



Reach, Gather, Grow

IN GALATIANS



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PREFACE

Matthew 28:19-20 is referred to as the Great Commission. It is the last two verses of the book of Matthew. Jesus has already risen from the dead, and He gets the disciples together for some final words. It is a coach's last pep talk as the players enter the arena for a big game. He says, ***“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.”***

It is these verses that are the basis for who we are as the Church: The Church exists to glorify God by reaching the world, gathering with the saints, and growing in the Word.

Reach, Gather, Grow in Galatians shows that the Great Commission is not isolated to two verses or one passage. It is displayed throughout the New Testament Epistles. As the title announces, *Reach, Gather, Grow in Galatians* shows Jesus' command being repeated by Paul throughout the book of Galatians. There is also a section about giving to the Lord that is interwoven through the book of Galatians.

Reach, Gather, Grow in Galatians consists of four study guides for personal or group discussion and twenty-four devotions covering the mission of the Church from the book of Galatians. This is not only a topical study on the mission of the church but also an intense look at the book of Galatians. This study will help remind the believer to focus on essentials and listen to their calling by God.



LESSON ONE

REACH

PASTOR BEN KIRKMAN





I absolutely love the book of Galatians. It also happens to be the first book of the Bible that I taught entirely through as a Pastor. The Lord knew it was exactly what I and the wonderful people I was pastoring needed. It was a life-changing study for many reasons. One of the biggest impacts Galatians had on my life was seeing the passion the apostle Paul had for the truth of the Gospel.

1. Is there a Bible passage that has been influential in your life? Why?

In his letter to the churches of Galatia, Paul gets straight to the point. He has something very important to say - no time for small talk. You have been there before, right? You have some information so important you skip the conversational formalities.

Before we get to Paul's important warning to these churches, I want to give you a quick background on his history with them. Before the writing of this letter to these churches, Paul had spent some time personally ministering to the people of Galatia. This is modern-day Turkey, and you can read about some of his adventures there in Acts. While he was in those places, Paul did what he always did (after the Lord got ahold of him) - he preached the Gospel. He faithfully spread the message of the sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ. He spread the message of salvation by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ alone.

Some of the people of Galatia received this message well, and the Gospel was spreading there. With the Gospel circulating so well, there were people that would follow Paul around and spread a "false" gospel that Jesus was not enough for salvation. Their message was



that a person needed to add religious rituals, traditions, and activities to what Jesus did in order to truly be saved. They brought confusion and contention to the believers in Galatia. Their message would have been something like, “I know Paul said this, but here is what you really need to do to be truly saved.”

With the confusion dominating at these churches, we can see why Paul would skip the small talk and get straight to the point. He starts out by reminding them where his Gospel message came from. Galatians 1:1 says, ***“Paul, an apostle - not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father.”*** Paul’s message was, “People of Galatia, remember; you can trust the Gospel I have shared with you because it is directly from God. Remember, the Gospel I taught you is a Gospel of grace and peace from God!” Galatians 1:3-4 adds, ***“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins.”***

The true Gospel is only possible because of God’s grace. The result of trusting in the necessary, gracious payment of Jesus for salvation brings peace with God.

The false gospel that the Judaizers in Galatia were spreading did not offer peace or hope. In fact, the reality of a performance-based gospel is doubt and fear. It left (and still leaves) people hoping they had done enough to be at peace with God, but they were always in a spot of uncertainty. The true Gospel offers the certainty of grace and peace with God through Jesus. Romans 5:1-2 says, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into his grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”





2. How would you explain salvation by grace through faith to someone?

3. How would a “gospel” that required religious works plus trusting in Jesus be problematic?

Even with the true Gospel preached by Paul and its impact of grace and peace in their lives, the believers of Galatia were starting to be swayed by this different, legalistic “gospel” of the Judaizers. Galatians 1:6-7 says, ***“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel - not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.”***

4. What might be the appeal to a works-based gospel?

5. What is the problem with this distorted works-based gospel?

Paul has encouraged the believers of Galatia with what the true Gospel provides. He then warns them that there is no other gospel but the one that is from God through Jesus and gives a strong



warning against the people spreading a false gospel. Galatians 1:8-9 continues, ***“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.”*** Paul gives more than just a “be careful” to the people spreading a false gospel, twice he calls for them to be cursed! Paul is not playing around with the necessity of the true Gospel.

6. Why would Paul call for a curse against those spreading a false gospel?

After Jesus got ahold of Paul with the true Gospel, Paul devoted himself to spreading the message of peace with God through Christ alone. He knew the truth. He knew where hope truly came from, and he passionately shared the message at any cost. His whole life became about sharing Jesus no matter what. He was so passionate about the Gospel that the only one he cared about pleasing was Jesus. Galatians 1:10 says, ***“For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”*** He faithfully served Christ, spreading the Gospel with his whole life.

7. Have you truly believed in the Gospel of Jesus for salvation?





8. How and who can you share the Gospel with this week?





LESSON ONE | REACH





PELTON

REACH, DEVOTION 1

Caleb Jones

“Paul, an apostle - not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead - and all the brothers who are with me.” Galatians 1:1-2

This past year, my wife and I bought a Peloton bike. Now if you do not know anything about Peloton, I will give a glimpse into what it is. Peloton is a stationary exercise bike that has a display and hooks up to the internet so that you can be connected to other people during a live class. I recently heard someone tell a peloton joke, “How do you know if someone owns a Peloton bike?” The answer was, “Because they will tell you!” It could not be more true. We know it is true because I just told you I owned one! I cannot even tell you how it all works. I have no clue how they built it. I am not a bike expert. I am not even in shape. Yet, I have gear that says I am all in. It even posts to my Facebook after every exercise just so people know that I am part of the Peloton family.

Are we as eager to share the Gospel as much as we are about our Pelotons? We are so quick to share the change in our diets and weight but what about the change that Jesus has made in our lives? One of our location pastors recently flew to California to witness one final time to his grandfather. I remember the Holy Spirit asking me if I loved people that much. In 2 Corinthians 5:20 (NIV), Paul says, ***“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.”*** Implore means to beg. Have you ever begged someone to repent and follow Christ?



Often times I think we are so scared of our lack of knowledge of the Bible, that we would not even start a conversation about Jesus. As much as we should be in the Word and studying the Gospel, Paul actually says in 1 Corinthians 1:17 (NIV), ***“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel - not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.”*** He is saying we do not need to trick people with our words. We do not need to have this perfect map of words so that it calls people to Jesus. We just need to preach Christ. Be honest with your words. I cannot tell you how many times I have tried to guess what someone will say back to me and so I try to have an answer for everything. I wonder how many times I did not say anything because I could not come up with the words.

So, how do we share?

Here are several verses that can help us to take the next as well as prepare us scripturally. Psalm tells us to store the Scripture in our hearts. Study over these verses. Apply them to your own life. Memorize them.

- Do not be ashamed to share the Gospel. Romans 1:16
- Do not overcomplicate it with eloquent words. 1 Corinthians 1:17
- God’s love is given through His sacrifice. John 3:16
- We are all sinners who are in need of a Savior. Romans 3:23
- God loved us so much that He sacrificed His only Son on the cross for us. Romans 5:8
- The payment for sin is death. But God! Romans 6:23
- Confess with your mouth and believe in your heart. Romans 10:9
- Whoever calls on Jesus will be saved! Romans 10:13





GRACE AND PEACE

REACH, DEVOTION 2

Ferdinand Sanders

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Galatians 1:3

When was the last time you wrote someone a handwritten letter? Outside of the occasional note to my wife (I promise it happened at least once in the past year), I really cannot remember the last time I penned a letter to anyone. Now, when was the last time you received a handwritten letter? Sometimes I wonder why I even have a mailbox. Every day when I get the mail, I am met with things I do not want - ads for places I do not go, credit card opportunities, bills, and junk mail. Receiving a personal, handwritten letter has to be one of the topmost pleasant things that we can experience. It always seems to warm my heart and put a smile on my face. There is great intentionality that is felt when something is personally handwritten. In a world where messages can be sent and received within seconds, it seems we have been drifting further and further away from that personal intentionality.

The New Testament is filled with handwritten letters. New pockets of Christians and churches were starting to pop up as the disciples began to ***“make disciples of all nations”*** (Matthew 28:19). These letters are full of encouragement, direction, guidance, comfort, and sometimes, necessary correction or challenges. As a church, we have been looking at the Apostle Paul’s letter to the churches of Galatia. Paul opens his letter with a greeting in which he writes, ***“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”*** (Galatians 1:3). Now, this was just the introduction. It is the pleasantries if you will. It was not the main point of his letter to



the Galatians, and admittedly, is very easy to move past as we make our way to reading the “meat and potatoes” of his letter. If we move too quickly past verse 3 as the recipient of this letter, or even as the reader today, I would argue that not only do we miss out on grace and peace as the context or foundation of the letter, but I fear we may even be moving in the opposite direction as we rush to advance ourselves further.

I wonder, how many times do we do that with Scripture?

Believe me, I am the first person to skip ahead whenever a chapter begins to list out a genealogy. However, how much do we miss by approaching Scripture with the “lesson to be obtained” already in our minds? Maybe we sit down on a Sunday morning and completely miss God’s voice because we begin to fill in the gaps with our own voice, rather than being attentive and hearing the Scripture passage in a fresh and new way. If we believe that Scripture is the living, breathing Word of God (John 1:14; 2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:12), take time to be in His presence.

In the spirit of Galatians 1:3, I wanted to leave you with ten passages to sit, read, reflect, and ponder on the grace and peace which is offered to us from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- ***“Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father’s Son, in truth and love.” 2 John 1:3***
- ***“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Romans 5:1***





- ***“For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.”***
Ephesians 2:14
- ***“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”***
Philippians 4:7
- ***“Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.”*** 2 Thessalonians 3:16
- ***“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”*** John 16:33
- ***“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.”*** Ephesians 2:4-5
- ***“Who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.”*** 2 Timothy 1:9
- ***“For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”*** Romans 6:14
- ***“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”*** Romans 3:23-24



LESSON ONE | DEVOTION 2





A PRICE PAID

REACH, DEVOTION 3

Mitchell Holmes

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.”

Galatians 1:3-4

It is so easy to forget things. I am a forgetful person. My wallet, keys, sunglasses, you name it, I have forgotten it. Now I know some of you reading this are far more organized than I am and you do not empathize with this struggle. Even so, I would wager that you still forget things. As humorous as it is to constantly forget my wallet, I also forget far more important things. I forget the many ways that God has blessed me. Here are a few:

- I live in a time period when I have the ability to pray directly to the Lord, this was not always so.
- I live in a country where I can attend church without fearing for my life.
- I can afford food and housing.
- I have an incredible family.

These are just a few of the astounding blessings on my life that the Lord saw fit to grant me, and yet it is so easy to forget these things as soon as one bad day comes. When my tire pops on the interstate, you best believe that the last thing on my mind is how blessed I am to be able to pray whenever, wherever I want. I would be willing to bet I am not alone in this struggle, it is easy for all of us to forget some of the most incredible things because they are a steadfast part of our lives, day in and day out.



One of the most incredible things that I think is all too easy to forget is the price that has been paid for us. Each of us has an unpayable debt. Romans 3:23 says, ***“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*** All of us have done wrong and all of us have a debt that we simply cannot pay. Galatians 1:4 is our focus for today and it says, ***“Who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.”***

On the cross, Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, creator of the universe, and Light of the World, thought of you. Specifically, I am speaking of you, the one that is reading this text right now. He thought about you and all of the wrong you have done and will do. He thought about the trials and sufferings you would go through and how you would turn your back on Him time and time again. He thought about the ways that you would reject His loving embrace. He saw all of it and He chose to die for you anyway. He took your sin, He took my sin, and the sins of all humanity onto Himself so that we did not have to pay the price of our sin. He took our unpayable debt, He placed it upon Himself, and He who knew no sin paid it all.

Today, as you ponder and pray, consider the things that are so easy to forget. Brainstorm ways to remind yourself of these blessings so that when the bad days come, you never forget the price that has been paid for you, and He who paid that price gladly.





THE LINE

REACH, DEVOTION 4

Peter Mason

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel - not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.” Galatians 1:6-7

Every year the MLB releases amended rules for the upcoming baseball season. This past April, teams were allowed to increase their 26-player active roster to 28. Surely this has some bearing on how the game is played, but no one really blinked an eye. In recent years, however, the idea of a game clock or countdown has been suggested to help speed up the game due to baseball's notorious slow pace. True baseball fans have been alarmed at this suggested change because that would cross the line, “It would no longer be baseball.” The slow social element of baseball is what makes it baseball! Whether you agree, disagree, or simply do not care, it is a fascinating question, “How much can you change a thing before it ceases to be what it was?” If we started kicking the ball instead of throwing the ball, we would no longer be playing baseball, but where is the line?

We do not have the space to ponder that here, but when it comes to following Jesus, the Apostle Paul has written the entire book of Galatians to show us where that line is for our faith. In these verses, we see the church had begun to accept a changed and distorted gospel. It was a gospel so distorted, that Paul says they have begun to desert Jesus Himself!



The line for Paul is the line between the Law and the Gospel. When the Law mixes with the Gospel, it is no longer the Gospel. The Law is God's good and holy command but it is separate from the Gospel of Jesus. Let me explain. The Good News of Jesus is not that you now have the power within yourself to obey all of God's commands and follow His teachings. The Good News is not holy advice to help you live a good life. The Good News is not a command to do anything. It is because in ourselves we are unable to fulfill the Law's command.

The Gospel (Good News) is simply hearing and accepting that something has already happened for you. The Gospel of Jesus is that wherever you find yourself today, a man has died on a hill outside Jerusalem to save you, whether you like it or not. That man is Jesus. The Good News is that help comes from the outside regardless of how well your life is going or what kind of person you are today. As you read these words, you can let go of the heavy burden of believing in the distorted gospel of needing to do something in order to be accepted. Instead, simply enjoy your forgiveness. This is the only demand of the Gospel which is to rest and enjoy your forgiveness. You will be surprised how easily a holy life begins to bloom in your life when your energy is refocused from doing to receiving.



A DANGEROUS GOSPEL



REACH, DEVOTION 5

Pastor Noble Baird

“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.” Galatians 1:8-9

The sad reality about the world we live in today is the distortion and deceit that is rampant in a broken world. Whether you turn on the tv, social media, radio, or even the songs we listen to - the truth is no longer the truth, it is about how you feel and making sure that those feelings and truth are not hurtful or contradictory to someone else ideology. Truthfully, this has been the case since the fall of man in Genesis chapter 3 and nothing has changed since. We only see and hear things more quickly because of the technology at our fingertips.

In Galatians 1:8-9, Paul is dealing with this very issue, a distortion of the truth. Paul writes in Galatians 1:8-9, ***“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.”*** Paul is concerned about the church in Galatia and warns them of a distortion of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. I have always loved how Paul plainly and clearly presents the Gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, ***“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you - unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first***



importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.”

Paul boldly proclaims the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There was nothing more, nothing less. As he says before that proclamation, this is and must be the Gospel which we stand upon and through which we allow the Spirit to work within us all.

So, as you continue throughout today - not worrying about or thinking about tomorrow or the rest of the week, just today - what is the Gospel you stand upon? Are you standing firm and being sanctified through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ? Or are you allowing the truth of the Gospel to be distorted by the world or circumstances that surround us every day? We must stand firm and be on guard for the false gospels that are so prevalent and have been prevalent for thousands of years. That is my prayer and challenge for myself and for you today.





APPROVAL

REACH, DEVOTION 6

Jill Osmon

“For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.” Galatians 1:10

Approval, we all seek it. Some of us find it in our families, some in our work, others in relationships, and I think most of us try to find it in the world in general. Yet it remains elusive to so many of us, creating a desire that is left unmet in our lives.

Paul is speaking of approval in Galatians 1:10, saying, ***“For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”*** Paul is speaking to a group of people who seem to have lost their focus on what the Gospel really is, seeking to find approval in man instead of God.

I should not be, but I am always quite amazed when I read the Bible how rich and on point it is in today's world it is. Can you picture our world, our culture today when you read this? So many thoughts and opinions on what the Gospel is, and we find a church here in Galatians that seems to have been refocused on a "gospel" more palliative to the world so that they can find and gain approval from man.

Approval is generally defined as the belief that someone or something is good or acceptable. How easy is it for us to seek out someone or something that says we are good? However, the world sees good not as God sees good, but for what it can gain or what it can affirm



in them that feels and looks good. We live in a world that looks at the Gospel not as good but destructive because it shines the light on our sin and depravity, something that does not feel like approval but condemnation. Yes, it will be condemnation if you do not accept it, but if you choose to give your life to God, the approval from God is so much more. Approval from God is finally finding the freedom and peace that we all seek. Our approval from God is found through Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection. We simply have to accept the Good News.

Approval from man is fleeting and temporary, it may feel good at that moment but what is left? It is a life that feels like it is missing something, something so basic yet so big you cannot survive without it. We try and fill it with all the world offers and yet when we turn to Jesus for our approval, it is like the sun shining on your face, refreshing and good.

So the question I have for you today is, "Whose approval do you seek?"







LESSON TWO

GATHER

PASTOR BEN KIRKMAN





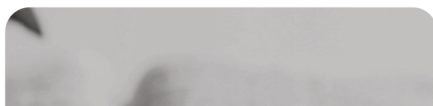
1. When you think of gathering together with other followers of Christ, what comes to mind?

As I reflect on my 39 years of gathering with other followers of Christ, it brings up so many (mostly good) memories. I think of the wonderful people, families, and lifelong friends. I have stories of laughing, crying, and doing life alongside other people who love Jesus. It is so neat to consider that God designed us to be in a community with other people and how those relationships can help us face whatever comes our way.

2. Share a positive story of a family from your church (present or past).

I mentioned that my churchy memories were "mostly good." I would imagine that we would all have some stories of hurt within our church family experience. Any time you get a group of people together that tends to happen. It may have something to do with the fact that even though a person loves and follows Jesus, they still sometimes make bad or selfish decisions. I have heard stories of hurt from people that are almost unbelievable. It is so sad that hurt from believer to believer happens as often as it does. Of course, the reality is we all have the ability to be the ones causing the hurt. So, we need to be careful and aware of the way we treat others.

The churches in Galatia were going through a difficult time dealing with the Judaizers that were infiltrating their congregations. There





were non-biblical religious standards being imposed and enforced by this group of religious “elite,” and it was bringing confusion and friction to these followers of Jesus. The Judaizers were adding works to the Gospel, which created a culture of the self-righteous judgment of others. The Gospel is by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus. Ephesians 2:8-9 clearly states, ***“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”***

If you throw self-righteous “judginess” into any group of people, there is going to be a lot of hurt taking place, and hurt people often respond by taking their pain out on others. Paul strongly calls out the people bringing this unsettling false gospel into town and lets us know how he feels about them in Galatians 5:12, ***“I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!”*** (I will let you study and figure out what he is saying there.) You can clearly see Paul's frustration with these false teachers. They were bringing confusion, and the confusion was bringing dissension. With that thought and context in mind, look at Galatians 5:13-15, ***“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.”***

3. Do you have any stories to share where you were hurting and you took it out on other people? What were the results of your actions?

After Paul tells the Galatians how he really feels about the false gospel pot-stirrers, he graciously reminds the believers that they





are free in Christ. Christ has given freedom the Law never could. Through Christ, they had freedom from the bondage and penalty of sin, knowing they were declared righteous by Jesus and did not have to try and earn God's favor. They had freedom knowing that through Jesus they were at peace with God! Romans 5:1 says, ***“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** He follows up his encouraging reminder with a warning to not misuse this freedom. Just because you are free in Christ, that does not give you license to act like you did before He freed you. Use that freedom, not for selfish purposes, but to love and serve other people. The example of love and service Christ showed to us should be a powerful motivator for us to treat others the same way.

4. What is so wonderful about the freedom that is found in Jesus?

5. How can looking at the example of Christ loving and serving help us to love and serve also?

The next warning Paul gives to these believers seems pretty extreme, but sadly we see it playing out all too often among believers even today. Galatians 5:15 points out, ***“But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.”*** One of the big problems creeping into these churches was a biting and devouring among the people, meaning they would tear each other apart with their words and actions. Their focus was turning from the sufficiency of Christ to the wrongly added religious deeds.



This shifted mentality led them to think more highly of themselves than they should have and to look down on others who maybe did not keep the man-made religious duties as well as they did. This mentality is so destructive to relationships and churches. Can you not see it playing out? You get a person that thinks they have it all figured out who then begins to look down on and talk bad about other people. This turns into groups that are against each other, which leads to biting and devouring, which then leads to hurt and destruction of relationships. Before you know it, you have a group of people that at one time loved and served each other and now they cannot stand to even look at one another. Paul is warning these believers, “Watch out, pay attention! Keep your focus on Jesus! The only reason you have peace with God is because of Him. Keep your pride in check, without Jesus you are hopeless - dead in your trespasses and sins! You have no right to bite and devour, you have the right and responsibility to be loving and serving.”

I know as we fast forward a couple of thousand years from the time of this letter, the challenges we face may look a little different from those of churches in Galatia. However, the warning is still very real and applicable. As we gather together and serve alongside one another, it is a very real possibility that we can begin to bite and devour each other. If we bite and devour each other we are not going to be united in loving and serving Jesus!

6. Why do people feel the right or need to beat each other up with their words or actions?





7. Is there a situation where you have been biting and devouring that you need to address?





LESSON TWO | GATHER





BASIN THEOLOGY

GATHER, DEVOTION 1

Keaton Washburn

“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Galatians 5:13

If you read these devotions in order, you are most likely reading this before you head to Sunday gatherings or the day after gatherings, Monday. For me, being a social introvert, gatherings are one of my favorite days because I get to see and be with some of my favorite people. However, they are also the most exhausting day of the week for me. Whether you can relate to me or not, I hope you understand the importance of meeting together as a church body. As we study Galatians, specifically regarding Reach - Gather - Grow, I want to introduce you to a concept called basin theology. Before doing that though, it would be helpful to read Galatians 5:13, ***“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”***

The freedom Paul is referring to is the freedom that believers have because of Christ. Anyone who has confessed Jesus as Lord and believed in their heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, is no longer a slave to sin. Additionally, because of the coming of Christ, believers are no longer judged by God under the Old Testament Law. So, this freedom enables believers to be assured of their standing before God and no longer live under the strict regulations of the Old Testament Law.

Paul’s call then in Galatians 5:13 is both a negative and a positive. The negative side says, ***“Do not use your freedom as an opportunity***



for the flesh.” He is saying that Christian freedom is not an excuse to dabble in or near sin. This is not a call to get as close to sinning as possible.

The positive side says, **“Through love serve one another.”** Use your freedom to serve one another! When we use our freedom as an opportunity for the flesh we choose to serve ourselves, doing what makes us feel good. However, when the Christian uses their freedom to serve, they stay far from that temptation to sin.

So basin theology, what is it and how does it fit in? A pastor named Bruce Thielemann tells of a conversation he had with a congregant: The congregant said, “You preachers talk a lot about ‘do unto others,’ but when you get right down to it, it comes down to basin theology.” Thielemann asked, “Basin theology? What is that?” The layman said, “Remember what Pilate did when he had the chance to acquit Jesus? He called for a basin and washed his hands of the whole thing. But Jesus, the night before his death, called for a basin and proceeded to wash the feet of the disciples.”

It all comes down to basin theology. Which one will you use?





LOVE FOR REAL

GATHER, DEVOTION 2

Josh Thayer

“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.”

Galatians 5:13-15

You do not often think about it because it is all around us every day. It is something we inherited without even realizing it, especially being here in the United States. It is this little word with a massive meaning called “freedom.” Every morning I wake up, I have the freedom to choose what I want to do. I can drink a cup of coffee, I can have breakfast of my choosing, and I can even decide what clothes I am going to wear for the day. This is just the tip of the iceberg.

Freedom is also something that God gives to us freely. By sending His Son to die on the cross for us, we have the freedom to choose salvation and freedom to love, and even freedom to sin. Every day is a gift from God and is an opportunity to make a choice. Paul here in Galatians 5:13, confirms that we were given this gift of freedom and he urges us to not use it for evil but to use it for loving others.

When we choose to use our freedom to sin, we become a slave to that sin, Satan, or our own evil nature. It has the potential to ruin your life and the lives of others around you. It is all from your own freedom to choose sin. I am sure we all know that feeling of guilt, shame, and regret. Those are all feelings associated with sin.



LESSON TWO | DEVOTION 2



The other side of the coin is choosing to love and serve others. It is making a conscious effort to be like Jesus. To show others love, compassion, grace, and to demonstrate the ability to be selfless is a choice. That is love for real. That is what Jesus did while He was here on Earth. Day after day He demonstrated what real love looks like.

So now what? What are you going to do about it? You may have the whole day ahead of you to choose to make good decisions. Or maybe you are going to bed and have the freedom to wake in the morning and be a blessing to someone else. You have the freedom to choose. You have the freedom to step back into your own sinful nature. You have the freedom to also step away from that sin and run in the opposite direction. You have the freedom to love someone for real. God showed us how to love, now we just have to choose to do it!

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16





SERVING FAITHFULLY

GATHER, DEVOTION 3

Debbie Gabbara

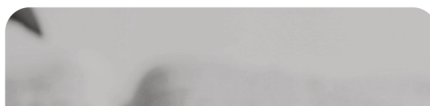
“You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.” Galatians 5:13 (NIV)

Long before the gatherings begin on Sunday morning, volunteers and staff arrive at the River locations. Lights and sound equipment are turned on, people arrive with instruments, and others warm up their voices as the bands begin to rehearse.

I am blessed to serve at the Holly location with our Guest Services team alongside a group of incredible men and women who have the heart to serve others. They come early. They come when it is raining or snowing, and when the sun is shining bright. They come on the cold days and on the warm days. They come with smiles on their faces and in their hearts, happy to welcome you into our buildings, eager to greet the community that God brings to worship together.

Like other teams around the building, we pray together before the gatherings. We pray for each other, and we pray for the pastors that will share the Good News of the Gospel that day. We pray for those that the Lord will bring to hear the message and for lives to be changed. We thank the Lord for giving us the opportunity to serve others. It is a special time that we always make a priority.

The last part of Galatians 5:13 tells us to serve one another humbly in love. I love being part of a place that has so many faithful servants who come to serve others humbly with love.





LESSON TWO | DEVOTION 3



It takes many dedicated servants to make a gathering happen. They greet our guests and church family, make coffee, teach kids, rock babies, lead us to worship in song, run cameras, put Bible verses on screens, and so many more behind-the-scenes tasks. I cannot think of anything more rewarding than serving God with others who love Him and want to share the joy that comes from serving Him!

“God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another.” 1 Peter 4:10 (NLT)



NOBODY WINS IN A BITE-FIGHT



GATHER, DEVOTION 4

Sierra Combs

“For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.” Galatians 5:14-15

After 12 years of parenting two very easy-going, well-behaved, calm, and mild children, everything changed. God gave us a third. We named her Clementine, which means merciful and mild. With our track record of the other two kids, I naturally assumed she would be just that. I was wrong. The child is not mild and she is not merciful. She is quite the opposite. She is extremely busy, loud, stubborn, and relentless to get what she wants. I have never seen such strong of a will in someone so young, and that personality showed up from the get-go.

Around her first birthday, she became every church nursery's worst nightmare - a biter. Luckily for the children and workers of our church, she has yet to make her move. My household has not been so fortunate. We have all been bit by cute little Clemmie on multiple occasions, sometimes drawing blood and leaving marks that have lasted for days. As a one-year-old who cannot easily communicate her needs and wants, biting seems to be her go-to. Angry? Bite. Sad? Bite. Trying to be silly, bored, just wants attention? Bite, bite, bite. It is painful and exhausting and has sent me asking friends and scouring the internet for advice on how to make her stop. I was surprised to hear a particularly strange piece of advice suggested by many people - just bite her back! They say that one time is usually all it takes to stop them from ever biting you again. Apparently, this



is a common suggestion to deal with biters. Before you send me a concerned email, I did not take the advice. I know my kid - if I bit her back it would start a war. She would 100% retaliate by biting me even harder, and nobody wins in a bite-fight.

In this week's portion of Scripture, we find ourselves in Galatians chapter 5. Paul was addressing the Christians living in Galatia who had fallen into disunity. It is 2,000 years later and nothing has changed. We still all naturally want to serve ourselves rather than others. We want what we want and we think we know best, and often time we can become so angry and bitter with fellow believers who have differing viewpoints, that everyone loses.

In Galatians 5:15, Paul warningly tells the church ***“But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.”*** The words here are much stronger than a Clementine type of bite. Rather, it is the striving to sting, gulp down, and devour one another as wild beasts would do, going so far as to not only fight to one party's death, but to fight until everyone is destroyed.

Paul gave a strong warning that by their intense contention and disunity, they were not only going to destroy each other's happiness and spirituality, but also hurt the witness and reputation of the church as a whole. Everybody loses. This warning is still so important today, and we would be wise to follow Paul's urging to keep our spiritual vision sharp. When we do not stay alert, we can easily wander back to serving our flesh which will always lead to contention and disunity with other believers. I have seen friends and families destroyed over such matters.

Churches that were once used mightily by God are now just pillars of smoke rising from the ruins of bitterness and wrath. Meanwhile, the weary world is so focused on the smoke that they cannot see Jesus.





As I said, EVERYONE loses!

So how then do we avoid this detrimental problem? The Bible sums it up in verse 14, ***“For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”*** It is as simple as that - love. Love those around you, not just the believers (and non-believers) who agree with you but the ones who do not. Truly love them and serve them! Resist the urge to bite them, even if they strike first, and even if they are wrong. Can you imagine what the church would look like if we truly loved each other despite our differences and disagreements and unified around the Gospel of Jesus? We would change the world!



LESSON TWO | DEVOTION 4





DANGER OF BITING

GATHER, DEVOTION 5

Patrick Bicknell

“But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.” Galatians 5:15

In Galatians 5:15, Paul uses a very strong description of believers who do not love others as themselves. He describes them as wild animals, those that bite and devour one another. In this verse, he is wrapping up a section talking about the liberty that we receive from Christ when we are justified through His finished work on the cross. He says things like ***“Christ has set us free”*** (verse 1) and ***“For you were called to freedom”*** (verse 13).

Paul, in this letter, is explaining over and over again how it is through Christ and Christ alone that we are justified, forgiven, and set free from this sin. Before he begins to transition into some more practical aspects of how we should live in this freedom, he gives this clear warning to those who bite and devour one another like wild animals. Paul says, ***“Watch out that you are not consumed by one another.”*** This is something that we Christians are notoriously good at. It is the hypocrisy that those outside of the church hate, and it is the behavior that devoted followers of Christ cannot stand to see in their fellow brothers and sisters. It is the attitude of selfishness. It is described as disregarding the well-being of others and not giving a second thought to how they are feeling, what they are going through, or the fact that what we do to them may hurt them. It is the lifestyle of wild animals. We act like wild animals because we get so consumed with ourselves that we take our eyes off of the person who has set us free, which is Christ.



I think this warning is so important for us to heed as we are going through Reach, Gather, and Grow as a church again. As we are refocusing on the mission of the church we need to take warnings like this and examine ourselves to see if we have fallen into this behavior. The clear way to do this in the context of Galatians 5:15 is to look at the two verses before it. There are three distinct things Paul points out. They are:

- Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh.
- Serve one another.
- Love your neighbor as yourself.

Are you allowing your flesh to plant seeds of selfishness in your life? Do you want others to serve you rather than for you to serve others? Is the way you treat others reflective of how you would want to be treated? We need to take the time to examine ourselves, to see if our eyes are fixated on the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and make sure that we are not behaving like wild animals and devouring one another. Instead, we should be loving our neighbors as ourselves and so fulfilling the law.





WHAT IS LOVE?

GATHER, DEVOTION 6

William Kinney

“For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” Galatians 1:14

We all desire love in all sorts of ways. Some are good, and some are bad. However, how do we define love? The world defines love as a feeling that can be gained or lost dependent on particular situations. They expect to love only when love is reciprocated. I sure am glad God’s Word does not define love that way!

From the beginning of the Bible, we see God’s love for humanity. Genesis chapter 3 lays out the history of how Satan deceived Adam and Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve broke the one commandment given to them, they were ashamed of being naked, covered themselves with fig leaves, and hid from God. Is it not peculiar that we do the same thing? When we sin, we get ashamed, try to cover up our sins ourselves and hide our sins from God. Even though Adam and Eve acted this way, God showed love to them. We see this love in the form of shed blood and sacrifice in Genesis 3:21 (NIV). This passage states, ***“The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.”*** This means that God had to sacrifice an animal and shed its blood (a picture of Jesus Christ on the Cross) for Adam and Eve to be forgiven. This passage defines love!

Love is sacrifice, blood, sweat, and tears rolled up into one package and delivered to someone else. So, when Paul wrote to the church in Galatia that the whole law is fulfilled in loving your neighbor as



LESSON TWO | DEVOTION 6



yourself, he means to make sacrifices for each other, even and especially when they wrong you. Paul was not talking about animal sacrifices here. Genuinely loving people require sacrifices of our time, finances, emotions, and self. Loving people this way brings glory to God, and that is how the whole law is fulfilled. When we genuinely love people, we genuinely love God. So let us all take a stand to start living counter-culturally, not love with our fleeting feelings, but unconditionally love each other by serving and making sacrifices for everyone we meet and know. Show the world what true love is!







LESSON THREE

GROW

PASTOR JOSH YATES





A testimony is an account of events that occurred. Testimonies are most often given in courts of law to try to piece together what happened and what the circumstances are in a case brought against an accused person.

A testimony is also a recounting of a person's life events. It is a person's story. It is your story. No one can really argue against your story and what you have experienced because it is your story.

Your story with Jesus is your testimony. How you came to know Jesus as your Savior is one of the most important stories you can tell.

1. Have you accepted Jesus as your Savior? What is your story about how you came to know Jesus? What is your testimony?

2. Have you ever been tempted to believe that your testimony is not that important? Do you ever think your story is just not that powerful? Why?

Please read Galatians 1:11-24.

The Apostle Paul is beginning his letter to the Galatians by letting them know about the Gospel that he preached and how he came to know this Gospel. The Galatians had been drawn away into false teaching and some had even deserted Christ (Galatians 1:6). False teachers had brought a false gospel that distorted the truth of Jesus. It was not Jesus plus the Jewish religious rites that brought salvation, it was only by grace through faith in Jesus alone.



Paul presents the truth of the Gospel and his own testimony to show himself as one that is trustworthy.

3. How does Paul describe the Gospel's origin in verses 11-12?

4. How did Paul receive the Gospel that he preaches? (Take a look at Acts 9:1-19)

Part of your story is about who you were before you met Jesus and Paul's story is no different. He talks about the fact that he was a Pharisee and that he was a persecutor of the church of God.

Paul was an unlikely person to convert and follow Jesus with his life. He was a "Pharisee of Pharisees" and he knew it. He was prideful about it. Read Paul's own words, ***"Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless"*** (Philippians 3:4-6).

His confidence in the flesh was misplaced at the time, but he thought he was doing the right thing in persecuting the church. There was no way he would follow Jesus, but God.





