

Daily Devotions to Help You "Build Relationships" as You Live the Lifestyle of a Faithful Steward

Monday

Joining Together

Scripture Reading:

"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him Who is the Head, that is, Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Ephesians 4:15-16).

Are you a joiner? Our insurance companies call us "members." Some publications refer to their readers as being part of their "family of subscribers." Regardless of what organizations we belong to, most of us have "joined" them in order to extract some kind of benefit for ourselves.

We may even join a church in order to derive some personal, temporal benefit, but God has something much greater in mind. It is through the Church that He pours out His gifts of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation by means of His Word and Sacrament. Nourished by these gifts, we become spiritually mature and stable (Ephesians 4:14). We "grow up into [Christ]." From Him, each member of the body receives his/her strength to do the work God gives him/her to do.

And God gives to us all the gifts we need, but how difficult it is for us to follow His plan! As sinners, we're often quick to judge how others use their gifts but slow to use our own. We are tempted to compare our gifts, finding some to be more valuable than others. Yet St. Paul tells us that each is equally important in the functioning of the Church.

How are these failings overcome? In worship Christ comes to us through Word and Sacrament to forgive our failings and to equip us to build up one another in love. St. Paul writes in Colossians 3:16, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom . . ." Then we will grow up in Christ, the Head. Then we can more ably use our gifts to build each other up for service to God's people and the spreading of the Gospel to the lost.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for blessing me with gifts to use in service to You through serving others. Help me always to acknowledge You as the source of all good things. Forgive me when I fail to be loving and obedient. In Christ's name I pray. Amen

Tuesday

Love Filled the Need

Scripture Reading:

"We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

The word "love" is used in many different ways: "I just love pecan pie!" "I love my child." "I love to play basketball." The word is thrown around so carelessly that its meaning has deteriorated.

If we want to know what love truly means, we can go to God's Word. There we find that "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16). We understand what that means only as we continue to delve into Scripture. We find that, since God is love, He acts in love. Everything our Heavenly Father does, He does out of love for us, His dear children. Because of His love,

He doesn't give us everything we want; He does give us everything we need.

What do we need? We need a Savior, for we are sinners, condemned to die eternally for our sins. *"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us,"* the Apostle John states positively, but his words that follow demonstrate what God's love does: *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:8-9).

That's love. Because of love, Jesus did not remain in Heaven but came to Earth to become one of us, to suffer and die for us, and then rise again, a resurrection that we celebrate every Sunday as we gather together to rejoice in this great love that makes us His own.

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers" (1 John 3:16). He gave us Himself, and He wants us to give ourselves to Him in return. Having given ourselves to Him, we develop an intimate relationship with Jesus, and it becomes a joy and privilege to share our resources, our time, and our abilities with Him by sharing them with others,

Prayer: Lord, thank You for loving me as I am. Teach me to trust in You so that each day I grow to depend on You for all I need and for the ability to share with others. Keep me focused on You, my Lord and Savior, Who has redeemed me from sin and death. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.

Wednesday

Choosing Our Path

Scripture Reading:

"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33).

God wants us to follow Him, but He gives us the freedom to choose what path we will take and whom we will serve. As we stand at various crossroads of life, God reaches out to us through His Word. In Jeremiah 6:16 we read, *"This is what the Lord says: 'Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.'*" As Yogi Berra said, "When you get to a fork in the road, take it." The road we take will have eternal consequences. Will we choose God's way or the ways of the world? God's Word tells us how to make that choice. By the power of God's Spirit, our answer can be like Joshua's. *"But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the river, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord"* (Joshua 24:15).

Joshua's choice was that he and his family would be servants and stewards of the Lord. When you reach the crossroads in life, you will hear God's call, "Follow Me." The call to serve yourself and the ways of the world will be loud and boisterous. If you answer God's call and follow the ancient path, as Jeremiah recommended, you will turn away from your self-interests and focus on ways to serve the Lord. Your lifestyle will reflect your relationship with Him. As followers of Jesus, we acknowledge God's ownership and love. We become stewards of what He entrusts to us. We see others as brothers and sisters in Christ. We live with an eternal perspective.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the same courage and conviction You gave to Joshua. Thank You for the faith You give me to follow Your will. Let Your love and grace flow through me to others. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Thursday

Living with Conviction

Scripture Reading:

"So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness" (Colossians 2:6).

For sports fans, March Madness is an exciting time of the year. Because of their intense interest, people spend many hours watching their favorite teams playing in the NCAA College Basketball Tournament. Among basketball fans, there is strong dedication to the sport of basketball.

We all have passions that occupy our time, thoughts, and energy. Many people have different interests than we do. Some of us are runners, others like to hunt, or travel, while still others are avid readers. Some of our interests may be noteworthy in that they can impact life itself, or they may be very insignificant as far as importance in life.

Perhaps at one time we had little more than passing interest in spiritual things. Then, as the Holy Spirit worked in us through God's Holy Word and Sacraments, our commitment deepened. An intimate relationship with Jesus developed and was manifested by the use of our time, talents, and money for His purposes. We willingly started devoting time daily to the reading of God's Word as well as spending time with Him in prayer. We found ourselves eager to attend weekly church services and Bible studies so we could worship the Lord and receive His nourishment. A desire to commit a generous portion of our money to the Lord through giving to our churches and to others was born in us. Our lives and blessings were turned over to God to be used in His service.

Our relationship with the Lord is God's gift to us. God calls and chooses us, and He gives us faith to follow Him. Paul wrote, *"For we know, brothers loved by God, that He has chosen you, because our Gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake"* (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5). May God bless and deepen our conviction for Him.

