

2-18-19

A couple of pointers:

- this is not a marathon, not a sprint. Meaning if you miss a day/reading, just pick it up the next day. Do not overwhelm yourself. That's okay.
- - The Bible is God's word for our lives, it is alive and it changes us over time. Key phrase over time.
- - If you have any questions regarding the readings/meaning feel free to let me know and I'll gladly walk with you over that passage.

2-19-19

Today the readings are ch 4-7 from Genesis.

Another way to keep track of the readings is by downloading the Bible app,

2-20-19

Today's reading (Genesis 8-12) is FULL of headliners!!!

From Noah to Babel to Abram . . . a lot to unpack Yes, I too skimmed through a lot of the names/genealogy.

If you have any questions feel free to let me/us know.

We read in private but we grow together.

2-21-19

Today we switch gears and go to the first 5 chapters of the book of Job.

It's incredible even "the greatest man of the people in the East" crumbled to pain.

Praise God for 1 For 10:13

"No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; he'll never let you be pushed past your limit; he'll always be there to help you come through it."

2-22-19

Today's reading is Job chapters 6-9.

Job's open cry to God is visceral and candid. He doesn't mince any words and is determined to "not keep silent but speak out in anguish" Job 7:11

This story is not over yet . . . it's just getting started.

2-23-19

Today's reading is Job 10-13.

We can see Job going back and forth, almost in a delirious way, showing defiance and allegiance to God.

This story is just warming up.

2-24-19

Job 14-16

The 3rd friend speaks up, and like the other 2 his words are eloquent (and perhaps even correct) but his approach/timing is off.

Job continues zigzagging between all of his emotions, but there's a KEY difference: the friends are mostly correct as they talk ABOUT God, while Job is mostly incorrect but he's talking TO God.

2-25-19

Job 17-20

The dialogue and distress continues . . .

My fav part is 19:25-26 "but as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives . . . and after my body has decayed, yet in my body I'll see God!"

Our journey here on earth is merely that, a journey. One day we will all meet the Author and Sustainer of our lives. for Job this was a source of hope in the midst of his affliction.

2-26-19

Their back and forth continues . . . I can identify with Job when he says "why do the wicked live on and increase in power?" 21:7. While in pain our optics are affected and I too tend to compare and see others waaaay better than me, while I sallow in my pity party.

2-17-19

These past few days I've been traveling and the change of pace really throws off my rhythm. . .

This morning I was able to squeeze in my reading by using the Bible App and have it READ IT to me as I was driving to work.

Not quite the same as me using a physical Bible, but sometimes I got to get crafty.

2-28-19

Job continues zigzagging, lamenting his condition to God . . . again, something I can totally see myself doing and even a fraction of how righteous Job was!

Hidden in the first verse of chapter 31 there's a gem: "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a young woman".

Currently I'm reading (listening) to a book by Devon Franklin that target lust (money, sex success) and it amazes me to find even Job makes a point to make a covenant with his EYES . . . good stuff.

3-1-19

Presenting: Elihu, the last man in this story. BTW kudos to you guys for sticking through 2/3 of the book of Job!!

Elihu is the youngest and basically tells Job no one is justified/clean/holy enough for God to owe them anything. It's a bit confusing because in chapter 1 verse 1 (and 8) it declares Job as a "blameless and upright man".

Does this mean Job was "perfect" in the sight of God? No. However he was "above the reproach in the sight of men. This is what blameless refers to.

We ought to aim to this standard ourselves as well lead men and women (Titus 1:6 and 1 Tim 3:2), but it shouldn't come at the price of fighting God because we think of ourselves 'holier than thou'.

3-2-19

Today's reading is the end of Job's last friend argument and moving forward we will see God Himself responding to Job.

For those of you catching this reading in the past few days it might be strange to read these plights, complaints, and back and forth. This is part of reading a full story as opposed to single Bible verses.

Reading the full written story of God is the equivalent of going into the kitchen and seeing all of the ingredients on the counter . . . some are very obvious while others we have no idea how they'll fit in.

Hang in there, it'll all come together and as we see the cooking process we will taste the unexpected flavors here and there.

This is God's story, and it relates to us. Not the other way around He is God and as Job said in the beginning . . . "I came naked into this world and naked I'll leave. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

3-3-19

And The Lord spoke . . .

A couple things:

- God spoke . . . not to be confused with God "answered" Job
- God spoke "out of the storm". Sometimes we hear His voice in the whisper, but other times it is in the loudness and chaos of life. God can be heard in any season.
- God displays His grandiosity and wisdom, yet this is the same God that knows us intimately . . . God even knows the number of hairs we have on our head (Matthew 10:29-31)

3-4-19

And just like that we finished the book of Job!

Couple of observations:

- God keeps reminding Job of His glory, wisdom, and sovereignty. This brings clarity to Job. Let us not lose sight of the holiness of our God
- God was upset, get this, with Job's FRIENDS because they have "not spoken truth" about God . . . like Job did! This tells me even if our optics are off, God honors us going pleading, even whining to Him as opposed to having Christian conversations . . .in short, Job prayed while his friends talked.

3-5-19

Today we go back to Genesis!!

We pick up with Abram (later to have his name changed to Abraham by God).

the story opens with God making Abram a promise to bless him in order for "the earth to be blessed through him" Gen 12:2-3

Even though the promise to Abram was particular (He was the one chosen to be the father of Israel), the idea of blessing others through our blessings is pretty consistent with the Bible.

3-6-19

Genesis 16-18 takes us to God dealing with the “father of all nations” Abram/Abraham.

I forgot how they obeyed God and even got circumcised as ADULTS and a mark of a new covenant. Later on we’ll see in Deut. 30 and reaffirmed in Rom 2 that this is a symbol of the work God seeks to do in our own hearts.

Towards the end of chapter 18 we see Abraham “negotiating” with God. It’s comforting to see as majestic as God is, he still engages us and welcomes our “moves”. It reminds me of my kids when they wanted to “sell” me things... I know it all is still mine, but I welcome (and enjoyed) the relationship

3-7-19

Genesis 19-21 is one of those “R rated explicit” passages in the Bible.

I’m not too sure how decadent/deviant Sodom and Gomorra was but it was very clear justice and thoughtfulness weren’t their moral compass.

By now you should see how our “ingenuity” only complicates our lives:

- Adam and Eve took and ate from the forbidden fruit... in order to be like God
- Abram established a “half truth” about his wife... in order to gain safe access in different nations
- Sara offered their maid to Abram... in order to fulfill (get this) God’s promise
- Lot offered his two daughters to a mob of decadent men... in order to “save” two angels
- Lot’s two daughters inebriated their dad and had sex with him.... in order to preserve the family line

What God promises, God delivers.

Let us steer clear from “assisting” God by taking shortcuts.

St. Augustine once said “Right is right even if no one is doing it; wrong is wrong even if everyone is doing it.”

3-8-19

Genesis 22-24 open with God testing Abraham. This is not rare. You can see that in Job’s life and later on king David asks God to “examine his heart” as well.

Abraham took the test, not as a test but as simple obedience to God and, as always, God provided a way.

Many times we get job opportunities, proposals, bids, and our task was just follow through. Sometimes we get the job/task/bid (human success) but other times we do not (human failure).

One could say Abraham FAILED because he didn't sacrifice his son, but in reality he was called to listen/obey God. In other words he PASSED the test while, by human standards, failing to execute the plan.

3-9-19

Genesis 25-26 show the end of Abraham's life and a closer look to his sons, in particular Isaac.

Did you catch how Isaac in Gen 26:7 used the exact same lie/excuse his father used before? Like father, like son, like me.

We all have traits, habits that we carry from way way back. The battle between self-preservation and faith... the irony of it all is that it is in the Light that we find freedom and peace of mind, not in the cobweb of 1/2 truths.

3-10-19

Gen 27-28-29 tells us of the family dynamics of Isaac. He had twins (Esau and Jacob) and they couldn't be any different.

The more I read the more I get a sense of favoritism from the parents (Isaac and Rebekah) and the ensued rivalry between the kids. This all culminated with Jacob tricking his father and creating deep family tensions.

As some would say, Jacob had a "karma" moment when his uncle tricked him in a similar way he tricked his father years before! I just think it was interested God left that piece of info there for us to see...

Jacob, Isaac, Abraham, they all are presented as they were, warts and all. And yet these were the men God used to bless the nations of the world.

If there was hope for them, there's hope for us!

3-11-19

Gen 30-31 we see more of Jacob and his relationships with Labán, Leah, and Rachel.

These passages are difficult for me to discern what God is doing because they're flooded with family, hierarchy, procreation, sex, deceit, assumptions, and even a secret escape!

It just seems like Jacob is reaping some of his early mistakes, and then there's family money getting involved and everything is exacerbated.

3-12-19

Gen 32-34 paints the picture of reconciliation between Jacob and Esau. My fav verse was 33:10 when Jacob tells his brother (whom he hasn't seen in 20 years!) "To see your face is like seeing the face of God."

There's something "heavenly" about touching base and reconnecting with those that know us best.

3-13-19

Gen 35-37 shows God changing Jacob's name to Israel. There's a precedent with God doing the same with Abram to Abraham.

These new names were prophetic, as Apple would say they were an "upgrade".

Throughout the Bible we will see that God gives us a new nature (2 Cor 5:17) and even a new name (Rev2:17)

I'm not sure what my name is/will be, but I know most of you at a personal level and I wouldn't be surprised if some of your God given names aren't:

- Faithful
- Caring
- Honest
- Reliable
- Present
- Joy
- Peace

3-14-19

Gen 38-40 tells us about Joseph (one of my fav stories) but it also mentions Judah right in the middle.

Judah's story is fascinating because it was him, and not Joseph, the one who God used to birth forth Jesus (see Jesus' genealogy in Mathew 1). Judah was a regular man, you can say he was "kind" by not having Joseph killed, but to the core he was self-centered.

Didn't care much for Tamar and in fact has a burst of self-righteousness against her when in reality he was the main perpetrator. Once confronted with the truth, he acknowledged his ego and did the right thing.

Do not miss Judah's transformation in the midst of Joseph's story. We might all want to associate ourselves with Joseph, but knowing my own heart I'm more like Judah.

3-15-19

Gen 41-42 is like the script out of a movie!!!

Before rushing into the plot let us consider that Joseph stayed in prison 2 years before Pharaoh asked for him... TWO years!!! Yes, God made promises and yes God is always faithful, but it all doesn't always happen in OUR timeline.

"God is never late and rarely early. He is always exactly right on time--His time." — Dillon Burroughs

Moving on to Joseph and his brothers, that's a story on its own!!!

3-16-19

Gen 43-45 tells us the story of Joseph and how it unfolds.

A key principle is when Joseph tells his brothers "it was not YOU who sent me here, but GOD." 45:8 God ordains, directs, and redeems our steps.

Not to be lost in the shuffle is the transformation for Judah, from a selfish cheat to a selfish leader.

3-17-19

Gen 46-47 tells us about Jacob's trip to Egypt to meet Joseph and Joseph's admin skills.

There are a lot of names I quite frankly glossed over, but as we are about to finish Genesis a sense of appreciation for the people of Israel came to mind.

Throughout history Israel has faced challenging situations, but as you have/will see they represent in the Bible a picture of our own journey of faith.

3-18-19

And just like that we finished our 2nd book of the Bible, Genesis.

Reading these last 3 chapters make me appreciate the integrity of Joseph and his perspective. This is in full display when he said "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended for good to accomplish what is now being done..." Gen 50:19-20

Amazing perspective! Ultimately Joseph trusted God for purpose, but also for justice.

3-19-19

Welcome to Exodus!

This is the story of God, Moses and the Israelites. This is where it all begins! In fact "exodus" means exit, which encapsulates their exit from Egypt and Pharaoh.

In these first 3 chapters we learn about Moses' birth, his relationship to Pharaoh, and God's faithfulness towards his people.

One little nugget is the correlation between God's activity on earth (3:8) and our obedience (3:10). In other words, God has chosen to carry out his wonders through (drumroll please...) US!

3-20-19

Exodus 4-6 continues with the story of God, his people, and Moses.

Did you catch 5:21-23 when the Israelites accused Moses of making things worse rather than better? The word/promise was God liberating them from Egypt... their current reality was Pharaoh making their lives even MORE miserable

It seems as if right before the breakthrough we are handed the breakdown. May us follow the Author of life and not be swayed by current circumstances.

3-21-19

Exodus 7-9 tells us about Moses' calling/obedience, the plagues, and how Pharaoh reacted to each of these plagues.

Do not miss one crucial detail: the heart of Pharaoh. To be more precise, the HARDENED heart of Pharaoh. If this were our first encounter with the biblical text one could be led to think that it is God himself the author of our hardened heart. However as we study the Bible we see that a hardened heart isn't a condition reserved for the "bad guys" in the Bible but also to the Apostles (see the story of Jesus walking on water in Mark 8).

Our hearts could easily be hardened by our own selfishness, by our own egos. In the case of Pharaoh he was motivated by self-preservation, and in the case of the Apostles they were motivated by their need to be catered, served, flattered. These motivations aren't that different from my own motivations and thus I too must ask God constantly to "search" my heart and keep it plugged in, attached, to Him.

3-22-19

While reading Exodus 10-12 the whole concept of God hardening Pharaoh's heart kept bothering me. It seemed capricious to "manipulate" a situation and then turn around and pass judgement.

While doing some research I came across this quote:

"The sun can melt wax or harden clay. If a substance melts or hardens is not determined by the sun but by the material the sun shines on."

This helped me understand its really the make up of our own heart, and not the light of God, that hardens or softens us.

Let us keep coming to the Light to be shaped, transformed, and made alive!

3-23-19

Did you catch how the Lord asked the Israelites to “encamp” right where they’d feel the most tension?

God had a lesson of faith prepared and it required maximum attention, even desperation.

God met his people right in this juncture, right at this near breaking point.

Does this means that God will always deliver us from every breaking point? No, that’s not what I see in the Bible.

I do see God meeting us there; sometimes He delivers us, sometimes He does not. God the Father met Jesus at his breaking point, and did not intervene. However the mere presence of God was more than sufficient for Jesus himself to endure the ultimate pain.

But did you noticed how fickle the faith of the Israelites was? Just saw the hand of God deliver them through 10 plagues, and they wished they’d have died in Egypt. Shortly after they see God splitting the Red Sea only to complain about the drinkability of a river stream (Ex 15:25). This shows me miracles do not produce long-lasting results... and yet it is miracles what we most likely ask God for

3-24-19

Exodus 16-18 reminds me how we magnify and glorify the time we lived under slavery. Slavery to the Egyptians for the Israelites, slavery to ourselves in our case.

Fleeting thoughts come and lure us to believe “living in bondage” is better than living in dependence of God. May God give us enough grace to rebuke those thoughts and realize a day apart from the Lord is a day closer to the dark, the chaos, a lame photocopy of who we really are.

On Chapter 18 we see Moses’ humbleness by taking the wise counsel of his father-in-law

3-25-19

When considering these chapters, and the introduction of the 10 Commandments, I go back to a quote by G.K Chesterton:

“The more I considered Christianity, the more I found that while it had established a rule and order, the chief aim of of that order was to give room for good things to run wild.”

Let us not be fooled. Every system comes with rules. Even lawlessness come with the rule of not following the rules! At the end of the day we have to decide which master to serve, either our Creator, a lame photocopy, or our flawed judgement.

3-26-19

Exodus 22-24 has a lot of regulations!!! From loaning money, interpersonal relationships, and even between humans and animals... yes, it's there 🤔

God seems to move in stages with Israel. In the beginning there's a lot of miracles and wonders, but also drastic punitive consequences. As we move along God moves from external force for/against us to internal nudges towards freedom/bondage.

Early on my walk with God was much more emotional, miraculous even! Nowadays is more subtle, but deeper. Less about God wooing me and more about me trusting.

3-27-19

Exodus 25-27 has many details for the building of the Tabernacle. This construction was made to indicate the location in which the Israelites could experience God to the fullest.

The good news is that nowadays God makes his home in our very hearts! "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."
Rom 5:5

Keep in mind the Old Testament is like the "prequel" to our present reality in Jesus Christ.

3-28-19

These specifications for the tabernacle (yesterday) and the priest's garments (today) aren't easy reads... at least to me.

The easiest way I find to go through these passages is to compare their symbolism with our reality in Jesus.

Whereas the Israelites were expected to present specific sacrifices in order to commune with God, today our reality is different. God himself provided the ultimate sacrifice and now we have open access to God. Open, not free.

3-29-19

Exodus 30-32 are PACKED with detailed info regarding God's early dealings with his people. I'd like to point out a few things:

A) there's rhythm in the way God instructed his people to approach him.

B) as soon as the people doubted God (capital G), they created another god (lowercase G)

C) following God will come at a price. Early here we see violence, later Jesus would reaffirm the value/cost of following Him

3-30-19

There's a lot to cover on Exodus 33-35, but I'd like to zero in on 34:14 where it states "Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God"

A CT this past week told me he cannot believe in a jealous God because that seems as if God is "insecure". A similar claim was made by Oprah (simply Google Oprah/God/jealous) The best way I can explain this is in the context of marriage. Now suppose another person is trying to alienate a husband or wife's affections, tempting either spouse to violate the purity of their marriage relationship. If that's the case jealousy is the right response due to imminent danger the spouse is being exposed to.

You see, God isn't jealous because he's lonely (he's not), insecure (most def not), or capricious. He's jealous because as a good spouse, or a good shepherd (Psalms 23), he knows there are "fake" shepherd who ultimately want to destroy us, our relationships, and our freedom.

3-31-19

Kudos to you guys if you were able to plow through all the specificities of the Tabernacle, the arc, the table, etc shared in chapters 36-38.

One little thing I'd like to point out and is from the beginning of chapter 36. It says that the people were bringing MORE THAN ENOUGH to the house of the Lord! To the point Moses had to tell them to stop!

Many times I give with a mentality of "scarcity" instead of a mentality of "abundance". Our God is a generous God and more than I can think of, He has come through for me and my family. Trust me, not out of my awesome skills, but out of His faithfulness

4-1-19

Today we finished Exodus by reading the last two chapters, 39 and 40.

It finishes with last touches details regarding the tabernacle (the physical place where God would meet his people).

Notice how on 40:34 it says "then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." Do not miss the THEN part.

Many times we (specially I) hope/expect to see the glory of God BEFORE obeying, before exercising faith. This book of exodus clearly makes a case for the following order: obedience/faith and then we see the glory of God

4-2-19

Welcome to Leviticus!!!

Today is a good day to reconnect with the word of God.

The theme of this book is God and His holiness. A holy God expects holiness from us . . . and since He knows we are nothing but He also provides a pathway, a substitute. That way His justice is served and our flawed heart redeemed.

4-3-19

Leviticus 5-7 is a tough read for us since our culture is far remove from anything resembling animal sacrifices.

When we read about this usually thoughts like this are the ones that come to mind:

“The gods are angry with me and are going to kill me. But, maybe if I kill this animal and make sure the gods get their pound of flesh, they’ll be appeased and happy, and just maybe, they won’t kill me or send a plague on my family. Sure it’s barbaric, but so are the gods.”

This system of sacrifices wasn’t foreign to this culture and it provided a) a way for them to be at peace with God b) clarity of right vs wrong and c) a constant reminder to reconcile with each other.

4-4-19

Leviticus 8-10 is a continuation of the establishment of God’s temple and worship. However chapter 10 is a curveball.

Here we have the story of Nadab and Abihu. These were Aaron’s oldest sons and died abruptly after offering “unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command” Lev 10:1

God is establishing his holiness and the same fire that cleanses us also has the power to kill us. There’s sacredness in this world. Not everything is a free for all.

In fact, knowing (fearing) this sacredness is told to be the “beginning of wisdom” as later stated in Proverbs.

4-5-19

Leviticus 11-13 continues with the ordinances of Israel and what makes them fit or unfit (clean vs unclean) for worship.

From which animals to eat, to what kind of boldness is appropriate, God was establishing his presence in the minutia of their lives. As if to say, “I’m the God of your everyday, not just one day a week”

4-6-19

Leviticus 14-15 open with ceremonial regulations for those with skin diseases.

If they're thought to be clean, they need to be brought to the priest, and then the priest would go outside, examine them thoroughly, have them shaved their head/beard/eyebrows, and even then they needed to stay outside their tent for 7 days.

Now take a peek at Luke 17 when Jesus tells the 10 men with leprosy "Go, show yourself to the priest" 17:16. You, go, by yourself to your adjuster, to the one who holds the key to your acceptance and rejection.

Knowing full well they were still sick, these 10 men simply took Jesus at his word, "and as they went, they were cleansed."

Let us have this faith, today.

4-7-19

Better later than never....

Leviticus 16-18 remind us of one thing: God is to be approach on His own terms, and not ours.

I heard the preacher alluding to this this morning during church, and he even mentioned Cain (wanting to give first fruits as an offering) and Abel (presenting a sacrifice as an offering) and how God saw favorably Abel's offering. It wasn't because God didn't appreciate fruits and vegetables, but because throughout scripture we see the concept of SACRIFICE.

Towards the end of these chapters God goes in to d e t a i l s on sexual behavior between his people. I'll let you guys check that one out on your own...

4-8-19

Leviticus 19-21 start out with a reference to the 10 commandments, then it goes back into physical/sexual expectations, and ends with the criteria for Aaron's sons.

There's a lot to cover, from tattoos to beard trimmings, local vs general principles, but a general idea is this: God cares about our appearance, sexual behavior, and family relations.

I can take all those 3 principles and go to work, since I too fall short from Lev 19:2b "be holy because I, the Lord your God, Am holy."

4-9-19

Leviticus 22-23 continues the proper order for ceremonies and introduces the festivities God wants his people to celebrate.

The verse that caught my attention was 22:9. I usually read from a NIV translation, but for clarification I went to a TheMessage transliteration:

“The priests must observe my instructions lest they become guilty and die by treating the offerings with irreverence. I am God who makes them holy.”

This verse spoke to me.
I have to think more about this verse personally...

4-10-19

Lev 24-25 continue with the story of God establishing law and order for Israel.

It's truly amazing how these laws, either in literally or symbolically, have shaped our world. The idea of a God who is holy, good, and personal and how this God expects people to act accordingly, is something I can see in the values we as a society hold dear and I've witness first hand are NOT common everywhere in this world.

This book of Leviticus is very particular to Israel, however this story has shaped the way we see God and others.

4-11-19

The last 2 chapters of Leviticus finish with ceremonial norms, and reiterates the theme of the book: God is Holy.

It does all that AND also mentions in 26:40 how God is faithful to forgive us, to redeem us, to reunite us back with Him as soon as we ask. This asking takes humility and sincerity.

God help us always recognize our shortcomings and come back to you day in and day out!

4-12-19

Welcome to the book of Numbers!!!This is the 3rd book of the Bible and 4th in our journey.

Speaking of journey, this book compiles the story of Israel from Mount Sinai (10 commandments) to the border of the “promise land”. It start us off with the census of those present at Mount Sinai. Yes, lots of names 😊😬😊

What I took from his passage is that God cares. He knows and cares for each and everyone of us. He doesn't need a census for himself, but he wanted Moses to know that He cares at a personal level about everyone.

4-13-19

Numbers 3 and 4 teach us why this book is titled N U M B E R S 😊🙄😊

After I was done reading I thought, why would God wanted me to read this? And the answer is the same as yesterday: to point out the P E R S O N A L relationship God wants each everyone of us.

Just like the knew of every tribe, clan, family, he also knows today each and everyone of us.

4-14-19

Numbers 5 and 6 tells us about some procedures for jealousy and for those who want to take a special vow for the Lord.

Last year we went to Cuba and learned when people take a special vow in that culture/ religion, they wear ALL WHITE for a full year. Here in the Bible is a bit different but still it is a thing.

Chapter 6 ends with the following blessing and I want to share it for all of you as well:

“The Lord bless you,
and be gracious to you;
the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.”

Amen.

4-15-19

One chapter today, but it's a loooooong one.
What caught my attention was the spontaneous offering from the leaders of Israel. We cycle between giving money, time, and/or talents to the house of God (church) but it is important to notice that God welcomes this spontaneous giving and (in my experience) giving takes many forms.

4-16-19

Numbers 8-10 tells us the story of the people of God leaving mount Sinai.

Right before they leave there's the celebration of Passover and a handful of people didn't fit the requirements. From 9:7-10 we are told they went up to Moses wanting to participate but were unfit... then Moses tells them to wait for the Lord's answer... and then God addresses them particularly.

I too feel like a misfit as a believer. In my mind I have these images of what a Jesus follows should be/look like and most days I feel that's not me.

I rejoice in learning God makes room for those like me.

4-17-19

Numbers 11-14 start with the following line “Now the people complained about their hardships...”

Keep in mind this is as they were getting ready to leave mount Sinai; which remind us of Exodus 14:11-12 when they ALSO complained shortly after leaving Egypt.

Two things I understand from these passages:

1. We DON'T like changes: in both times the Israelites were leaving their comfort zone
2. We are weak. Even the strongest of us get reduced to dust in the face of hardships.
3. Get this, both times God performed something they've never seen before. The first time it was the parting of the Red Sea and the second was the provision of manna and quail.

4-18-19

Today we skipped Numbers 16 and went to Psalms 90. Since we are reading the Bible chronologically this means Moses wrote this psalm after seeing his people doubting God (yet again for the 10th time) and seeing how it affected the community.

Notice the difference optics can make. Ten of the spies that came back from the promise land saw “the people” aka “the obstacles” Caleb and Joshua saw the same PLUS the Lord (14:9).

It made all the difference in the world.

4-19-19

Numbers 16 & 17 is a dramatic passage in which it is clear the path towards the promise land is paved with opposition.

Opposition from all angles: Moses opposed it with self doubt, externally via Pharaoh, but also at a family level with the story we see today from Korah and the Levites.

The most importance piece of this whole story is that God had made a promise to his people and he would deliver it against all odds.

Personally I can overcome a lot of opposition, but deep down I struggle KNOWING that God is taking me to a promise land, a land where milk and honey flows....

4-20-19

Numbers 18-20 reveal the fascinating ending of 38 years of Israel meandering in the desert.

It is here this “new generation” raises the same complaints to Moses/Aaron (sad) but it is here we see Moses and Aaron do something out of character: publicly swap roles with God.

Long story short God told them to speak to a rock and water would flow. Instead they gathered the people, reprimanded them, threw a “pity party” and struck the rock twice! Just like that I take criticism, loss of revenue, illness, etc as an opportunity to make life about me when the Bible clearly shows this is G

4-21-19

He is Risen!

Numbers 21 and 22 tells us about the story of Balaam, God, and a donkey :-)

Ancient church tradition identifies 7 “deadly sins” and greed is #2. Here we see how Balaam’s greed starts coming out after he’s presented with honor and riches in order to bless/curse a nation.

It’s a passage difficult to slice, but God tells Balaam, “only IF they summon you in the morning you shall then go...” however we can see Balaam didn’t wait to be called, and simply arranged his transportation (donkey) and went.

Greed and impatience go hand in hand.

4-22-19

Numbers 23-25 tells us of the fascinating story of Balaam and the first encounter between Israel and Moab.

After many attempts to curse Israel, the Moabites decided to change strategies and “invite” them to their feasts, in which they worship their god and next thing you know they’re sexually involved with them.

This is a tricky one for me because my first instinct is to say “be careful who you celebrate with” . . . but very quickly I’m reminded of who Jesus celebrate with . . .

I think we need to be wise here. For most of us (me included) celebrating/hanging out with those who actively enjoy/seek/ the shadows, the shadiness of like is dangerous. Unless we can love like Jesus, I’d stay clear.

4-23-19

Numbers 26 & 27 tells the tail end of the Israelites in the desert and the succession of power from Moses to Joshua.

Before we move forward with Joshua, there’s a little story of 5 daughters (of course I noticed that) and how they approached Moses for fairness in the distribution of an inheritance.

Personally I take solace in knowing all of us (including my own daughters) can go up to God directly and he hears our plea, he welcomes our relationship.

4-24-19

Today on Numbers 28-30 we see a close up of warfare (never fun) but we also see lots and lots of offerings, easts and sacrifices.

As I was meditating on all of this religious activity I realize there is meaning in patterns, in rhythm.

In all honesty one morning prayer on my knees or one isolated church attendance isn't going to transform much. However the sum of little but consistent spiritual practices do shape/curve/align my optics.

4-25-19

Numbers 31-32 introduce a terminology we haven't seen before, to "follow the Lord wholeheartedly" 32:11-12.

Based on our readings thus far, it all hinges upon acknowledging reality ALONG with God. The previous generation acknowledged the challenges of Canaan... but ignored God and wanted to go back to slavery. Caleb and Joshua saw the same reality, but also remembered God.

Yes, your reality is your reality.

Yes, my reality is my reality.

Let us not forget about God in the midst of our it all.

4-26-19

Numbers 33&34 summarize the Israelites walk into the promised land.

Half way through chapter 33 God makes clear they must "drive out all the people from the land or they'd become a splinter in their eye, a thorn to their side"

This reminds me of what in Recovery is often referred as "clean house". To surrender our life cannot and must not stop at the "big ticket items" but we need to keep a clean house or these little things are usually what ends up tripping all of us over.

4-27-19

The last 2 chapters in Numbers talk about the concept of Refuge Cities and it's regulations. Towards the end of the book there's this one family with 5 daughters 🥰🥰



Long story short, there's this scenario involving land inheritance, who they can marry, and so forth and so on.

What caught my attention was that Moses made room for this 1 family and specifically went up to the Lord to bring forth their special case.

I believe God still does that today. I believe he makes room for our extremely particular lives. Granted, sometimes we don't get what we ask, but looking back I'm thankful for God's room for my messy life and I ultimately trust His wisdom, not mine.

4-28-19

Welcome to Deuteronomy!!! This is the 5th book of the Bible and the 6th in our journey through the Holy Scriptures!!!

You'll notice on chapter 1 the main thing that keeps coming up isn't the time the Israelites built a golden calf (action of the hands) but instead it was the time they didn't take God into consideration (action of the heart)

In fact on Deut 1:27 it says "Il Signore ci ODIA..." (yes I'm reading the Bible of my host family here in Italy 🇮🇹) which translates the Lord HATES us. This tells me when I don't take God into account in the midst of my reality God sees it as an action against Him.

Lord never allow me to lose sight of what YOU are doing in the midst of my reality.

4-29-19

Deuteronomy 3&4 tells us about some details (rather graphic) of warfare and reminds the people of Israel of God's statutes and ordinances as they cross the Jordan into the promised land.

Keep in mind this "promised land" wasn't empty and ready to be given. It was occupied, fortified, and fiercely defended by its inhabitants!

Much like these forces we too face the relentless wear and tear of moving forward in life. And it all hits at once, in my opinion. We have the joy right next to the sorrow, the financial threat right next to the unexpected income, the gratefulness right next to the complaining/comparing. At least I do.

And yet God reminds us in 3:22 to "NOT FEAR these things, for God himself is with us." Amen.

4-30-19

Deuteronomy 5-7 begins with a contextualized version of the 10 commandments. Then it goes into details of warfare, and towards the end it keeps reminding his people this:

"Do not be terrified by them, for the Lord your God, who is among you, is a great and awesome God." Deuteronomy 7:21

Regarding "them" God made a point by not defeating all of them "at once" but little by little. That's precisely how I feel God works in my life, freeing me from myself also "little by little".

5-1-19

It was Dallas Willard who once said “if you want to know God’s address, it’s at the end of your rope.”

Deuteronomy 8-11 tells us of the vicissitudes the Israelites went through, and on 8:2 it says: “Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart...”

It is in the wilderness, in the desert, at the end of the rope, where we find clarity, 20/20 vision, where we find God.

5-2-19

Deuteronomy 11-13 comes with specifications to Israel as they begin to cross the Jordan towards the promised land.

Notice the tension/trust never really loosen up. This land comes with its own obstacles, perhaps even more dangerous than the obstacles in the desert.

We are called to trust God in the desert, but also in the promised land. In all honesty the beginning to mid April was a very stressful month for me, financially and it took a mental toll on me as well. During those 3 weeks I was KEENLY tuned in to God. These last 2 weeks working in Europe? It has been harder to tune in, to align with God.

Let us (me) keep trusting God in the promised land as well as we do in the desert 🙏

5-3-19

Deuteronomy 14-16 give us more specification regarding dietary measures and sacrificial ordinances for Israel as they establish themselves in the promised land.

We usually do not associate freedom with regulations, but it is precisely these limitations that give us the room to be free.

There’s a part of me that always tells me “you can do it, no limits, go for it, yolo...” and yes, I probably can do whatever I want to do, but by living like this I’ll surely end up bounded by chaos, pain, or worse.

There’s freedom in having limitations. One does not exclude this other. It enables it.

5-4-19

I managed to get to Deuteronomy 17-20 via the Bible App (it has a feature where it reads out loud the passage to you) since it look intimidating to reading 4 chapters on one sitting 😂

This is what I mean by getting “crafty” and sticking to a few things over a long period of time.

Some of us have been reading the Bible daily for now 75 days, some of us have been hitting the gym 3x week this year (not me), some of us have 45 days (or more) without abusing substances, but the principle is the same: rhythm carries on, and the rhythm you have in one area of your life is the best indicator you can gain rhythm in other areas in your life.

Chaos and rhythm are contagious. Our choice which to lean on.

5-5-19

Deuteronomy 21-23 continue with the specific regulations to the new nation of Israel.

These passages are not easy to digest since I tend to apply “revisionist history” on it, or I want to play judge and pass judgment on God.

My flesh is so intoxicated that it misjudged me (usually making me feel better than lost) misjudged others, and ultimately wants to judge God himself.

I need to admit my judgment is off and if I can’t properly judge me/others, the reality is that I can’t even begin to judge God.

5-6-19

These 4 chapters are chuck full of very particular regulations regarding Israel.

Yesterday at church I learned there are 613 laws to be followed by our Jewish brothers and sisters. Praise God the idea of all of these regulations is to put a spotlight on our shortcomings and to bring us closer to God!

That’s the importance of being real with our weaknesses and not delusional. Whether it’s through accountability partners (like I have), sponsors (like some of you have), meetings, church, whatever the tool to keep me grounded and level, it’s a tool I need to keep near.

5-7-19

Deuteronomy 28&29 list the benefits/consequences for the nation of Israel if they obey/disobey God.

Towards the end of chapter 29 there are these words:

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.”
Deuteronomy 29:29 NIV

To believe in God is also to believe in mystery. Not everything makes sense to us, and that’s okay. We are called to trust, to love God and others; not to make sense of it all, defend God, or explain everything to everyone.

5-8-19

Deuteronomy 30&31 pivots and tells us of God’s compassion, and leadership transitioning from Moses to Joshua.

This is found within the first verses of Chapter 30:

“... when you and your children return to the Lord your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you. Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the Lord your God will gather you and bring you back.”

Praise God for his 2nd, 3rd, and 1000th forgiveness on me and on us 🙏

5-10-19

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”
Joshua 1:9 NIV

This is one of those verses my pastor always preached on back when I was 15 years old in the Dominican Republic.

Someone once told me DO NOT BE AFRAID is the commandments God most repeats in the Bible. Do not be afraid... do not be afraid 🙏

5-11

5-12

Joshua 9-11 tells us of a tribe that tricked Israel into a peace treaty. Notice one of the verses point out the Israelites did not consulted the Lord about this treaty before making a vow.

In my life I can see how I personally make “treaties” with habits I need to just quit. Not nasty habits, but those that can easily entangle me.

We will see how this play out for Israel later on, but in the meantime let us be reminded of “gray areas” in our lives and how they can easily trip us over.

5-13

Joshua 12-15 tells us A LOT about villages and cities in the Canaanite region.

Around chapter 13 we hear about Caleb again for the first time since him, Joshua and 10 others were sent to so recon Canaan.

We now learn it has been 40 years since that first appearance. We also learn it was Joshua (not Caleb) the one God appointed to follow Moses’ footsteps. We also learn God made a promise of a specific land to Caleb and it isn’t until now that Caleb asks Joshua to let him have it (check this) in order for him to FIGHT for it at plus 80 years old!

Caleb did not forget about God 40 years ago, went along with not being the one picked by God, fought align with everyone else, and at 80+ ask if he could now take on the task of driving away the kingdom that was possessing the land God promises him... wow.

5-14

Joshua 16-18 tells us of the splitting of the land among the Israelites.

However there were still 7 tribes (out of 12) that have not gone out to take possession of their land. To these Joshua writes:

“So Joshua said to the Israelites: “How long will you wait before you begin to take possession of the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has given you?”” Joshua 18:3 NIV

Keep in mind “taking possession” meant going into battle trusting God will deliver.

I can see how I can believe God can do amazing things for others, but not so for me. I think I can relate to these 7 tribes. I’d go to battle for a brother but I have reservations regarding God coming through for me...

5-15

Joshua 19-21 continues the partition of land/cities. Quite frankly 90% of these verse were about cities I wouldn’t be able to pronounce out loud 😂

As I read/listen to these chapters I was challenged to find something I could apply to myself first and share with you guys second. Thank God of the LAST verse on the last chapter:

“Not one of all the Lord’s good promises to Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.”
Joshua 21:45 NIV

I just downloaded an app with God’s promises to have easy access to them. Here’s the link for the App Store: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/the-promises-of-god/id965713062?mt=8>

5-16

Today we finish the book of Joshua. Joshua finishes his book asking his fellow Israelites to make a decision, to choose between serving God or something/someone else.

God loves us so much that he gave us freedom. It is by exercising this freedom we truly show what’s in our hearts. We either choose to love God , or we choose to love our desires (ego/flesh).

Joshua tells us we will always serve a god... the question is which god will we serve, the God of the universe or the god of our name and last name

5-17

Welcome to the book of Judges!!!

Do you remember when God told Israel to take possession of the land and DRIVE OUT all of the enemies? And do you remember how a few tribes here and there did not do so? Well... now these gods/lifestyle have become a “snare” and Israel is not longer victorious.

God’s commandments are for US, for our own good. To love God is to love ourselves. To know God is to know ourselves. Any variation of that leads us empty handed, confused, and in a state of dependence to that which we traded God for.

I know that first hand, and some of you I know personally also can attest to this.

5-18

Judges 3-5 tells us about the cycle of Israel: pursue other gods+God give them to their own desires+people cry out to God+God sends a deliverer (a judge... hence the title of this book)+the people are delivered+the people then pursue other gods+repeat.

Besides the striking resemblance I share with this sick pattern, I’d like to pause and call your attention to the leadership of 2 women in these chapters: Deborah and Jael.

One was a Judge and the other was just a quite slayer... 

5-19

Judges 6&7 introduces us to Gideon. Yes, those New Testaments we see in hotel drawers are mostly provided by a group of men and women that take their name after this biblical judge :-)

Notice how God purposely told Gideon to reduce the number of warriors for battle. From 20,000 to 300! Why? Because otherwise people would think it is by power, and not by God, that victory is achieved.

Some of us also feel decimated in one or more areas in our life. Some financially, emotionally, relationally, or even spiritually. This is the moment when we need to cry out to God and depend on him.

It is not by nought, but by God.

5-20

Judges 10-12 tells us the story of a man who was ostracized because he was not a legitimate son, then sought after when his leadership was needed, and then this man made a vow to God in exchange for a victory.

As I was reading this story I was hoping that either God wouldn't grant him the victory or that he wouldn't follow through with his vow. I was wrong on both counts.

Not sure what to take from this reading other than we deal with a God that is alive and we need to be mindful of the promises we make. In other words, let us be careful what we wish for.

5-21

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5-22

"I've seen a Philistine woman... now get her for me as my wife"

"Samson saw a prostitute and went in to spend the night with her..."

"Some time later he fell in love with a woman... whose name was Delilah"

Samson was a man of passion, a man of the moment. He's like a mix between Jason Momoa (aquaman) and Gronk (from the NFL Patriots)... if you can imagine that.

Ironically his impulses cost him his eyes, literally. However it is precisely there where Samson for the FIRST TIME learns to lean and fully trust God.

Not in his power and might, but in his weakness and suffering.

5-23

“I’ve seen a Philistine woman... now get her for me as my wife”

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5-24

Judges 19-21 presented a grim narrative I was struggling to either relate or write about. It told us about a Levite (people chosen to work at the Temple), his concubine (strange a priest/minister would have a concubine), gang assault/rape (no comment), body dismembering... you get the picture.

It all made sense on the very LAST verse of chapter 21: “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.”

Now I can relate to that. Whenever I call my own shots, “wing it”, or play it by ear, I too behave as having “no king” but acting as my own god. From this delusional position I too find myself “doing as I see fit”. On my best days I average 50/50, fifty percent of my ideas are good and the rest are less than that. With enough time my ration worsens and I wouldn’t be surprise if it gets to Judges 19-21 levels of wickedness and depravity.

Lord help me, help us not depend/judge by our own standards since these are tightly entangled with our emotions. Help us raise above ourselves and remember YOU and your ways today. Amen.

5-25

Welcome to the book of Ruth!!! This is one of those “good feeling” stories of the Old Testament. Definitely worth reading/listening to it.

God is the God of taking our complicated, messy, hopeless lives and turning them into purpose, worth, and relevance.

This book could've been titled Naomi, Judges part II, or simple jump straight to king David. Instead it's called Ruth, a foreigner with no business in the story of Israel but became the great-grandmother of King David.

5-26

Welcome to the book of Samuel!!!

This book starts with Samuel's mom (Hannah), the high priest Eli, and the beginning of a new way of God dealing with Israel.

As faithful as Eli was, there was something that negatively affected his tribe and thus the course of Israel: how he dealt with his sons. Unlike Eli, his sons were "scoundrels" and the text seems to indicate Eli was aware of this and did not address it.

As a father I know how biased my own opinion can be when it comes down to my own kids.

God, help me show true love to my kids even when it needs to be tough 🙏

5-27

1 Samuel 9-12 tells us about the ascension of Saul, Israel's first king.

Towards the end they recognized they made a poor choice, they decided to elect a king instead of keeping God as their king. However this was not the end of the road for them.

Samuel told them to "not fear" but to now, in the midst of their poor choice, to follow the Lord and he will bless them!!!!

Did you get that? Some of us have made poor choices relationally, financially, morally, etc and God is still willing to bless us! Instead of paying us right, what we rightfully deserve, God is still willing to bless us if we TODAY surrender and follow the Lord.

Thank you God 🙏

5-28

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Thank you God 🙏

5-29

Saul... a man more in love with winning and reputation than with God.

Saul was not a bad guy, at least up until this reading. He was a practical guy. His biggest issue was shown when he was afraid and instead of searching God he tried a “foxhole” religious act hoping to conjure “good luck” and get what he wanted.

Does this sound like a bad man? Not to me. It sounds like a man I see everyday in the mirror. I have a strong allegiance to “my image” and with that in mind I often seek God for what I can GET from him... and not so much for who He is.

5-30

1 Samuel 15-17: Welcome to the story of David, not as king David but the young defiant (and good looking) shepherd.

What stands out about him? His faith in God. As we all probably know of the Goliath, it is key to emphasize no one, not a single soul from Israel believed Goliath could be defeated... except for David.

David was not stronger, but he stuck to what he knew and he placed his faith in God.

I am not stronger than my problems, I know I can't win against them. I might win a battle here and there but sooner or later I show my true colors and it's embarrassing.

It is not by power, but by faith in God 🙏

5-31

The cool thing about going through scripture chronologically is that it jumps from David running away from Saul straight to the song he wrote WHILE being a fugitive!

“But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble.”

Psalm 59:16 NIV

God, let me be like David and sing, remember YOU in my time of trouble. Not when everything is going awesome, but when there's no money in the bank, when our

savings start dwindling, when our bills are due, this is precisely when I/we need to remember YOU 🙏

6-1

David chose peace of mind instead of vengeance. The Bible tells us the man who was trying to kill him was sitting “doing his business” in front of him and David could easily put an end to it all.

David, the mighty warrior that killed Goliath, had the chance of his life... right in front of him. He'd have been justified and praised by his friends. This would've been the easy solution.

Easy however doesn't always brings peace of mind.

Just like David today you and I have a choice towards those who do us wrong.

6-2

David in the run, he's a fugitive. While running away from Saul he wrote these Psalms. From 1-10 David's level of desperation was an 11! How do I know? The text tells us he was so desperate he went to his enemies and since he knew they'd probably kill him David pretended to be INSANE in their midst 😏

In that state of mind his attention was dialed up to God. This is so different from my go-to move. In much lesser levels of desperation I tend to compare, complain, and sulk in my own emotions.

Please God give me a new heart and let me bring my emotions, frustrations included, to him in the midst of my desperation

6-3

For a second time God allows David to take vengeance in his own hand, and like before, David decided to trust retaliation to God.

People will surely do us wrong. Institutions will do us wrong. Even systems will do us wrong. Why? Because people aren't perfect and life is complicated.

God, help us to keep our plea to you and to not drink the poison of revenge since it has the power to kill us first.

6-4

For a second time God allows David to take vengeance in his own hand, and like before, David decided to trust retaliation to God.

People will surely do us wrong. Institutions will do us wrong. Even systems will do us wrong. Why? Because people aren't perfect and life is complicated.

God, help us to keep our plea to you and to not drink the poison of revenge since it has the power to kill us first.

6-5

As we get a front-row access to David's heart there's something he wrote almost "in passing" towards the end of Psalms 17. He mentioned how he wants to be saved from "those whose reward is in this word"

Many times I lose sight of this. Yes, we are called to get up and work our talent to the best of our ability, and and and to remember that the best is still yet to come.

Let me not solely see my day, my present, and my problems, but lift my sight God to what's yet to come 🙏

6-6

Now with Saul in David's rear mirror it's clearer why he is considered a "man after God's heart". It's because while fugitive, wrongly accused, and deep desperation, David consistently took his frustration, lament, and plea to God.

It is said that gold is purified by fire and this I can see in David's life.

God, help me follow suit and make you my rock in the midst of my fire 🙏

6-7

Today we had 6 short psalms, but they are like honey. This is David's heart at its purest:

"I lift up my eyes to the mountains— where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth."

Psalm 121:1-2

It is getting clearer and clearer why David is considered a man "after God's heart" with every psalm we read.

Lord let my heart be like David's heart 🙏

6-8

The book of 2 Samuel starts with the fall of Saul and the ascent of David to the governance of Israel.

I always thought it was a seamless, immediate transfer of power. I was wrong. It took about SEVEN years and many wars!

It does seem to me every time God makes a promise there's a desert to cross, time to endure, trial to suffer, and battles to be fought. This is good for me to know and re-train my mind from the addiction to instant gratification...

6-9

6-10

Today's reading is from 1 Chronicles 1-2, but I honestly can't see an application from that text. Therefore I'll share with you an application from yesterday's reading, Psalms 16:

"I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken."
Psalm 16:8 NIV

I keep my eyes ALWAYS on the Lord, says David. Not on the circumstances, the bank account, his companion, his health, not even his desires.

Today, let me keep my eyes on you God 🙏

6-11

Today we have a flurry of psalms. There's SO MUCH to gather here, but there was 1 verse that I kept going back to and time and time again.

Psalms 49:20 tells us about prosperity. Does it condemn it? No, it tells us to have "understanding" while we are prospering. Understanding of what? We aren't taking any of it with us.

It is good to prosper, but let us stay grounded, humble, and understand this bear non true significance in our spirit.

6-12

1st Chronicles brings us to the famous Prayer of Jabez:

"Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, "Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain." And God granted his request."

1 Chronicles 4:10 NIV

My problem is how this prayer is used out of context. It's not about the prayer itself, it's not about what Jabez asked. It's about the fact that Jabez "cried out to God". Period.

God wants an intimate relationship with us. This is evident in David, Moses, Abraham, and Job. It's not about what we ask, how we ask, or even if we get it. It's about going to God.

6-13

Today's reading reminds us there's value in remembrance.

It is easy to forget God's faithfulness. God has been good to us, God has been good to me. He has not dealt me with justice. I fail at living up to my own standard, let alone God's standard. And yet God still has given me health, choices, family, finances, and the opportunity to love and be loved.

Let us not forget 🙏

6-14

Today's reading happen to be a loooong list of names and places. So for this time I'd like to share a little story written by Hemingway and republished in What's So Amazing About Grace by Philip Yancey:

A Spanish father decides to reconcile with his son who had run away to Madrid. Now remorseful, the father takes out this ad in the El Liberal newspaper: "PACO MEET ME AT HOTEL MONTANA NOON TUESDAY ALL IS FORGIVEN PAPA." Paco is a common name in Spain, and when the father goes to the square he finds eight hundred young men named Paco waiting for their fathers.

God tells us the same.

6-15

In Psalm 91 God tells us to stay away from idolatry and not worship any other gods besides Him. When I read about idolatry I immediately think about carved images, however this author made me pause and think:

"Idolatry is seeking security and meaning in something or someone other than God"
A.R. Bernard

That's not much of a carved image, but a disposition, an inclination of my heart. It's not about what I have or who I have, but about my heart towards them

6-16

The books of chronicles is full of names, family trees, and short 1-liner descriptions.

As I read/listen to this portion of the Bible it is clear God is a personal God. A God that knows our ascendants, our descendants, and ourselves. God is not just the "God of the world" but the God of Abraham, David, Jacob, and the God of every single person on this text chain.

Our God is both, the God of the universe and my God 🙏

6-17

Every time I see “Psalms” as part of our daily reading I get excited. Why? Because it is like a private tour into David’s heart.

It is evident David saw God as a force, a friend, and most of all as a reality. For me this means God is here in this hotel room I’m staying in Birmingham. He was there while I photographed a local model and with me in that dreaded “middle seat” airplane ride.

God is with me, God is with you, God is there in the midst of it all 🙏

6-18

In Psalm 91 God tells us to stay away from idolatry and not worship any other gods besides Him. When I read about idolatry I immediately think about carved images, however this author made me pause and think:

“Idolatry is seeking security and meaning in something or someone other than God”
A.R. Bernard

That’s not much of a carved image, but a disposition, an inclination of my heart. It’s not about what I have or who I have, but about my heart towards them

6-19

In Psalm 91 God tells us to stay away from idolatry and not worship any other gods besides Him. When I read about idolatry I immediately think about carved images, however this author made me pause and think:

“Idolatry is seeking security and meaning in something or someone other than God”
A.R. Bernard

That’s not much of a carved image, but a disposition, an inclination of my heart. It’s not about what I have or who I have, but about my heart towards them

6-20

Today we have 2 psalms in our daily reading. Coincidentally today at Chapel we will be going over a psalm as well :-)

This is what I’ve gotten so far, both from these psalms and from our reading: obedience is for OUR own sake, not to satisfy an egotistical God. A lot of blessings are out there for us not by God parting the Red Sea but by us being obedient.

God help us “clean up” my side of the street with diligence, not to earn your love since you love us regardless, but for our own sake 🙏

6-21

Today’s readings take us back to Chronicles. The readings tells us about king David bringing back the Arc of Covenant and its immediate impact on the life of Israel.

We can make many things about the Arc but one thing is clear, it is sacred. Even David refused to have it near him for 3 months and appointed special people to handle it. One thing that I've noticed around me is that nothing, absolutely nothing is sacred in our culture.

We seem to celebrate the shocking element, air out intimacy, make jokes and light of anyone and everything. From sex to marriage, from seniors to abortions, from vices to God.

Not everything is the same. Everything has value but it isn't the same. There's a place for silliness and there's a place for reverence. Music is not just a string of noise, but the combination of sounds and silences.

6-22

Today we have many psalms. At first glance I thought I was going to camp on Psalm 1 since I studied recently.

However a couple things jumped at me from the others: a) the Lord is my shepherd, I have no lack and b) The Lord is father to the fatherless.

My parents separated when I was 8 or so and the impressions I had from my father were plagued by substance abuse, inconsistency, and "it's my way or the highway" attitude.

I take solace in learning that the God we serve is a God willing to be a father to us, a father to me. In that I then lack nothing. Yes, I do wish things were different but I'm done judging and holding grudges. People are people and nobody is perfect. My dad isn't, nor I am. But God is a father to us all.

6-23

Today's readings have the same story being told from the book of Samuel and the book of Chronicles.

Here we have king David and how he behaves as a king. Notice in one hand how he channelizes his "crazy side" by letting go while celebrating God. On the other hand notice his relationship with this prophet named Nathan. David is the king, he doesn't need to hear nor be accountable to anyone. Yet he welcomes, hears, and surrender to the advice of Nathan.

We all need a "Nathan" in our lives. No one has 360 full view on everything, and if king David practiced humbleness this way we (I) surely can learn and take a page from him.

6-24

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6-25

In today’s passages we see God giving victory to king David left and right. Every battle he fought it was a battle won for David.

This shows how fickle circumstances can be. A few days back (in our reading) David was fleeing, running away and hiding. Today he was conquering and accepting gifts from nations.

If David makes his circumstances the source of his hope, his peace of mind would be heavily compromised. Instead David makes God and God alone the source of his hope.

This peace of mind doesn’t last long, since like, us David has to fight his negative habits. But that will come later. For now let us keep our sight, our hope in God

6-26

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6-27

Psalm 53 tells us there’s “no one good, no one who seeks the Lord”. This reminds me of a passage from Romans which tells us that “we all are all sinners”.

The reason I camp on this portion is because we set each other apart by thinking “we aren’t as bad as _____” but the reality is that we all enslaved to our desires and wants. In other words it is not natural for any of us to want to seek God. This is good news!!!! Why? Because if you volunteered to be on this devotional, if you struggle

wanting to do the “next right thing”, if there’s any desire in you for God, this means GOD IS WORKING IN YOUR LIFE.

In a strange way you and God cooperate in your heart. God gives faith but you are the one who asks. God knocks but you open. God gives and you, and I, receive.

6-28

The topic for one of the Groups I facilitate this week is control. Spoiler alert, we cannot control outcomes, only influence situations.

In 2 Samuel 10:12 we see a verse that encapsulates this beautifully: “Be strong, and let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. The Lord will do what is good in his sight.”

Let’s us shake off fear, fight the battle of today, put forth our best effort, and trust God with the outcome. God’s view is 360, from infinity to infinity, and ours is only an obtuse angle at best.

6-29

In these psalms we see David interacting with God. The posture of King David is a clear one, humbleness.

I can’t remember reading about someone SO in tune with his own weaknesses in the Bible before God. In that last psalm he writes “But as for me, I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God. You are my help and my deliverer; Lord, do not delay.”

But you and I remember David as the valiant and strong man who defeated Goliath and the most prosperous king of Israel. Yes, but the secret of was his humbleness to God.

Let us approach God with an open heart, with an open hand. Let us position ourselves with a heart ready to be filled, and not filled with our own ego before God.

6-30

David had a habit of taking women as wives/concubines. It was “normal” in his day to do this, however this was not the best blueprint (Genesis/Adam and Eve).

The time came in which the time between David’s thoughts and David’s actions narrowed. He saw a beautiful woman, he asked about her, he had her brought to him, he slept with her... all in a matter of hours, perhaps minutes. Please don’t look at the outcome yet, look at the internal mechanics: he had a thought, shortly after he was executing the thought.

Sometimes the space between a thought and an action narrows in our lives as well. Money (power) has that power. Traveling alone (isolation) gives us that space.

Sometimes we seem to turn gold everything we touch, and our ego makes us feel like a king.

Let us be careful, not only when we are lacking, but specially when we are rolling. It is there and then when we can make a mess REALLY quickly.

7-1

I don't remember reading through the Bible before and getting SO much out of David's life!

Today we learn a new gem, while he kept his sin in secret his "strength was sapped". For the longest time I've associated confession as "1 more thing God required" but it is actually for OUR SAKE. Once David confesses, he was forgiven and he experienced forgiveness.

David had 20/20 vision, his unconfessed sin caused a rupture between him God. He felt "dragging" perhaps like a shell of himself. Like so many times I feel myself but drawn with excuses, entertainment, or a callous attitude.

Let us be sensitive, FEEL when we are distancing ourselves from God, and promptly confess.

7-2

David was brave, a warrior, a man after God's heart, but he also lacked sexual discipline and he struggled being an attentive/present father to his kids.

You go ahead and read these chapters for yourselves, but it seemed David struggled confronting his son Amnon, protecting his daughter Tamar, and dealing properly with his son Absalom. All of this costed David his kingdom.

Sometimes we excel at a public life, but struggle in our private life. Let us not keep our priorities in order.

7-3

Here we see David fleeing away from the hands of his own son Absalom. And it is precisely here, in distress, where David's heart shines the most.

In peace king David sleeps in, wanders around, and neglects parenting. In distress he leans on the Lord, gains clarity, and keeps his priorities in order.

Is that just human condition? Could we ask the Lord to teach us to keep a humble heart SPECIALLY when things go our way? I surely hope so, and that's my prayer for today 🙏

7-4

A few days ago we saw David having zero accountability, he decided not to go to war, stay in his bed, saw a beautiful woman bathing, called for her, had sex, she became pregnant and then David had her husband killed.

This time around David is fleeing from his son, he's embarrassed, humiliated, crushed, but he has a powerful weapon: humbleness.

How do I know? The passage today tells us he wanted to go to war against his son BUT his generals advised him not to. Let me repeat, the subordinates advises the king not to do something! What did David do? He humbled his own ego and surrendered to their advice.

Let us practice humbleness when things go our way in the same way when we were/are when crushed by life.

7-5

Today we have a flurry of Psalms, and right off the gate we are told a crucial piece of information in regards to David's heart: he has always been mindful of God's unfailing love towards him.

As a King, he was aware of God's love towards him.
While persecuted, he was aware of God's love towards him.
In the palace, he was aware of God's love towards him.
In a cave, he was aware of God's love towards him.

Let's us today be aware of God's love towards us. What would happen if we take this awareness of being loved by God every minute of our day?

Money has no love for us. Success has no love for us. Not even luck has any special treatment towards us, but God loves us.

7-6

In today's reading we have some sweet psalms from David. I say sweet not because of lack of pain (in fact he's in a lot of physical pain), but because through the pain David keeps interacting with God.

If we take a hard look we see David actually forgetting about God when things go on "cruise control", while he's way more in-tune when things get difficult.

There's one piece of information I'd like to point out from psalm 41. Towards the end, in the midst of David feeling hopeless and in a lot of pain, he writes: "I know you are pleased with me..."

Sometimes life isn't as black and white as sometimes people (specially religious people like me) make it out to be. Let us be less judgmental and more compassionate. We are all going through our own personal battles and only God knows our heart.

7-7

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7-8

It seems we are about to transition from David since that chapter 23 from 2nd Samuel is titled "David's last words"

Once I read the title I presumed these words were going to be about his kingdom (a feat none of us in this chat can align), his conquests, his achievements. However David's last words were about 2 things: God and people.

David related to God as an ever present being. He talked to God, cried to God, negotiated with God, even danced to God! David cared for his people and he was loved by them. To this day the people of Israel respect and love David.

My devotion to God is a private practice and only God can be my judge. However I am accountable to people, not stuff, in my life. One day I too will have "last words moment" and my hope is that they'll be about God and the people God has entrusted me with.

7-9

Psalms 98 opens up with "sing to the Lord a new song, for He has done marvelous things..."

While reading scripture has been foundational in bringing clarity, the truth is that I make a lot of my decisions riding on my emotions and nothing touches my emotions like a song.

Spanish is my heart language so I've had to learn new songs now that I go to an English speaking church. While the songs on Sunday were beautiful I found myself not knowing them nor able to find them easily throughout the week. This is why one of the pastors made a playlist and I'd like to share it with you.

Listen to these songs not as a chore, but in the background and let them connect with you.

<https://open.spotify.com/user/hns9qnckz31ooahkoz754k0s/playlist/3INB7WySjdwWMiiXMrLoOT?si=pUewWKLmR1SvfQjDo2yt4A>

7-10

Security in numbers is something I long. From the number of books that I try to read every year, to the times I check my CreditKarma app, the idea is the same: the more, the better.

David apparently had a similar thought when he performed a “census” to determine how many mighty warriors he had in his army. Was this wrong? No. Is checking my WellsFargo wrong? No. Is the REASON why we do so that tells us if we are doing so for information or we are doing so for our ego.

Having more isn't necessarily good. In fact I could argue some dangers. Yesterday I was playing Mario Kart in “random mode” and we ended up racing a track with many, many, many pitfalls. Do you think the orange mushroom was my best friend in that situation? Do you think speed was my best strategy in a track I've never ran before?

What I needed then was someone to follow. What I need today is a shepherd to trust. Numbers are helpful, but numbers come and go. God is the God of this life and the next.

7-11

At the end of psalm 108 David says “Give us aid against our enemy, for human help is worthless” (108:12)

I found it a bit harsh to agree with a “human help is worthless” statement. After all I believe God uses medicine/therapy/nutrition to accomplish many things. Certainly these means are not worthless!

There are however certain battles, some areas in our lives where we just have a deep dissatisfaction, a vacuum if you will. Doesn't matter what we throw at it it's never fulfilled regardless of the quality/quantity of our relationships, number in our bank account, or accolades hanging on our walls.

Let us acknowledge this vacuum (humbleness) and reach out to the fountain of life TODAY. It's a free offer. Best things in life are already given to us. Let us open up and receive 🙏

7-12

These 3 chapters tells us about some of the offices of the Temple. There are lots of names and functions, but one in particular caught my attention: musicians. It is clear King David (a harpist himself) made sure music was a part of the house of the Lord.

Music is powerful. Music literally changes my mood. The following song I first heard it in Spanish and it resonated with me so much that I wanted it to be played at my wedding. The lyrics in English are as follow:

"Great is Thy faithfulness, " O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.
"Great is Thy faithfulness!" "Great is Thy faithfulness!"
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—
"Great is Thy faithfulness, " Lord, unto me!

For the curious, here's the version that I first heard back in the late 90's (in Spanish)
<https://open.spotify.com/track/4qn9xldNzipuoFS4kjlAdp?si=RBTrjUEtRUaVWEvKuVBMcg>

7-13

These are some sweet psalms of David we have for today. What caught my attention was one of the verses in chapter 145 when David says “the Lord is near to all who call Him...”

I once heard one of the pastors from the church we attend say, “we need to pray/ connect with God at least in the same way our phone depends on its charger”. I don't know how often you charge your phone, but I charge mine over night, in the car, and while I'm editing photos. In other words my phone is always either near a charger or plugged in.

Let us really interact with God. Let us go above and beyond the relationship of a cellphone with its charger. If we want to experience God we must connect with him.

7-14

Psalms 127 is a short psalm but it's one of my spiritual mentors drilled in our minds every Friday evening. As a teenager in Santiago, Dominican Republic, there was a woman who picked me and a bunch of other teens in her late 80's Toyota Corolla and drove us to her house to pray.

She led this prayer meeting for about 2 hours and would sprinkle the prayer with bible verses... such as this one: “Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain.” Psalm 127:1
NIV

She would tell us we could study/work/socialize all we want but unless God brings life out of it, it'd be an empty pursuit.

We all do similar things, we study, work, do family life, but unless God is in the midst of it we will find a way to make it all about us... and we all know how that ends up.

Let's do, yes!... but let us seek the Giver of Life first and foremost in all we do 🙏

7-15

Like father, like son.

These psalms have served as an inspiration to countless songs (a handful come to mind), but there's a principle I noticed in David's psalms which his son Solomon also wrote about:

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise." Psalm 111:10 NIV

The word "fear" is open to many interpretations, but based on our readings we can be sure it encompasses an element of awareness.

In my case, God is in my job, commute, counseling sessions, chapel services, recovery-groups, travels, runways, models, insurance agents/principals, and models. But God is also in my interactions with my wife, daughters. Let us not forget God is also present in my handling of money, purchases (I believe Amazon prime day is today), interaction with technology, and the use of my phone.

Yes, I do believe my life would be better if I practice the awareness of God in all I do.

7-16

1 Kings chapter 2 calls Solomon to literally "man up!". Coming from King David I'm curious as to what exactly David means by this. Simply put in this context it means to a)be strong b)obey God and c)keep your commitments.

I'm not sure any female would take offense of a man who is strong, obeys God, and keep his commitments. Today we hear a lot about "toxic masculinity" but in my opinion what we need is not men acting less masculine but actually the opposite. If men would follow David's advice and man up, we would have less broken homes, fatherless children, low income households, etc.

The culture I grew up promotes the "picaflor" who's the man who just can't settle down with one woman. Here in the United States I see the type of man that never really grows up and instead holds on to little responsibility and living for the moment.

It's time to expect our man to hold their commitments, be strong, and hopefully obey God. Perhaps the key is to flip the order of that last sentence.

7-17

There are different levels of understanding for today's reading, psalm 119. I'll take the top layer only and focus on how the writer used each letter of the Hebrew alphabet to write about God. In my case I'll attempt to do the same with my last name, yes an acrostic!

P: please let me not forget You

A: at times I struggle and make life about me as the center of it all

U: use whatever will get my attention to remember You

L: love and acceptance is what I get from you, in spite of me

I: in my lowest you still love me

N: never let me buy my own lie

O: o is a letter I'm drawing a blank 😊

You, on your own time try to use your own name or last name and meditate on each letter about God. Frankly we (I) don't think much of God besides what people post/talk about, so let's spend a few minutes on this exercise 🙏

7-18

Solomon was young when he became King, and in his youth God appeared to him in a dream and asked: "what would you want me to give you Solomon?" And Solomon asked not for health or wealth, but for wisdom.

Long story short God ended up giving him wealth as well (since he asked for something for the benefit of others), however long life (health) was predicated upon his obedience.

It is one thing to KNOW right from wrong, but it is another thing to DEPEND in God. Notice I didn't say "do right from wrong". The reality is that nobody can "do enough good things" and all of us have our personal battles. However we all can depend on God.

That's what we are called to do. We are called not to do more, but to surrender, to depend, to remember God. As we do so, the "doing" will come as a fruit of the Spirit, but the seed is remaining (abiding) in God 🙏

7-19

After reading many psalms of David, here we have one psalm accredited to Solomon.

At first I wanted to take the angle of “a young king enjoying his kingdom”, but since I’m familiar with Solomon’s story I have to admit I take/read his stuff with a grain of salt.

Yes he’s smart, yes he has wisdom, yes he’s well thought off by other kings... but he drank his own “kook aid”, he took on unnecessary risks, he gambled too much.

God, help me be remembered as someone that depended on You for everything, like a child to a Father, and not like someone who took the wisdom given to him and lived off that gift.

The second is a dead end, but the first is an everlasting journey.

7-20

Today we have the entire book of Song of Songs! This book has been interpreted in many ways depending of your religious background, but it is evident it contains elements of poetry, romanticism, intimacy, and sexual drive.

There’s a verse that repeats a few times: “Promise me, O women of Jerusalem, not to awaken love until the time is right.” 8:4 NLT

It is my observation, and personal experience, when love is “awaken” logic, common sense, and priorities goes out the window. Why? Because it’s love we’re talking about here! Love is powerful and there are different layers of love, mainly: eros, philia, storge, and agape.

What do we do? We focus, advertise, exaggerate “eros” love. We are who we are with, physical appearance takes the drivers seat, and love is a race with many many many potential racers around us... all of the time.

Love is amazing but let us not be nearsighted. First there are many levels to love we can develop, and second there are also other worthy recipients of our attention, for example: self, family, causes, education, projects, dreams, etc.

So, when “loves” comes our way let us be ready, and celebrate its arrival. Until then let’s get off the overhyped “bigger, better, now” love train we all are bombarded with.

7-21

The first 3 chapters of Proverbs can be summarized in two words: seek wisdom.

Keep in mind this is Solomon writing this, the wisest man alive. This would be the equivalent of LeBron James saying “work on your game”. For those who aren’t aware of LeBron he has been dubbed “The Chosen One” since High School and has a God-given talent towards basketball. Why would the best at their craft want us to keep pressing? Because wisdom, true wisdom, makes us humble.

The more we know, the more we are aware of what's left to know. This applies to finances, parenting, sobriety, fitness, etc.

Let us never be arrogant enough, or plain lazy enough, to plateau in our growth. Let us keep seeking advice, reading books, practicing self awareness, staying humble, being vulnerable, acknowledging no one (us/me specially) has it all together.

7-22

These 3 Proverbs have A LOT of wisdom nuggets, let me list a few and then I'll zero in what caught my attention the most.

- It characterizes wisdom as a woman (no surprise there 🐉).
- It talks about the value of discipline
- It tells us about how to get out of debt
- It warns us about adultery

The portion that caught my attention was:

"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." Proverbs 4:23 NIV

I think we all would agree with that. But do you know what is the very NEXT thing Solomon tells us about right after that? "Keep corrupt talk away from your lips"

Could there be a correlation between the words we speak and the health of our heart? I believe so, and Solomon seems to hint that as well.

Let us pay attention to the words we say to others, but also to ourselves. Let us be careful the lyrics we expose our ears to... and then automatically end up singing.

The tongue can be used to curse and to bless, and it applies to others but also to ourselves.

7-23

You've got to read these proverbs on your own, there's so much simple wisdom there! What caught my attention was this verse: "Better to be a nobody and yet have a servant than pretend to be somebody and have no food." Proverbs 12:9 NIV

Did you know God is not oppose to you working hard and enlarging your estate? To have a servant is a sign of prosperity. It provides management to assets, tutoring to children, and companionship, to mention a few.

Yes, it is better to be thought of "a nobody" but work your tail off, doing the right thing, and prospering... than to be thought of "somebody" and have no fooodood!

Let that sink in. Some of us flaunt an image but deep down we know we are broken, we are broke.

A few days ago I read this on Facebook and agreed 100%:

“I’ve built more relationships with people by being open about me struggles (brokenness) than I ever could have pretending like I had it all together.”

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7-25

Today’s proverbs have a lot to say about friendships, words, and diligence. In fact I was certain I was going to journal about one of these things. However there was a verse that “spoke” to me:

“Children’s children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children.” Proverbs 17:6 NIV

I had to read it a few times because my understanding was that children brought pride to their parents. I’m sure that’s somewhere in the Bible too (I think...) but not in this passage. This verse is clear: my life can make my daughters proud.

I’m aware I send this to 3 groups of 20 people or so, and some of us aren’t parents. For those who are parents like me I think sometimes we put/expect too much from our kids when in reality we should also think: are we living (not talking) a life worthy of making our kids proud?

If you don't have kids there's plenty in those 3 chapters to learn, but today I just had to stop and deal with this verse personally.

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7-27

These 3 chapters have a lot to say about riches, poverty, being a wife, and justice. Again, I'll share what caught my attention the most:

"Those who guard their mouths and their tongues keep themselves from calamity." Proverbs 21:23 NIV

Two nights ago at our Small Group we were talking about the times in which we "take a break" from God and simply relax and let loose with our friends. You know, when we say things we'd never say in front of a microphone.

I think if Solomon would've written this book today he'd have also say "Those who guards their words IN TEXTING would also keep themselves from calamities". You see this is for our own sake, not for God's. God loves us regardless but there are things we can do to make our lives a little easier on earth... being thoughtful with our oral and written words is one of those things.

7-28

On today's reading Solomon dishes out "The 30 Sayings of the Wise". Here's the verse that caught my attention:

"Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge."

Proverbs 23:12 NIV

<https://www.bible.com/111/pro.23.12.niv>

Key word? APPLY. Yesterday I was in charge of cleaning up the back porch. This is one of the two places invested money last summer. We put up a gazebo, a swing, but most importantly we planted new flowers and worked a simple design with white gravel and the red stuff (I can't think of the name) that costs like \$3 and covers the ground.

Well, today you wouldn't notice much of that design. Why? Because it takes discipline to keep the garden looking good. In other words just because we've made an investment sometime ago it doesn't mean we do not need to keep APPLYING maintenance and care.

Whatever you care about (finances, relationships, sobriety, education, fitness, etc) you can bet it will revert to the way it was if we don't keep APPLYING, nurturing, fostering.

We are either growing or rotting.

7-29

Today we jump from Proverbs to two historical books in the Bible.

These reading share how the Temple in the name of the Lord was built by Solomon. Notice how this was the appointed time to build:

““You know that because of the wars waged against my father David from all sides, he could not build a temple for the Name of the Lord his God until the Lord put his enemies under his feet.”

1 Kings 5:3 NIV

Did you catch that? It was building season because there was peace. To be clear there are lessons to be learned both in times of wars and peace, however times of peace are ideal for foundational/systematic growth.

If right now you're in a season of hustle, you're always on-the-go, you're waging “wars”, then do what you have to do and take care of business.

If on the other hand you aren't feeling the “heat of life”, if you have time in your hands, if you find your mind wandering, perhaps we could use this time to BUILD, to grow systematically, to laid down foundational pieces for the following seasons.

7-30

Today's reading is all details about Solomon's palace and the building of the God's Temple.

I've visited many historical ruins and the most prominent buildings are usually the king/leader's home and the worship place/temple. There's something special about the “house of the Lord” it is a place consecrated to worship.

Every other place is geared towards us. The mall is for shopping, the beach is for us to relax, Starbucks/DD is for our cup of joe, but church is for God. Yes, not all churches have lived up to that standard, but you get the point.

It was this month a client shared “I started praying on Thursday, I knew I needed to surrender and I did that evening. However I was WAITING on Sunday to do it in the House of God”

We can do push-ups at home and that counts, but man there’s nothing like going to the gym with its culture and the likeminded people. That’s what church should be for us. Not every time is a PR but it adds up when we make it a regular feature in our week.

7-31

These 2 chapters tells us about the time in which the Temple was finished and the Arc of the Lord was brought into the holiest place. When this happened Solomon fell on his knees and started a prayer.

The prayer is a long one, but towards the end he says in verse 46 ““When they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—...” 1 Kings 8:46a

This grabbed my attention because historically we’ve made a career out of distinguishing ourselves from others. I’m not talking about skills/talents, but about essence and value. Time and time again history records people thinking themselves better than others, becoming self-appointed judges, and acting on that air of superiority.

I’m my experience as a spiritual director, youth pastor and missionary the 1 verse most people know from the Bible is “you shall not judge”. In fact people already feel/know they have shortcomings (sins), but for some reason some of us have made a point to think of ourselves BETTER and putting others down.

Solomon says “every one sins”. You, and me. Not just “them”, but us. All of us fall short, specially me Arturo Paulino. Yes I can judge talent/skill, but I cannot judge the value of a Persian because I have NO CLUE the genetically makeup, family history, traumas, expectations, upbringing, etc etc etc

Let us avoid the trap of self-righteousness. It’s not biblical and it smells terrible 🤢

8-1

On Psalm 136 after King Solomon finished praying and consecrating the Temple literal fire came from heaven and burnt the offerings and the people started chanting “Praise be to God, His love endures forever!”

Some of you have been in this reading journey since the beginning (today is day #165) and as unmerited as it is, God keeps pursuing, inviting, and showing up in people’s lives.

“God is good, all the time...all the time, He is good” is an old saying and it is true. I am the one who at times can’t handle the brightness of the light (because it exposes my heart), but God keeps walking near and calling me by name, much like Adam and Eve.

It is my shame that keeps me in the hiding, wanting to cover up, but God keeps on walking by, calling, knocking, and waiting on me, waiting on you.

Here’s a song by Chris Tomlin about God’s love and how it “Endures Forever” <https://open.spotify.com/track/1IR7W2QlenqJU4YhZXQBs2?si=rYKAvNwcQjefyRtv5KQoZw>

8-2

The last 6 chapters of Psalms are ALL about “Praise be to God”

I once heard that “we are what we eat” and while I do not agree 100% I can see their point. I do however think we are what we put in our body, starting with what we believe our identity to be, yes continuing with nutrition, but also with what we LISTEN TO.

It amazes me how we just let ourselves go, sing/recite/repeat our hearts out to lyrics we’d a) be embarrassed to read out loud to someone we respect/care or b) lyrics that while fun to recite hold very little truth and celebrate surface living (primal emotions, pride, or straight up vulgarity)

I have a challenge: change the music you listen for a set time and see how your outlook in life changes. Pick a time, 90 days, 30, 21, or at least 7 days. Let us expand our lyrical taste and start feeding our ears with songs that aren’t about us. Take a break, we all need it.

I’ve shared a playlist before (in English) but if Spanish is your first/heart language I’ll put another huge playlist at the bottom of this text.

Listen, we all love our junk food music, trust me I consume that too from time to time but I can’t live off of that. I need to have a musical diet full of macro nutrients that will SUSTAIN me, not just entertain me.

Does that makes sense? Would you take on this challenge?

English

<https://open.spotify.com/user/hns9qnckz31oahkoz754k0s/playlist/3INB7WySjdwWMiiXMrLoOT?si=pUewWKLmR1SvfQjDo2yt4A>

Spanish

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6moUPmGY6rDJy9r9WupRDa?si=JC4C7sLzQ0-vihGjbPkBoQ>

(My personal all time fav artist in Spanish is Marcos Vidal)

8-3

Today we have two chapters accounting for the final stage of the construction of Solomon's palace and his temple. These two massive buildings took 20 years to build.

There was a little gem in that reading and it was God's promise to bless Solomon. What was the prerequisite? For Solomon to walk before God "faithfully and with integrity of heart and uprightness..." 1Kings9:4

At this point we could think "who could ever live up to THAT standard!!!" Yes, this is an intimidating proposal from God it seems. Until we read the rest of that verse: As your father David did.

Wait a second, David the one with "women problems", the one who plotted and murdered, the one who had questionable parenting? That David? Yes, that David.

If you read David you'll see he was FAR from a perfect person, but he was MINDFUL of God. He was aware of God. He believed IN God, as oppose to just having knowledge OF God.

Let us have a heart like David today 🙏

8-4

As we close out Proverbs the author tells us little lines in a "fortune cookie" style. One of those gems is this one:

"Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control."
Proverbs 25:28 NIV

As a city with broken walls, says Solomon. In ancient times walls were necessary to provide the safety, peace, and resources necessary for growth, for development.

In our lives today if we just "live for today", yolo, or "go with our hearts" we'd be exactly like one of those cities, exposed to the elements and stuck in the same level of progress.

I know this is getting ahead of ourselves since I'm about to quote the New Testament here, but one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit is the self-control. As a fruit it isn't something YOU can produce, instead it is something that grows as you welcome the seeding of God in your life.

Do you want the gift of self-control in your life? Take a moment and ask God to plant the seed in your heart right now. Ask, and you will receive.

8-5

These three chapters pack a lot of good wisdom! I highlighted a lot of verses and would like to share one of them with you this morning:

“Death and Destruction are never satisfied, and neither are human eyes.” Proverbs 27:20 NIV

The first part makes sense I think. If we all live by “an eye for an eye” there wouldn’t be a single person with two eyes in the world. Vengeance is never satisfied. However neither EYES?!?

As a photographer I produce images. Commercially I create images for magazines, camps, and models. However I am on an “image diet” myself. For example I do not have Instagram on my phone, I check my IG on my wife’s phone. My iPhone is on a “R rated” restriction/filter via a software I use for my own kids.

Why? Because there’s no limit to “research”, there’s no limit to human “creative expression” and next thing you know you/we are seeing things never meant to be aired in public and worst yet since our eye will never be satisfied we’d want to keep seeing more and more.

Let us be vigilant what we expose our eyes to. Not everything needs to be seen. I share that as someone who produces images, as a father, husband, and son.

8-6

Today we enter one of my fav books in the Bible, the book of Ecclesiastes. This verse encapsulates the ethos of the book:

“What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.”

Ecclesiastes 1:9 NIV

Harsh, yes... but I agree. You see I’ve heard many stories, from Latin America to Europe, from addicts in recovery to missionaries, from young and old, and the gist is mostly the same: we all need to find our way back to our Maker.

Some of us follow the route of wealth accumulation, prestige, promiscuity, extreme behaviors, self-righteousness, religiosity, etc but we all are seeking (knowingly or unknowingly) our way back to God. Every other destination leaves us empty and dissatisfied.

8-7

Wow, we covered Ecclesiastes in 2 days!!! If you have a moment try to slow it down since there’s a lot to unpack in this book. Yesterday I shared the gist of this book and today it’s conclusion:

“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.”
Ecclesiastes 12:13 NIV

Solomon says above all the things he knows (keep in mind he's the wisest), all the things he saw, all the power, and all the possessions, there's this one thing who's superior to it all: To fear God and to follow his commandments.

Now, to fear God as we've seen is to be aware of Him, to remember him, to interact with him, and not to live life as on your own. To follow his commandments (there are 613 in the Old Testaments) is not in order to gain God's love but for us to be blessed.

These commandments were given for us to live in harmony with each other and creation, but also so we can realize we CANNOT live a perfect life... thus these commandments takes us back to God.

Today let us be mindful of God, let us do our very best to love/serve others, and when this becomes challenging let us go back to God. It's a “catch 22” in which we get closer and closer to the Light with every attempt to live this way.

8-8

We've come to the end of Solomon's life and for someone as wise as he was you'd think this story would have a happy ending... but unfortunately there was something more powerful than wisdom for Solomon, his love for women.

I'm not talking about his love for his grandmother, mother, wife, and daughters, but his love for his 700 wives and 300 concubines!!!

In my opinion proximity dictates destiny. In other words, those who are closest to you/me will have the greatest impact in our lives.

Solomon kept about 1,000 women close to him. All of them from different believes, traditions, and life goals. No wonder his heart was not “fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father has been” 1 Kings 11:4

Be kind to all, but be very careful who you keep in your close proximity.

The wisest man there was simply couldn't handle it and I know for a fact it wouldn't be much different for me/us either.

8-9

These last 2 chapters in Proverbs do not come from Solomon but rather a gentleman we know very little about and from a mother of a King.

I'll focus on the proverb from this mother since my mom has played (and still plays) a crucial part in my life:

“It is not for kings, Lemuel— it is not for kings to drink wine, not for rulers to crave beer,”

Proverbs 31:4 NIV

Popular thought tells us the higher you rank, the more money you have, the more of a “king” you are, the more you can live a life of excess and carelessness. However it is quite the opposite, it is precisely the attention to LITTLE things, the discipline of saying no, that allows for the freedom to focus and pay attention to what really matters.

To be clear the case the Bible makes is not about drinking is about WISDOM. Not everyone is the same and we all react differently, however the stakes are higher as we claim up in life/responsibilities.

In short, if you have people looking up to you, if you’re about to start a family, if you have big hopes and dreams, be careful with the trivial things. Discipline equals freedom.

8-10

This part of the historical books is a little confusing between unusual names and the fighting among the tribes. One verse stood out to me in the midst of it all:

“After Rehoboam’s position as king was established and he had become strong, he and all Israel with him abandoned the law of the Lord.” 2 Chronicles 12:1 NIV

There’s a “facebook version” that reminds me of this verse:

“I remember the days I prayed for the things I have now”

The idea is that while in distress, while in need, while in desperation, you and I PRAYED (past tense). Yet many of us today, if we are honest with ourselves, need to realize our spirituality has decreased.

We don’t pray as much/long/often as we seek out the approval of others. We don’t read Scripture as much as we scroll for entertainment on social media. We don’t attend church nearly as much as we/I should.

Yes, no church is perfect. Yes, the Bible isn’t an easy book, and prayer/meditation takes time. But none NONE of it prevented you and me from “just doing it” when we were desperate.

Let us seek out God in ALL times.

8-11

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8-12

When reading these chapters all I can think of is “what a mess!”. A soldier murdering a king and then becoming king himself, there are 2 kingdoms instead of 1, I can’t even keep track of who’s who right now.