5. Do you have anyone in your life right now that you think will never accept Jesus as their Savior? Write their initials here:

_____.

The word, **“but,”** in verse 15 is a word of hope. It is a word of rescue. It is a word that changes things.

- The other team scored a touchdown, “but” there was a flag on the play!
- You have cancer, “but” it can be treated.
- I was at my wits’ end with this kid, “but” God changed him.

God intervened in Paul’s life and called him out. God had determined this from the beginning of time! Paul’s life had changed because of “but God!”

6. What have been some of the “but God” moments in your life? How has that grown your faith?

What an amazing moment in Paul’s life! God reached down in His grace and Jesus revealed Himself to Paul on the road to Damascus. God radically changed Paul on that road and in the coming three years.

It has been said, “Karl Barth, perhaps the twentieth-century’s greatest theologian, liked to say that true Christians are the victims of a successful surprise attack by God.”

It is easy to believe that you somehow found God, but the truth is you have been found by God. Jesus steps into the scene of our life and





saves us. The Holy Spirit calls us and we respond. It is as though like Paul, the scales have fallen off of our eyes and we can see Jesus as He is.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:6.

7. How have you seen the glory of God revealed in your life?

I just love the phrase that Paul tells us people were speaking about him before they knew what God had done in his life, ***“He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy”*** (Galatians 1:23). Paul had been transformed. Jesus was now living in Paul and in verse 16 he declares that he had been changed so that Jesus could be revealed. He was revealed in the one that had persecuted the church! What a change! What a transformation!

8. How has God transformed areas of your life as you have grown in Jesus?

Paul would describe himself as a person that never deserved Jesus, but he had changed him anyway. Read how he describes himself and what had changed him in 1 Corinthians 15:8-10.

Your testimony is your story. It is only by the grace of God that any of us become who we are. Only grace makes sense of who we have become and only grace can describe our lives.





9. How does God's grace describe your life?

Romans 1:16 says, ***“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”***

It is easy to forget that the Gospel is the power of God to change lives and bring salvation. He can do it for anyone at any time. Yes, He can do this even to the person that you listed on question 5.

God's grace in your life is never a dull or boring story. Do not be tempted to believe that your story is not worth sharing. Jesus coming into your life and changing you is a miraculous story whether you accepted Jesus at the age of three and have been in church all your life or if you lived a life of promiscuity, substance abuse, and crime, only to be changed by Jesus. Both of those stories are stories of the mighty grace and mercy of our Savior and, like Paul states at the end of our passage, “They (will) glorify God because of (you).”

You have been given a story by God. Sharing that story is part of your growth as a disciple of Jesus. Here is the toughest question of this study.

10. When will you share your story with the person you previously listed?



LESSON THREE | GROW



It is scary to share your story. It is scary to put yourself out there. What can God do with your story? It is not your job to save anyone, it is your job to share your story.

Remember, “but God...”







LESSON THREE | GROW



EVERYONE HAS A STORY THAT NEEDS TO BE TOLD



GROW, DEVOTION 1

John Rigg

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Galatians 2:20

In 2017, after a few years of battling Alzheimer’s disease, my father passed from this life to the next, two months shy of his 89th birthday. On the day that we celebrated his life, I stood before a large crowd of family and friends and did the best I could to honor the life of my father and bring glory to God. In the crowd that day was a few of my high school buddies that came to pay their respects as many of them knew my father well.

As I stood before the people gathered that day, my eyes kept returning to the face of one of my friends, as I could see that he was totally transfixed on me and what I was saying. Canoe, (yes Canoe is his nickname) had a glossy look on his face that morning; it was the look of utter disbelief in what he was seeing and hearing as his high school friend spoke about Jesus and His promise of eternal life.

Canoe had every reason to be stunned that day, as our high school relationship and the life we lived during those days were far from being Christ-centered. No need for details here, just know we were living for us, not for the glory of God.

Canoe stayed after the service at the funeral home and then joined us for lunch at the church. In fact, Canoe was the last one to leave that day. I could tell something was bugging him but yet I felt he was



not going to say anything unless I did. So I asked him a question, “What did you think of today?” He stumbled over his words as he answered, but really did not say anything. However, I knew what was bothering him. I then proceeded to tell him that I had a life-altering transformation of heart and direction in my life, and it was all because of Jesus. He continued to listen as I shared with him my encounter with Jesus and how everything has changed.

In Paul’s letter to the churches in Galatia, he explained to them that at one time he did not live a life that followed Christ, but rather persecuted Jesus. However, after an encounter with Jesus, the way in which he now lived was not for himself. Galatians 2:20 records, ***“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”***

Much in the same way the Galatians stood in disbelief of Paul’s new life, so stood my high school friend Canoe. I knew at that moment with my friend, that my story needed to be heard.

This is true with everyone that has had an encounter with Jesus. Although it is sometimes difficult to articulate, there are a few simple steps in sharing our story, or should we say, His Story!

- Begin by briefly explaining your life before Christ.
- Then transition to how you came to Christ. Include events leading up to your hearing and responding to the Gospel as well as sharing the “Good News” with the person.
- Finally, share your life after coming to Christ, the changes that you have made and your new direction; not that you are perfect, but since Jesus has become Lord of your life, the course of your life has altered.





I have not seen my high school friend since the day that I shared my story with him or what God is doing with it. However, this is what I have learned - each of us has a story that needs to be told and we must be ready to share it.

I think of it this way, God cannot use it if I do not tell it.





LESSON THREE | DEVOTION 1



THE FATHER'S REACTION



GROW, DEVOTION 2

John Stone

“Nevertheless, knowing that a person is not justified by works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the Law; since by works of the Law no flesh will be justified. But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Far from it!” Galatians 2:16-17 NASB

When was the last time you stopped to reflect on the love that your Heavenly Father has for you? Think about the incredible sacrifice He made to purchase you and the amazing future He has waiting for you (Ephesians 2:4-7). In light of these realizations, why would we still try to earn our salvation through our own efforts as though Jesus Christ is not sufficient in Himself? Our faith is based on Him who called us by name. He is called Faithful and True (Revelation 19:11) and has already completed the work that we so desperately needed but could not do for ourselves (John 19:30).

Picture with me a scene that plays out weekly at every location. A father comes to pick up his son or daughter from the nursery. This little preschooler runs to their dad with a picture that they have scribbled all over with crayons. Sometimes the color choices match the scene on the page, but most times not. Half the picture is not colored at all, the rest is wildly outside the lines. The technique is generally clumsy with broad arcs or jagged zigzags of color. It is hardly a Rembrandt or Monet (maybe Picasso). However, the most beautiful part is (or should be) the father's reaction. He scoops his little one up in his arms and exclaims “Wow! You colored that for





me?” The love he has for his child turns the Crayola disaster he is holding into a masterpiece.

This is justification. It is our Heavenly Father loving us so much that when He looks at us He sees His own Son, Jesus Christ. He sees beyond our poor choices, bad scenes, and clumsy technique. His love does not allow Him to judge us based on the wild zigzag of scribbling all over the page of our life. He sees a masterpiece, not because He is blinded to all our sin and imperfections, but because Christ took our sins, made them His own, and replaced them with His righteousness so that we could be justified in the eyes of our perfect Heavenly Father (Romans 3:21-26).

If we are honest, we know that we are not capable of coloring within the lines of our life. We need to stop trying to earn God’s love through our own efforts and instead, accept with humility the love that He freely gives us and be grateful to our Savior. We need to keep coloring the page of our lives with everything we have. One day we can run to our Father and present our masterpiece knowing that despite all our mistakes, to Him it will be beautiful.

“Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all.” Luke 18:17 (NASB)



RAISED WITH HIM THROUGH FAITH



GROW, DEVOTION 3

Sydney Kimball

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Galatians 2:20

When you tell others that you are a Christian, you are not only saying you identify with the family of God, but you are also saying you share in the death and resurrection of Christ. When we accept the free gift of salvation, we are dying to ourselves and our sins, and being raised to new life just as Christ was before us; we are **“crucified with Christ.”** He paid the price so that we, as believers, would no longer be forced to live by the law and be burdened by sin and shame as a result of breaking it. He brought a whole new meaning to the faith.

Take a moment to read Romans 8:2-3.

Jesus came to bring a new covenant to His people. It was no longer about religious traditions and Levitical Law. It was about loving Jesus and living a life that reflected that love and respect for Him. This concept is displayed by Paul when he wrote, **“The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”**

What he is saying here is that Christ loved us all so much that He gave His life for us so that we may have eternal life. If Christ was willing to do that out of His love for us, then we must allow our love for Him to alter the way we live. We must live as the resurrection power lives within us. We must live like we truly are a new creation.



LESSON THREE | DEVOTION 3



When you say, “Christ lives in me,” you are saying that the same resurrection power that raised Jesus from the dead lives in you! It is a hard concept to grasp. The Holy Spirit dwelling within us helps bring us conviction and guidance through life. That is why He is called the “Helper.” Abiding in the Holy Spirit allows us to live for Christ in the way God intended. He gives us the power and the authority to be ambassadors for the Kingdom of God just as Jesus was here on Earth.

So, leverage your gifts, the power of the Holy Spirit, and your love for the Lord in order to live like the power of the risen King dwells within you!



STEPPING WITH THE SPIRIT



GROW, DEVOTION 4

Pastor Josh Yates

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” Galatians 5:16-18

I love soccer, or should I say, futbol? I realize that I lost some of you just by saying that. I used to be that person too. Soccer is a game of high drama. IYKYK (If you know, you know). When your team scores, it is some of the highest elation in all of sports.

On May 8, 2019, my team, Tottenham Hotspur, was in the Champions League semi-final against Ajax, a team from Amsterdam. The Champions League is on par with the Super Bowl, only in Europe. The Spurs had lost the first leg of the semi-final 1-0 at home and had to go to Amsterdam to try to win. Ajax scored two goals in the first half and it seemed like my team was done. The team looked dejected; I was depressed at halftime. Then, one of the greatest comebacks in soccer history began. The Spurs came out like a different team, they were determined. They scored in the 55th minute and the 59th minute to draw to within 3-2. They had to score one more goal to win the semi-final. In soccer, when playing two legs of competition, the team that has the most away goals wins in the event of a tie over the two legs.

Spurs' shots were just wide multiple times, they hit the post at least twice. I was a mess! At the end of the match, five minutes of stoppage



time was added to the game because of injuries during the second half. Nothing was going our way. We had the ball at midfield with 94:53 on the clock. This would be the last chance. The ball was sent deep into the Ajax half of the field and controlled by one of the Spurs' players. Two passes later and with 95:01 showing on the clock, Lucas Moura put the ball in the back of the net to win the game and send the Spurs to the Champions League final, the first in the club's history.

This sent me into a frenzy (along with all other Spurs' fans) screaming at the top of my lungs and running in circles around my office. Jeannie, my wife, burst in the door to make sure I was not dying. The Spurs never gave up that day and they achieved an improbable victory, one that gives me goosebumps even as I write this.

So, why in the world do I share this in a devotional book?

We face an enemy every single day that is called the flesh. We have a choice each day whether we will serve God or serve our flesh. The flesh is the biggest tool of our enemy, Satan, to hinder us in our walk with God and make us ineffective in sharing the Gospel to those around us.

The Apostle Paul wrote Galatians to encourage the people in Galatia to return to following Jesus, not the false teachers that were leading them astray. They had been called to freedom, not a return to the slavery of sin in the flesh.

How do we overcome the lure and the pull that the flesh has on each and every one of us? We walk in the Spirit. We make a decision to follow and obey Jesus not just every day but in every situation. The only way we can know the decisions to make by walking in the Spirit





is to be in God's Word, asking God for His strength through prayer, and living in a community with God's people, the church.

It is like the story I shared today, we can choose to be down and out, thinking that the flesh will win; or we can look to God, choose to walk in the Spirit, and never give up.

If you choose the latter, you will receive the strength and power you need to overcome the temptations of the flesh. That is something to cheer and scream about at the top of your lungs while running around your office!



LESSON THREE | DEVOTION 4



FRUIT OF THE FLESH



GROW, DEVOTION 5

Pastor Josh Yates

“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Galatians 5:19-21

Today, we start a two-part devotional on the fruitiness of our lives. I do not know about you, but I love fruit. My favorite fruit is a pear. The sweetness and the texture are just amazing to me. As I write this, I am thinking about going to cut one up right now.

The interesting thing about fruit (and all things that we eat that are grown) is that each different fruit or vegetable is produced by a specific type of plant. Apples come from apple trees and oranges from orange trees. It would be insanity to look at an apple tree and expect to get pears from it!

Paul begins this section of his letter to the Galatians to talk about what fruit is being produced in their lives. He presents a list of works that people do that make it apparent that those works are from the flesh. It is a rough list.

He starts out his list with the works of sensuality. Sexual immorality here is the Greek word, *porneia*, which encompasses all kinds of sexual sin including adultery, fornication (sex before marriage), pornography, and more. The next two words encompass a desire to live in a sensual way continually.



Idolatry is placing anything above God. This can be even good things. Our family, job, hobbies, vacations, and finances are not necessarily bad things. However, when we place more of an importance upon them than we do on God, we have begun to worship them.

Sorcery is what it sounds like, using spells with the desire to get what you want. Palm reading, Ouija boards, dabbling in witchcraft, and even some of the seemingly harmless games we play fit into sorcery. The battle we wage is spiritual and we must remember that our enemy will use whatever he can to get us to focus on things other than God.

Paul then moves the list into a set of words that deal with our relationships with other people. We can be jealous of what others have, even envious. We can rage and rage about what someone did to us or to someone we love on social media. It is easy to try to get people on your side in an argument and the only outcome of that is dissension and division.

Finally, Paul addresses how people can party and let their hair down. I am not going to get into the wisdom of drinking alcohol today, but as Paul says, drunkenness is never okay. It is a loss of control and you do things you would never do when under the influence of drugs or alcohol. That leads to doing things with groups of people that you would never do those things with.

This is a rough list, and Paul does not pull punches. In verse 21, he warns, ***“Those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”*** Those that practice these things do not have the Spirit living in them and they will not be in Heaven on judgment day.

It can be easy to look at this list and dismiss the big ones at the beginning and at the end. It can even be somewhat easy to dismiss





the things in the middle. However, every single one of us has the possibility of falling into any of these if we are not diligent in seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Do you practice any of the things on this list? Be honest with yourself. If you do, ask God for forgiveness today. Ask Him to begin to mold you and shape you into the image of Jesus. Go to a trusted friend and ask them to help you overcome. Talk to your location pastor about how you can overcome this. You can even give me (Pastor Josh at Lake Orion) a call and I would be honored to help you.

Do you know Jesus? Have you given your life to him? God's Word tells us in Romans 10:9, ***"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."*** Believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He died on the cross for your sin and He raised from the dead to bring you life and you will be saved, right where you are today! Call on the name of Jesus, ask for His forgiveness and you will be made clean. If you made that decision today, give me a call! I would love to rejoice with you.

You can overcome what sins you struggle with! We will talk about that next.



LESSON THREE | DEVOTION 5



FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT



GROW, DEVOTION 6

Pastor Josh Yates

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.” Galatians 5:22-25

“Where’s the beef?”

I probably just seriously dated myself, but do you remember that phrase? Wendy’s used to have an elderly lady in their commercials that was always asking that question about their hamburgers. The only hamburger place that had a decent amount of beef was Wendy’s!

Along the lines of the question in that commercial, early on in my ministry in the early 2000’s a similar question became a staple in the youth ministries I pastored, “Where’s the fruit?”

What is the fruit of your life? Do you want to know who or what you live for? Take a look at the fruit your life is producing. How do we know if we bear good fruit? We simply look at the Fruit of the Spirit found in our passage today.

There is so much in this list that Paul presents to the Galatians. Love is unconditional and the fruit upon which the rest of the gifts are founded. Peace is only found in Jesus and is a peace that passes understanding.



The next three gifts are about our relationships with other people. Patience is exactly what it means, having patience! I always joke with people that you do not want to pray for patience because God will help you learn it by giving you opportunities to practice it! Kindness is having integrity in how you treat others. It is putting others first as Jesus taught, ***“The last will be first and the first will be last”*** (Matthew 20:16). Goodness is the uprightness of heart and of life. It is seen in living for God and loving those around you.

The final three are character traits within yourself. We need faithfulness to God and to those we love. We must add remaining true and believing the best. Gentleness is another way of speaking of meekness. It is strength under control. This leads to the final fruit of self-control. This is being able to have control under pressure and temptation.

The thing about this list (at least for me) is that it is a list that I struggle to live up to. It is kind of like spiritual whack-a-mole! I think that I am doing well in loving others and then my peace is struggling. I remain faithful in a situation and then self-control gives out! This is a daunting list to live up to if it was all about you!

The list Paul gave us yesterday is a more natural list. This is the list that comes naturally to us. The flesh lives in us and is at war with the Spirit that lives in us.

The list that we read today is called the fruit of myself, right? NO! It is the Fruit of the Spirit! This is not a list to get you to try more or to strive more. It is not to make you feel like you do not measure up. The fruit of this list is born in your life as you live in the strength of the Spirit and not the flesh. The Spirit lives in you and gives you the ability to live this way.





Matthew 7:17-18 says, ***“So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.”*** These are Jesus’ words. The fruit we bear is directly linked to who or what we are living for.

So, where is the fruit? Who or what are you living for? If the fruit of your life is lacking or represents some of the list from Galatians 5:19-21, run to Jesus. This is the beauty of the Gospel. Instead of our sin and struggle causing us to run away from God, the Gospel implores us to run to God and find His grace and mercy. Run to Jesus today and find forgiveness. Point your life toward Him and see the fruit of your life change in ways you never thought they would.

Run to Jesus and bear much fruit!