Prayer: Good and gracious Heavenly Father, thank You for Your presence in my life and for Your protection and guidance. Place within me passion and boldness to share the Gospel with all people. In the name of Christ I pray. Amen.

Friday

Mutual Edification

Scripture Readings:

"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Ephesians 4:29).

God has provided a support system for us as Christians through His Body, the Church. Within this Body, we participate together in Word and Sacrament along with speaking words of exhortation and encouragement to one another. It is necessary at times to speak Law in order to correct and discipline, and it is essential to speak Gospel to bring forgiveness and peace to the repentant. Fulfilling these duties complies with the command we receive through Paul who tells us to *"build each other up."*

Traditionally, we have depended on our pastors and elders to do this task of edifying, or building up. Possibly we are hesitant to carry out this obligation. We may feel inadequate, or we may shy away from confrontation. However, we are exhorted to be God's instruments through which He will work. *"All this is from God, Who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation . . . And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us"* (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). As members of God's family, we have the privilege and responsibility of encouraging others. As His ambassadors, we can be sure He will equip us for every task He requires us to complete.

If we truly are inadequate due to lack of knowledge of God's Word, there is a simple remedy for the problem. Start reading your Bible regularly and begin attending an adult Bible class! If there is no class that meets your needs, ask your pastor or elder and take steps necessary to prepare you to be Christ's ambassador.

Prayer: Lord, I thank You for my church and Christian friends. Help me to be an encouragement to them by sharing Your love for me with them. Allow me to be a light in a dark world. In Jesus' precious name I pray. Amen.

Saturday

Expressing Your Love

Scripture Reading:

"But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

The three words "I love you" are very powerful. Love is expressed not only in words

but also in action. In fact, it has been said, "Talk is cheap." To tell someone that you love him is good to do, but love also needs to be expressed by what we do and how we act. As God's people, we convey love through our giving and serving.

In God's Word, He tells us how much He loves each of us and then proves it by giving His Son to die for us. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16). Jesus gave His life for us and He keeps on giving. We respond to His love for us through our giving. When we give faithfully of our time, talents, and treasures, we show our love for Jesus.

God takes love seriously. He loves us, and He expects us to love one another. Jesus said, *"Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another"* (John 13:34). We love others by serving them. Serving communicates love. *"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many"* (Mark 10:45).

The love that Jesus places in our hearts can be our fuel to make a difference not only in our lives, but in the lives of those around us. It is important to express our love as we thank God for His abundant grace, mercy, and blessing, but our words must be supported through the greater expression of our love as seen through our giving and serving, as God gives us grace to do.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for loving me in spite of my sinful ways. Help me to live a life that is worthy of Your tremendous sacrifice for me. I thank You for my gifts. Help me to use them in ways that give You honor and glory and benefits others. In Your precious name I pray. Amen.

Bible Study 2

Witnessing for Jesus

Prayer: Dear Jesus, place within us the confidence and boldness to proclaim the Good News to those around us in all places and at all times. Help us to be Your witnesses both in what we say and do. Bless us as we examine what it means to be witnesses for You. In Your precious name we pray. Amen.

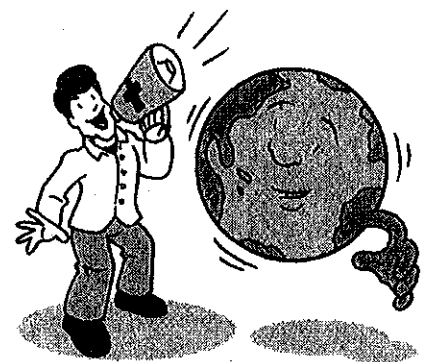
Theme verse: *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”* (Acts 1:8).

Introduction

Stewards manage all of life and life’s resources for God’s purposes. God wants *“all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth”* (1 Timothy 2:4), and He gives us, His stewards, the privilege and responsibility to share that truth, the Gospel, with all people. He uses us as His hands, feet, and mouth. We are His instruments through which others hear and learn about Jesus and His love, grace, and mercy. Let us be mindful that, as we live **the lifestyle of faithful stewards**, we are “witnessing for Jesus.”

Prior to Jesus’ ascension, He told His disciples, *“. . . you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”* (Acts 1:8). Filled with the Holy Spirit and His power, the disciples began the task that every generation of Christians since then has continued. “Witnessing for Jesus” takes place in our homes, neighborhoods, at our places of work, and beyond. Being a witness for Jesus is more than attending church or being busy in church work. “Witnessing for Jesus” means sharing His Gospel so others will come to know Him as the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).

Go tell the world Jesus died for all!



As witnesses for Jesus, we have the opportunity to tell others of the greatest miracle that has ever occurred. The Son of God condescended to come to earth to live as one of us, to be humiliated for the sake of those He loves, and then to rise victoriously, the *“firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep”* (1 Corinthians 15:20). This miracle is one to be shouted from the housetops, for it is meant not just for you and me, but for all humankind. That’s what the *“Therefore”* in the Great Commission means. Christ has died for our sins and risen again so that we might live forever with Him (Matthew 28:18-20). He has authority to issue this command. **“THEREFORE GO!”** Don’t keep this miracle a secret. Take time to tell it to your neighbors and friends. Use your talents to build up your church so that its mission and ministry might be enhanced. Spend your resources so that others (if not you yourself) are enabled to be His witnesses to *“all nations.”*

Sharing the Good News

God’s plan for His people has always been that we take responsibility for sharing the Good News. Peter wrote, *“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason*