it. The key is how we respond—with perseverance or by giving up?

The specific theme in this passage is hope, the hope of the glory of God (verse 2). The world cannot give us hope, but if we are followers of Christ, we do have hope. We have been made right with God because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ! We have hope because God was glorified through the death and resurrection of Jesus. This hope cannot put us to shame because God is on our side, and we are loved by Him.

As Christians, we can rest, knowing that there are better things to come. The promise of Heaven and living in God's glory carries us through. We can share, boast, and encourage others in this. We can share the Kingdom of Heaven with others. When we know that we are unshackled, we are not bound in hopelessness, but rather, we are full of grace, love, and hope. How freeing it is to be full of the things of God—treasures that we cannot obtain anywhere on Earth or from anyone other than our Savior and Lord!

Because we have hope in Jesus, we can rest in His grace, allowing us to be unshackled from the world's burdens. We have the hope of God, His grace, and that is all we need. What are you doing to live unshackled and grace-full?

Author: Molly Weaver, Flourish Intern, Winebrenner Theological Seminary



Rest, Renew, Revitalize

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.

~Matthew 11:28-30 (The Message)~

Rest has been part of God’s design from the very beginning. During creation, God worked each day and rested each night. Then on the seventh day, he fully rested. He set apart the Sabbath for holy rest. Jesus also took time away from the crowds for rest.

I have heard it said that the fourth commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” (Exodus 20:8), is the only commandment we brag about breaking. We wear “busy” like a badge of honor. The COVID-19 pandemic may have forced some of us to not be busy because our calendars were cleared for us. Did we know what to do with all the extra time? Did we decide to rest? On purpose rest? Real rest?

When this scripture promises us if we come to Jesus and get away with him, we will recover our life, I think it means that we won’t be encumbered by burdens that we aren’t meant to carry. Instead, we will carry only the yoke of work God has ordained for us to do. Jesus offers himself as the anecdote to weariness. Believing He can handle all of our problems, stresses, and concerns brings us true rest. And learning how to carry the right things—what we are created for, not the things that are ill-fitting on us—brings us a free and light life.

Get away. Be quiet. Enjoy God’s creation. Study God’s word. Take a nap. Grasp what the unforced rhythms of grace look like in your life. Lay down the burdens you aren’t meant to carry. Be intentional in keeping company with Jesus. And live free.

Author: Amy Wilt



Stretching Beyond

When they had gathered together they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He answered them, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has established by his own authority. But you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

~Acts 1:6-8 (NABRE)~

It was a humid, summer day and the sun was blazing hot already. I don't know why we waited until noon to climb the tallest brick lighthouse in the US, which boasts 210 feet. We had gone a couple of times before during some of our past summer vacation trips. But this time, our son was finally long-legged enough to charge up the 257 steps of the majestic Cape Hatteras Light House in Buxton, NC. Right about the half-way point, I was winded, and we felt like we were being cooked in an oven. My husband seemed to have more lung capacity and an urge to make it to the top, so he kept going. My son and I paused at a landing to gaze out the narrow window and pace ourselves the rest of the way. Round and round, we continued to climb. I was surprised he didn't complain and found my internal voice asking, "We're almost there, right? How many more steps? Why isn't there an elevator?" Finally, we emerged out a small door onto the balcony, feeling the wind whip through our hair to cool us down significantly. The sky was bright blue filled with puffy, white clouds, and the view of land and sea, combined with the huge smile on my son's face, was totally worth it.