LESSON FOUR

GIVING

PASTOR JOSH YATES





Giving can be a tough topic to discuss. It is such a personal thing and for so many people, it can feel as though the church always talks about money or giving.

1. Do you feel like the church (The River and other churches you have been a part of) talks about money all the time? Is this rooted in truth or just perception?

Paul talked to the Galatians about caring for one another by carrying their burdens and doing good to everyone. This is important for the body of Christ (the Church) to be doing all of the time. Read Galatians 6:2-3 and 10.

2. How can you carry the burdens that other people carry?

3. What does it mean to ***“do good”*** to other people?

4. What keeps you from carrying the burdens of others?

The burdens people carry can be numerous and can seem as though we cannot meet every need. The reality is, we cannot meet every





need around us. However, if we allow God's Spirit to control us, when we live generously we can meet the needs that God brings to us and be a blessing. We can actually accomplish more than we think we can.

5. What do you think it means to live generously?

Marquis de Lafayette was a French officer who provided invaluable assistance to George Washington and the struggling American army. After the war was over, he returned to France and resumed his life as a farmer on many estates. In 1783, the harvest was a terrible one, and there were many who suffered as a result. Lafayette's farms were unaffected by the devastating crop failures. One of his workers offered what seemed to be good advice to Lafayette, "The bad harvest has raised the price of wheat. This is the time to sell." After thinking about the hungry peasants in the surrounding villages, Lafayette disagreed and said, "No, this is the time to give."

God blesses us not just for our own benefit, but also so that we can be a blessing to others in need. The tendency to hoard and try to build up more and more is a dangerous one, and the best antidote to greed is to be a generous giver. There is certainly no shortage of people in need today, and while we cannot meet every need, if we do what we can, God will multiply resources so that it is enough.

Read Luke 21:1-4. The story of the widow that gives just two copper coins into the offering box always convicts me. There are so many times in my life when I feel like I just do not have the ability to give. The reality is, I always have the ability to give, it just may not look like the people around me.





6. Do you ever feel like you cannot give? Describe that feeling and see if it is rooted in truth.

The amount of the gift is not as important as the heart behind the gift. We can give because of guilt or coercion. It might be something that you have always done because that is just what you do when you go to church.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-8. Christians were unusually generous with their money, especially to the poor in the early church. In fact, we learn in Acts chapter 4 that there was ***“not a needy person among them,”*** because they had sold some of their possessions to help those that needed it. The needy had no food and no ability to care for themselves. The people sought to meet the needs around them. The connection between a follower of Jesus and their generosity has been true of finances from the beginning of the church. Generosity and following Jesus go hand in hand.

7. Why is it so hard to talk about giving when it comes to our finances?

Paul spoke to the Corinthians about the importance of being generous in giving to the work of God. He encourages them here to be generous in every way by using an illustration about sowing and reaping. If a person sows sparingly, they will reap sparingly. If a person sows generously, then they will reap generously.





LESSON FOUR | GIVING



Sowing sparingly is like taking one seed at a time and carefully placing them one by one like they are putting a diamond in a vault. When you sow that way (sparingly), you will not see the harvest that would be plentiful. However, when you sow seeds generously and spread them all around (freely sowing), you will see a greater harvest because you have a greater opportunity to see that harvest!

Each person should give how they have decided in their heart with God because God loves a cheerful giver. We should not give out of guilt, compulsion, or even reluctantly.

8. What does it mean to be a cheerful giver?

9. Do you believe there is a connection between how we give and how we are blessed?

In 2012, we only owned one car and had two little girls (one is in college and the other is in eighth grade now). It was a 2002 Dodge Caravan that had over 125,000 miles on it; however, we thought we were good for a while. Then the engine blew a gasket and we were stuck. What were we going to do? Needless to say, it was a stressful time in our household. We had a little savings, but we did not have the money to go buy a new car. So we prayed.

For a little context, we had never really tithe consistently in our married life up to that point. We had made a decision a few years





earlier to give consistently of our finances to the church (and in other ways) as a commitment to God.

So, back to the story. The next day, our parents gave us \$1,000 toward a car to help out as they could. Then on Wednesday, a family in the youth ministry heard that our van blew up and they wanted to give us \$5,000. On Thursday that same family said they felt like they should give us \$8,000. Then two more families heard about our plight and donated \$3,000 more to us. We were able to purchase a 2009 Dodge Journey that we still drive today. We truly believe that through our obedience to God, He was able to bless us in a way that we could never imagine.

10. Does this mean that we should expect God to give money back to us if we give to Him? Should this be our motivation? Is this the right heart?

Sorry to answer the previous question in the actual study, but the glaring answer is no! This is what God did for us. He may do something like that for you. However, when we give we can know that God will use us to be His hands and feet in the lives of other people and He will also never let us down. He will provide for us and bless us in order to be a blessing to others.

Money is not the only thing that is part of living generously.





LESSON FOUR | GIVING



11. What are some other ways that you can give of yourself to love those around you by living generously?

When you give, you are giving to God Himself. Though what we give may be material, it takes on an eternal purpose when given to God. Give cheerfully whether you give of your time, talents, or treasure. Do good to everyone as you live generously!







LESSON FOUR | GIVING



RESTORE THE CAUGHT



GIVING, DEVOTION 1

Philip Piasecki

“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.” Galatians 6:1

My wife absolutely loves her Air Pods. She uses them when she is working out, when she is cleaning, and when she is sleeping. Occasionally they would go missing, but luckily they would always end up being tracked down and still functioning. Me, being the awesome, kind, and loving husband that I am, decided one day to remind her to be careful with them. The conversation went something like, “You use them all the time, you think that you would be more careful with them; just try to take better care of them.” Then, not too long after this conversation, they went missing again. The problem was when they finally turned up they were found in my pants pocket in the washing machine, permanently ruined. After I was so quick to get on my high horse and explain to her how to take care of her things, I ended up being the one to break them. Thankfully my wife is kind and loving and forgave me. She also got a brand new pair for Mother’s Day.

Galatians 6:1 says, ***“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”***

I tell this story because I could not help but think about it while reading Galatians 6:1. Here I was so focused on her potential fault of losing or breaking the Air Pods that I completely stopped “keeping



watch” on myself. Also, even though I clearly messed up, she was still willing to forgive me. Obviously, Galatians 6:1 is talking about something more serious than taking care of an electronic gadget. It is talking about a fellow believer who is caught in a sin, and what we are supposed to do in response to it. Reach, Gather, Grow, and Back to Reach is the heartbeat of our church. It is our desire as staff and Pastors that everyone is growing in these areas daily. As we grow, we then go back out to reach people, and one area of people that needs to be reached is those who have fallen into sin.

Let me first clarify that when a believer falls into the snares of sin, there are repercussions. For example, if a believer is caught in the transgression of stealing from the church, even when they are restored, they probably are not going to be allowed anyone near the church's finances in the future. However, that does not mean that they are to be useless for the Kingdom for the rest of their lives. Galatians commands us to restore those who have been caught in any transgression. The forgiveness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not limited. Please, do not limit the forgiveness of Christ in your own life. It is powerful enough to bring healing to any sinful situation. Restoration is a process, it is not a one-day thing. We need to seek wisdom from the Lord in each situation so that we can see clearly what needs to be done. For true restoration to happen, the believer who has been caught in sin needs to openly and honestly acknowledge their sin and be living in clear repentance. It needs to be repentance that is sorry for their sin, not just sorry they got caught. This can be a difficult process. I believe this is why the verse says, ***“You who are spiritual.”*** It takes biblical understanding and spiritual wisdom to navigate the situation. Restoration from sin is a tricky thing, but it is something that is possible if the transgressor is willing to repent and it is something the Lord desires for that person.





The Lord has offered so much forgiveness and restoration to us, so we need to be willing to reach out to others in gentleness and offer them the same restoration. Regardless of our past, the Lord has a plan for each and every one of us. We need to be willing to let the Lord use us to bring restoration from sin in other believers' lives. Also, as the verse warns, we need to keep watch on ourselves as well. We do not want to find ourselves falling into sin and needing this restoration as well. As we try and reach others, please be willing to find those who have fallen away, and encourage them to see that there is forgiveness and restoration offered to them from the Lord.



LESSON FOUR | DEVOTION 1





I CAN CARRY YOU

GIVING, DEVOTION 2

Jeannie Yates

“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.” Galatians 6:2-3

There are two ways to bring in the groceries: taking several trips or the right way, taking all the bags at once. Raise your hand if you are an all-the-bags-in-one-trip person! When my husband and I were first married, we rented an apartment on the second floor and we always made sure to load up our arms to carry everything in one trip. Bringing in groceries is much easier now that I can simply pull up, honk my horn, and enlist my minions, I mean children, to carry them in for me!