In Acts 1, the disciples are trying to make sense of the past three years they spent with Jesus, and especially the events of the most significant week of His ministry, their ministry. They had seen Him perform miracles, heard him deliver challenging messages, and witnessed His death and return to life. The whole time, they were expecting Him to liberate them from Rome's control and empower them to take the primary place as the greatest nation in the world. Why wouldn't they ask Him, yet again, if it was finally time? They had to be feeling a mix of emotions: relief that they still had a chance, now that Jesus was with them again, anxiety over the pressure that remained for their people, and excitement with the knowledge that Jesus could make things happen right then and there. They thought they were ready and that Jesus was finally ready to do it for them. Interestingly, His reply is more of a "wait and see" response as part of His farewell address. He tells them that only the Father knows both the specific date (Greek word "chronos") and the season (Greek word "kairos") that God's Kingdom would be established. And, by His permission, power, and purposes, it would include both Jews and Gentiles. Before the disciples were completely deflated, Jesus promises them the power of the Holy Spirit. He would be their comforter, guide, source of confidence, and equipping to tell others about Christ's saving grace and eternal kingdom. This would change everything in their homes and neighborhoods, their cities, their country, and the world!

So, what are you waiting for? What are you anxious about? Where and when do you feel powerless? Is it for better finances, career opportunities, or a better house? Maybe you need healing for a physical or mental health issue? Are you dealing with a relational issue with your significant other or a child? Maybe, you already know where you're supposed to go but are not sure about the when? My friend, when you said, "Yes!" to Jesus, you too were given His Spirit. He intercedes for you, gives you comfort and courage, and helps you live an abundant life. God may be telling you to wait and see what He will do for you and the people around you—whether those in your immediate context or those you have yet to meet on any part of this great big earth. Instead of asking about His timing, ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with His power every day. In this way, your perspective will adjust, and others will see Him working through you. Hopefully, they too will become a part of the Kingdom of God, and it will have been totally worth it.

Author: Alison Buck



4D Love

So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

~Ephesians 3:17-18 (NIV)~

What a critical truth for us to grasp! For too long, I struggled to believe that God loves me. I could understand and accept that God loves the whole world, but I had such a hard time believing He loves me because I was so focused on all of my failures and faults. I didn't feel lovable at all, so I could not accept the love of Christ, much less anyone else. Praise God! He didn't leave me in that state. He first showed me that my brokenness kept me from experiencing His love. He helped me face the issues that kept me broken and taught me how to walk in His truth. He graciously poured out His love into my heart day by day until I could understand with my heart—not just my head—that He loves me. I could give up my habit of striving to earn His love yet never feeling good enough because His love melted away every doubt. It didn't happen overnight, but over time, as I spent more time with Him in His Word and in prayer. The more time I spent with Him, the more I began to accept His gracious love, and the more I began to grasp how high and wide and long and deep His love for me is, the more it transformed my life.

When you understand how great God's love for you is, you begin to live boldly for Him, holding nothing back. There is no need to hold back anything from a God who loves so deeply! And when we hold nothing back, we experience the fullness of God in Christ. There is no greater joy than this! If you feel unloved or unlovable, don't lose heart. The King of the universe loves *you*, and He is waiting to show you just how much. Don't settle for anything less! You **are** loved.

Author: Kathy Foor



Dream Big

“Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’”

~Matthew 19:26 (NIV)~

Every person dreams of what they want to be when they grow up. For some, their dreams are easy to attain; but for others, their dreams seem out of reach. However, Matthew 19:26 says, “Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” Think about what you dreamed about as a little girl. Did you achieve your dreams, or did God place a different dream in your heart as you grew up?

Some people know exactly what they want from the time they are little, and they achieve those dreams with ease. Others dream of one thing, and then something in their heart changes, and their life seems to go in another direction. Then others seem to struggle with their dreams. Why is that? I think it all has to do with faith. Do we trust God to give us the desires of our hearts?

Think about Psalms 37:4, which says, “Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.” As a child, I thought that meant that God would give me everything that I wanted when I wanted it. However, as I learn and grow, I see that God is changing my heart. Therefore, my desires are changing. It has become more about growing His Kingdom than my gathering and holding onto things.

So, keep on dreaming. Pray for God to help you to achieve the impossible. You will be surprised about how much hope there is when we dare to dream and reach for the stars.

Dear God, we thank You for the blessings you place in all of our lives. Please remind us that no matter what we dare to dream, that You are there with us to help us and cheer us on to success. Remind us that we need Your help each and every day. Amen

Author: Jennifer Rodriguez



Introducing: The Flourish Conference

Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan.

~Ephesians 1:11 (NLT)~

Isaiah tells the story about God's care and provision. Isaiah 5:1-7 is a song about God's vineyard. He chooses a piece of ground, builds a wall around it, and removes the briars and stones. He then plants a choice vine there and builds a wall of protection and a tower. In every way, God has chosen the exact right conditions for this vine to flourish.

Isaiah's point in this song is that God's people are meant to flourish. God has already "given us everything we need for a life of godliness," exactly as He did for the vineyard in Isaiah's song. Jesus later adapted this vineyard song in a parable against the Pharisees and scribes for rejecting the Messiah (see Mark 12, for example).

The point of each parable is that God has given us what we need to flourish, and He expects us to do it. Sin prevents us from flourishing. Sin is anti-flourishing; it is rottenness. And in the case of Isaiah's and Jesus' parable of the vineyard, there was no fruit. The barrenness came from the rejection of God's ways. Jesus came to give us abundant life. He does this by inviting us into a life with Him, to be lived in His perfect way.

Lord, you see through us into our very hearts. May it be pleasing in your sight. Help us to know your love and forgiveness. Deliver us from everything that hinders your life from spreading through every aspect of our lives. May you use us to build up your Kingdom!

Thoughts to meditate on:

1. Am I flourishing? If not why?
2. What do I need to allow God to work on in my life so I can live an abundant life with Christ?

Author: Kathy Odegard



Drink from the Well

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

~John 4:13-14 (NIV)~

May the Lord cause you to flourish, both you and your children. May you be blessed by the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. The highest heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth he has given to man. It is not the dead who praise the LORD, those who go down to the place of silence; it is we who extol the Lord, both now and forevermore. Praise the Lord.

~Psalm 115:14-18 (NIV)~

"May the Lord cause you to flourish. May you be blessed by the Lord." This is my prayer for you today. Just a few words of blessing speak volumes. Take a few moments today to pass on the blessing. Take time to pray for anyone and everyone who comes to your mind, asking God to bless them and to make them flourish.

I've been wondering what it means for God to make you flourish. Clearly, it means to get more of something, but what? We could ask God to bless one another financially to meet the needs of our families. We could ask God to increase our faith. I wonder how that might change our lives if each of us had a greater measure of faith. We could ask God to increase our love for our brethren. That could have a tremendous impact on the family of God. We could ask God to increase our effectiveness in reaching out with the Gospel, and the Kingdom would grow. We could ask God to increase our numbers, having more people with whom to serve him and to praise him.

We say so often, "God bless you." Do we say that without really thinking about the implications? Today, what would your life look like if God blessed you? Of course, he has blessed each one of us in so many ways, but if he blessed you today, what shape might that blessing take? Would a blessing today bring a word of encouragement or a healing touch? Would it bring salvation for a loved one or hope in a dark circumstance? Would it bring light into a dark situation or flood your heart with joy? Whatever the blessing you need, whatever way you are needing God's increase, may he grant it to you immeasurably beyond anything you could ask or think, and may you be blessed as you pass a blessing on to someone else today.

Author: Kathy Foor



Just Open the Door

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

~2 Corinthians 5:20 (NIV)~

Jesus demonstrated to his disciples a life of devotion to the Father. He also demonstrated a life of devotion to his disciples, and especially the twelve apostles. He was not necessarily favoring them above others but invested in their lives so that they would continue to make new disciples long after He was gone. Jesus also showed compassion and lived a life of welcome to others who were not in his inner circle. He stopped by the tree that Zacchaeus was sitting in and invited himself to dinner. He invited the woman at the well into a conversation, just one conversation that changed her life for all eternity. He invited some to follow Him, and others were simply momentary encounters. However, He related to each person he met with compassion and understanding.