The Apostle Paul writes in Galatians 6:2, ***“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”*** Have you ever felt burdened? It is easy to get bogged down in life, to have worries and pressures of the day-to-day weigh down your heart and mind; but if we read the verse before this, we see that Paul is talking about a specific kind of burden. Galatians 6:1 says, ***“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”*** Sin is the heaviest and loneliest burden to carry, and if we are to survive the temptation that leads to sin, we have to enlist believers to help us carry it. In fact, James tells us to confess our sins to other believers so that we may be healed (James 5:16).



We need each other - that is why getting into a Growth Community is so important! Not only will you then have a group of people to talk about the Bible and pray with, but you will have others to help bear your burdens. Maybe, there is someone that needs you to help carry their burden. We have to be ready, willing, and able to help one another in a ***“spirit of gentleness”*** and not with pride or judgment. We are just as susceptible as anyone else. The next verse in Galatians warns us about this, ***“For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself”*** (Galatians 6:3).

Hebrews 12:1 reminds us, ***“Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”*** In order to run the race before us, we have to lay down the things that hold us back. Do not wait, do not put it off. If you are struggling under the weight of temptation or sin, you do not have to bear it alone.

In one of my favorite movies, *“The Return of the King,”* Frodo has been given the daunting task of destroying the One Ring in the fire of Mordor. His dear friend, Samwise Gamgee, has taken the journey with Frodo all the way from the Shire. As they climb Mount Doom and the burden is almost too much for Frodo to bear, Sam gently reminds him, “I can’t carry it for you, but I can carry you.”



SOWING AND REAPING



GIVING, DEVOTION 3

Justin Dean

“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.” Galatians 6:7-8

We have all heard the typical, “It’s not you, it’s me” breakup line. More times than not we know that what they are really saying is, “It’s you, but I am trying to be nice.” Generally, we blame relationships that do not go the way we want on other people. It is not just romantic relationships, but friendships, work relationships, and even family ties. We do not like to accept that we may have a part to play in some of the negative interactions we have with others.

Paul calls us to a different line of thinking in Galatians 6:7-8, ***“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”***

Hopefully, you know that we are called to both care for and disciple other people. Jesus commands us to do both of these things in Mark 12:29-31 and Matthew 28:19-20. Some of us handle these commands in different ways. Some do not follow the Spirit and thus ruin their testimony to others because they are choosing to live, react, and speak according to the flesh. The flesh runs how they interact with others, specifically those closest to them. Some people avoid deep relationships with others because they fear their own shallowness. Some of us speak too much truth without caring or loving those we



are discipling and thus, cause deep wounds resulting in broken relationships. Others of us focus so much on loving and comforting others that we do not ever challenge them and speak truth into their lives.

To see how we should sow our relationships with the Spirit, read Ephesians 4:15, ***“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”***

Together, we are called to grow, share the Gospel, and support others in both truth and love. Healthy discipleship cannot happen when one is without the other. We have to be willing to be intentional about how we grow together and reach others with the Gospel.

We see that in John 4:34-36; Jesus says that people are ready, so we should be too, ***“Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest?’ Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.”***

Galatians chapter 6 is calling us to answer some questions regarding how we are interacting with others. Are you willing to sow intentionally by both speaking and living the Gospel? Are you ready to reap the harvest through spiritual conversations and discipling others?

As you wrap up your time in devotions today, I want to encourage you to spend some time praying for some people in your life with whom you need to be more intentional (spouse, kids, boss, friends, and neighbors). Ask God to show you how to sow more seeds by living and speaking the Gospel to them this week.



CHINESE BAMBOO TREE



GIVING, DEVOTION 4

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.” Galatians 6:9

I enjoy the story of two frogs that fell into a tub of cream. One looked at the high sides of the tub which were too difficult to crawl over and said, “It is hopeless.” He gave up and sunk to the bottom of the container. The other one refused to give up. He kept swimming and kicking. In the process of survival, he was churning the cream without even knowing it. Finally, he found himself on a solid platform of butter and jumped to safety.

Although this story may seem a little childish, I think we all have times when we are barely treading water. It feels like we are spinning our wheels with no visible success. Where is the hope?

Galatians 6:9 reminds us, ***“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”*** God knows there will be times when we feel we are doing everything right and it just does not seem to make a difference. We ask, “Why try?” This can be from filling out applications and sending out resumes to reading the Word and praying. We strive to be diligent, but our efforts seem fruitless. I feel for the missionaries who pour out their hearts for years and even decades without seeing anyone come to the Lord. I respect and appreciate their faithfulness. Their calling is to obedience while leaving the results to God. Our calling is to obedience. We must “not grow weary of doing good.” Keep praying for the salvation of loved ones. Continue to read the Bible and ask for help or an explanation when needed. Fall forward.



LESSON FOUR | DEVOTION 4



The Chinese bamboo tree is very interesting. It needs water and fertilizer every day for five years before it even breaks through the ground. Once it breaks through the earth, it can grow 35-36 inches in a day eventually reaching upwards to ninety feet in height. We look way up trying to see the top of the tree forgetting the faithfulness of five years of “nothing.”

Keep planting seeds and watering. Success is a journey, not a destination.

“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” 1 Corinthians 15:58





DOING GOOD

GIVING, DEVOTION 5

Angela Cox

“So then, while we [as individual believers] have the opportunity, let us do good to all people [not only being helpful, but also doing that which promotes their spiritual well-being], and especially [be a blessing] to those of the household of faith (born-again believers).” Galatians 6:10 AMP

What does it mean to do good as a believer? Many times, we look at that as giving to the homeless and feeding the hungry. However, there is so much more to our role as Christians to “do good.”

Paul is speaking to the Galatian Christians about not growing tired of doing good. He reminds them that their work will pay off when the “crops” come in. What is Paul referring to? When we are invested and take time to pour into people’s lives, God will reward us with an abundant harvest.

What do you do to do good as a believer? I know for me, it is showing the love of Jesus in my everyday walk. A simple smile, holding the door, or just simply being kind does a lot. I think when we can show love, people see Jesus through it all. Through that love, Jesus rewards us for being obedient!

I think people can look at “doing good” as a lot of work, but the reality is, it is the most freeing thing we can do as Christians. As we let go of our ways and choose to trust the process, we see God’s favor and reap the harvest!



“Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act.” Psalm 37:4-5

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.” Proverbs 3:5-6

A big part of doing good is trusting Him. Like Paul is saying in this book, he is speaking to the Galatians that they will be rewarded for their hard work and to not grow tired. It is trusting the process, trusting our Heavenly Father, that the love and good we pour out to the world will be worth the reward.





IT'S ALL FOR HIM

GIVING, DEVOTION 6

James Mann

“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.” Galatians 6:14-15

As a children's director, one of my favorite things to do is to listen to the conversations that children have. There is a battle that goes on almost weekly of who was up the latest and who got the least amount of sleep. It is one of the strangest things that I see children take pride in. Somehow, in their minds, the lowest amount of sleep you get equates to how cool you are. It reminds me of how adults often compare who worked more that week as if the more hours you put in that week makes you a better person. Understand that this is not a knock on anyone. As I am writing this, Easter 2022 has recently ended and I have realized how many times I have said, “Man, I worked 62 hours Easter week.” The truth is there is no bragging right in that.

As we are learning about going back to reach, I have begun to challenge myself with the state of my heart in serving Him. Is my focus to do more than anyone else around me? Am I trying to serve constantly so others look at me and are amazed at how good of a leader I am? Am I working with one eye forward on the work and one eye looking back at who is watching me? Am I looking for the call out during a meeting for going above and beyond? The truth is we all need to evaluate our mindset when we serve.



I believe one of the things that Paul is hitting heavily on here is the idea, “Who am I to boast? The only good things that have occurred have only occurred because of my Lord.” Paul constantly spends time in his ministry pointing people to the Lord. He does not want any of the credit, nor is he looking to be raised up in any way. He just wants people to see what the Lord is doing, and Paul just feels grateful that the Lord is using him as a tool in the process.

Paul points to the actions of the circumcised and uncircumcised, which refers to the Jewish believers and the Gentiles. He is saying that it does not matter what you do to try and work your way into Heaven as a Jew or Gentile. Our actions mean nothing without the actions of the Lord. That is who we should be pointing to when it comes to what we are doing with our lives. We should all spend some time evaluating our hearts when we are going back to reach and make sure that we are doing it with the intent of furthering the Kingdom of God and not elevating ourselves.









OUR MISSION

Matthew 28:19-20: ***“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.”***

REACH

At The River Church, you will often hear the phrase, “We don’t go to church, we are the Church.” We believe that as God’s people, our primary purpose and goal is to go out and make disciples of Jesus Christ. We encourage you to reach the world in your local communities.

GATHER

Weekend Gatherings at The River Church are all about Jesus, through singing, giving, serving, baptizing, taking the Lord’s Supper, and participating in messages that are all about Jesus and bringing glory to Him. We know that when followers of Christ gather together in unity, it’s not only a refresher it’s bringing life-change.

GROW

Our Growth Communities are designed to mirror the early church in Acts as having ***“all things in common.”*** They are smaller collections of believers who spend time together studying the Word, knowing and caring for one another relationally, and learning to increase their commitment to Christ by holding one another accountable.

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