As Jesus did then, He wants to do now through us. As He welcomed others into His life so very long ago, He would like us to welcome others into our lives today. It might be just one conversation, or it might be a dinner invitation or a long-term commitment to reach out to a neighbor, friend, or even family member. We are the vessels Jesus wants to use to reconcile the world to Himself. Will you let Him?

Author: Kathy Foor



Upcycled: Our Mess to His Message

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:
The old has gone, the new is here!*

~2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)~

*'Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty
things, which you do not know.'*

~Jeremiah 33:3 (NIV)~

Wow! What a promise Jeremiah receives from the Lord! Ladies, God's heart is that we would know Him, and how can we truly know Him unless we learn to listen to His voice? Think about every relationship in your life. What kind of relationship would it be if we could only talk and never listen to the other person's words? It wouldn't be much of a relationship, would it?

It's the same with God. We can't have a close relationship with the Lord unless we learn to listen to Him. It is different than a human relationship because we cannot see God, but that doesn't mean it isn't possible.

Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me." (Revelation 3:20) Hearing the voice of God is not hard, but we must listen in order to hear. That is why Jesus so often said, "He who has ears to hear, let them hear." (Matthew 11:15; Mark 4:9; Luke 8:8; 14:35) Of course, Jesus meant not everyone who hears with their ears understands with the heart what He is saying.

This is the key: we hear God's voice with our hearts, not with our ears. Most of us will not hear God's audible voice on this earth, but all of us can hear Him speaking to us if we learn to listen. Ask the Lord to open your heart to hear what He has to say, and ask Him to help you discern His voice from all the other voices around you. He longs to be in a relationship with you! He longs to transform your life to make it completely reflect Jesus Christ. Are you willing?

Author: Kathy Foor



God's Word is HOPE: Flourishing in every Season

"But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."

~Romans 8:25 (NIV)~

The 30th anniversary year was indeed a year that will go down in history. Perhaps not for the typical reasons. Rather, it was the only year our ladies could not gather together in Findlay, OH. The reason for this? A worldwide pandemic—COVID-19.

Let's pause and review a bit. We were fortunate to meet in-person for the Flourish Conference the previous year of 2020. Just weeks later, it seemed like everything was shut down, and we were ordered to stay at home and quarantine. Because the information was scarce about this crisis, people all over the world were left without answers, without remedies, and seemingly without hope.

Rom 8:25 tells us, "But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."

Bibleref.com explains this verse in Romans: "Paul has been describing 1) our current state of being and 2) our future as Christians. Our future is glory when all will be made right, our faith will be vindicated to the world, and our redeemed bodies will allow us to be with our Father forever. Our current state, though, is one of longing for that {future} day. For now, we have to suffer through the realities of life and all the consequences of sin on this side of eternity. Though our hope is sure, {intangible}, it has not yet arrived. Paul describes us, Christians, as people who wait with patience for a hope we do not see with our eyes. Although, we might not always feel the longing as intensely, or always {wait} as patiently. Still, to be a Christian in this life means we patiently wait for the best possible reality anyone can imagine. We can trust our Father to bring it about at just the right time."

It's this hope of what is yet to come that gives us the faith and trust to wait patiently for our eternity with God, despite the pain and suffering we all experience; be it a pandemic, a divorce, an illness, a job loss, or any other thing the enemy of this world tries to throw at us to separate us from the love of God.

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our

Lord. (Romans 8:38-39). What a wondrous example of hope! It's this same God, the same Jesus, the same Holy Spirit who holds us in His hands every single day we breathe. This is our Heavenly Father who created us to serve Him by using the gifts and passions with which He has designed us. This is the same Lord of the Universe's plans and purposes that have created each of us to live in 2021. It's the hope from our Savior and Lord that makes it possible for believers to flourish in every season of their lives.

Author: Lynn Kaufman