It makes me wonder how people felt under these circumstances. It would be easy for anyone to assume that God was done with them and left the world on “cruise control”. But this is not the case. Even in the wildest ride, God is still at work, God is still in control, God is still on his throne.

Today, regardless of political parties, personal finances, illnesses and deaths, and anything we can think of I need to tell you what the Bible says:

“Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: ‘To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, forever and ever!’” (Revelation 5:13)

The driver’s seat isn’t vacant, God reigns. Not everything will make sense to us on this side of eternity. Not everything will seem fair to us, that’s understandable. But God still reigns.

8-13

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8-14

Today we cover one of the biggest prophets of the Old Testament, the prophet Elijah. Very peculiar fellow, kind of reminds me of John the Baptist but with a flare for drama.

You’ll have to read the full story for yourself, but long story short Elijah prophesied no rain and there was no rain. Then he prophesied fire (yes FIRE!!!) coming from heaven on demand, and fire came. He performed miracles, spoke the Word of God, and was highly recognized.

However after all of this Elijah felt depressed and alone:

“He replied, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.””

1 Kings 19:14 NIV

Elijah, much like Jonah, put too much stock on the RESULT and not in the process. He based his success on outcome xyz, instead of on all God did. In other words his focus was not on the progress, the advancement, but on a particular result.

You and I might not be/have where we wish we’d be, but let that not prevent us from loving the process, the system, the small progress we can make today. The results will

take care of themselves, and many times they do not solely rest on us. However the effort, the little things, the grinding that nobody sees can be accomplished today.

Set goals, yes... but execute and be happy with the strategy as well.

8-15

Presenting king Ahab. You know you've messed up BIG when the Bible has this to say about you:

"There was never anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife." 1 Kings 21:25 NIV

You'd think if there's a "bad guy" this is it, and if you read the entire story the guy was no role model. And yet towards the end of that chapter there's a quote from God saying the following to Elijah:

"Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself, I will not bring this disaster in his day ..."
1 Kings 21:29a NIV

Even the most evil king moves God when he humbles himself. God is a redeemer, a forgiven, a lover. It is our clenched fists that prevent us from receiving God.

If Ahab found mercy, let us humble ourselves to God as well today. He wants to make us whole, we just need to open up our hands.

Here's the picture: we are ALL disconnected from God, but when we humble ourselves God ties a knot and every time the knot is tied we get closer and closer to God.

8-16

When things go well for us, we have to make sure we don't surround ourselves with fans, but with real friends. Friends tell us truth, fans tell us what we want to hear.

King Jehoshaphat had this problem. He was a king, so he was at the top of the food chain. When wondering about going to battle he asked about 400 of "his" prophets (fans) and they all agreed with what he wanted, to go to war... shocker.

However there was one prophet (friend) who told him truth, but he didn't want to hear it:

"Look, the other prophets without exception are predicting success for the king. Let your word agree with theirs, and speak favorably."
1 Kings 22:13b NIV

Did you see that? The king was almost begging the friend to agree with his fans! Long story short the friend was proven right and the king not only lost that battle but also his life.

Let us not allow success to get into our heads and always, always keep people of TRUTH in our lives.

8-17

There's something special that takes place when we are overwhelmed, we gain clarity. It sounds paradoxical, but in those moments of anxiety we either turn to God or not, 20/20 clarity.

King Jehoshaphat was literally overwhelmed with an assault attack and immediately (20/20 vision moment) went to the house of the Lord and knock, inquired, surrender to Him. Here's a portion of his plea:

"Our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.""
2 Chronicles 20:12 NIV

Every time someone (David, Joshua, Moses, Abraham, Job, etc) deals with God, that person is blessed. This doesn't mean this person gets what he/she wants, but this person is at PEACE.

Abraham did get a son, David's son was not healed and died, Job did not get an answer, Moses did get his people out of Egypt, in short sometimes they won and sometimes they didn't. But they were always satisfied and at peace.

The reality is that not many of us seek out God. Not many of us cry out to Him. Not many of us go to His house. Not many of us surrender our will.

8-18

Welcome to the shortest book of the Old Testament, Obadiah. This tiny book is about how the descendants of two siblings treated each other.

On one hand we have the descendants of Israel going through a lot of troubles. On the other hand we have the descendants of Esau, not only not helping Israel, but laughing, mocking, and taking advantage of the situation:

"You should not gloat over your brother in the day of his misfortune, nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction, nor boast so much in the day of their trouble."
Obadiah 1:12 NIV

The descendants of Esau did this because they had a natural advantage due to their high geographical location which made it difficult to be conquered/invaded.

What's the learning point here? Life is cyclical.

Edom should've be kind and help Judah, not only because of brotherly ties, but practical ones: nothing lasts forever and one day the script might/will switch.

If you are in an "elevated" position, use it to elevate others. Let us not mock others for their misfortunes, or try to judge them. Life is cyclical, and much more complicated than we think.

Instead let us show kindness, generosity, and compassion.

Obadiah, short book with a big lesson.

The Miracle of Work 8-19

The Old Testament is the place where God displays his presence through monumental acts, the parting of the Red Sea, the plagues in Egypt, the fire from heaven etc.

The story that caught my attention from today's reading goes more in hand with the way I see God operating nowadays: through the means given to us. Let me explain.

There was a widow who was left with much debt. The creditors were coming after her sons to take them as slaves!!! So this widow comes to the prophet of God as ask for a miracle. His response?

"She went and told the man of God, and he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left."” 2 Kings 4:7 NIV

God made a miracle by providing olive oil. Now it was the widow's turn to KEEP working the miracle by selling that oil.

Most of us expect the first miracle from God, but what we don't realize is that there's a miracle that depends on us, it's called WORK.

A couple of weeks back my family and I went up to Flat Rock, NC to volunteer at a camp for kids with disabilities. Listen, listen... you and I have way more than we deserve and have the ability to keep working the miracle of life, health, and opportunity.

Let us pray to God for blessings, at the same time let us get up and keep those blessings by exercising the miracle of work.

No Accidental Garden 8-21

This portion tells us about yet another northern king who did not follow after God's heart, Jehu. The whole story is bloody and bizarre, one I have difficulty understanding honestly, but it ends with the following result:

"Yet Jehu was not careful to keep the law of the Lord, the God of Israel, with all his heart. He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam, which he had caused Israel to commit."

2 Kings 10:31 NIV

Key word: CAREFUL.

The other day I was blowing leaves in our back porch and I noticed how grass weed was growing in between the white pebbles we've spread last summer. You see, to make our back porch look nice we put a lot of time, money, and care... but make it look messy and ugly it takes no effort, just let it go.

Much like a garden in order for us to follow God it takes intentionality. It takes planning, time, and the willingness to do hard work. In other words it just doesn't "accidentally" takes place.

Honestly we do plan out what matters most to us, from retirement to our next vacation. Following God, much like a garden, takes intentionality too.

That was a Close One! 8-22

There are many things in today's reading, but one in particular caught my attention. Long story short, one of the 20 evil kings from the north was in great distress and pray to God. In His mercy, God provides a solution and this king and his people were delivered.

At this point you'd think this would've been enough for the king to stay on the right path... wrong:

"But they did not turn away from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, which he had caused Israel to commit..."

2 Kings 13:6a

It reminds me of me. So many times I've been in a financial bind, I've needed a break here or there, and when it comes do you know what I think? I usually think "It was my shrewdness that saved me" Not only I don't thank God but my patterns continue.

That's why I'm not big on everyday miracles. Very rarely they change people. In my opinion the only thing that changes people is when we knock, when we seek, when we surrender our will.

My \$16,500! 8-23

This portion of scripture tells us about a king that is mustering troops for battle and in an effort to boost its numbers he goes out and outsource militia from a foreign kingdom.

To my 6:30am calculations he stroke a deal by hiring “100,000 fighting men from Israel for a hundred talent of silver” 2 Chronicles 25:6

Again, a quick google search yielded 100 talents of silver equates to roughly \$16,500 US dollars. That’s a HUGE deal for 100,000 warriors! There’s only one problem: the Lord was not with these men and the prophet asked the king to let them go.

In other words, God was telling the king to walk away from his initial investment of \$16,500 empty handed. Before moving on to how the king handled this, put yourself in his shoes for a minute...

“Amaziah asked the man of God, “But what about the hundred talents I paid for these Israelite troops?” The man of God replied, “The Lord can give you much more than that.””

2 Chronicles 25:9 NIV

Read that last line again, the Lord can give you “MUCH MORE than that”! Amen!

God knows I’ve made bad deals, bought lemons, got into poor partnerships, and made a mess out of things, but this is so sweet to my ears to hear: The God we serve can give us much more than what we walk away.

Amen? Amen!

God’s Address 8-24

Today we go over the little book of Jonah. In these four chapters there are so many points and lessons! I’ll however pick one of them.

You all probably have heard of Jonah. Long story short, he was a prophet, God told him to deliver a message to Nineveh, he decided to go in the opposite direction by sea, big storm arose, and Jonah was THROWN into the sea.

You’d think it doesn’t get much worse than that... wrong. At this point a BIG fish came and swallowed Jonah.

Jonah has literally hit rock bottom and now to make matters worse he was just eaten by a big fish. However it is precisely there that Jonah FOUND back his faith:

“He said: “In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry.”

Jonah 2:2 NIV

This prayer took place in the belly of the fish. Read it again, Jonah felt reconnected with God, at his lowest point.

Do you want to reconnect with God, meet him at the end of your rope. That's God's address.

Do you need a major calamity? Not necessarily, you and I can position ourselves at the end of our rope every time WE HUMBLE OURSELVES. Let us get on our knees and pray. Let us admit we cannot control outcomes as much as we think we do. Let us acknowledge that there's a God and that we are not.

Following God vs Becoming God 8-25

Today's story present us with one of the most successful kings in Judah, king Uzziah. He reigned for over 52 years!!! Do you want to know the key to his reign? Here it is:

"He sought God during the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God. As long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success."

2 Chronicles 26:5 NIV

Key phrase? AS LONG AS HE SOUGHT The Lord! There's a common theme in the Bible and it entails calling, knocking, and in this case SEEKING.

At this point, after ruling at top of the game for over 50 years you'd wonder what's the opposite of seeking, and the answer according to the text is BECOMING.

"But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the Lord his God, and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense."

2 Chronicles 26:16 NIV

King Uzziah thought of himself inevitable, infallible, God-like. This led to his downfall and ultimately his life and health and death was dishonorable.

We either seek God or start thinking ourselves as gods. Let us not get this twisted.

A Clean Slate 8-26

About a month ago Chase Bank pulled out of the credit card business in Canada, but instead of selling the debt customers had accrued to debt collection agencies Chase decided to forgive the credit card debt of all of its Canadian customers. Clean slate!

Introducing the prophet Isaiah. Here's the word this prophet communicated to the people:

““Come now, let us settle the matter,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”

Isaiah 1:18 NIV

Come (insert your name here), let us settle this matter says GOD. Though you have done/thought (insert those thoughts/deeds) I will make them white as snow. No strings attached. Clean slate!

If it feels unfair, then you're getting it. It is unfair. That's the whole thing about the Gospel, the good news from God.

Today (insert your name here) you've been forgiven, cleansed, given a new opportunity, given a clean slate. Live your day as such!

Still on the Throne 8-27

If you've been following the book of Kings you'll notice a sense of disorder, a sense of confusion.

This scenario isn't much different from the one we see in the news/internet nowadays. Between politics, global trade policies, human rights, dictatorships, etc. At a personal level we have financial pressures, deadlines to meet, messes to clean up, illnesses, and decisions to wait for.

In the midst of all of this the prophet Isaiah had a vision, and what did he see?

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple.” Isaiah 6:1 NIV

Isaiah saw God, but God wasn't surprised or flustered by the circumstances. He wasn't caught “off guard” pacing back and forth trying to come up with a “plan B”. God was high and exalted, seared in a throne”

God sees and knows intimately what you and I are going through. He's only as far away as we place him. God has the ability to give us peace in the middle of the storm.

Yes, God can also calm the storm but sometimes God let the storm go on a little longer and uses it to build us up.

The point is that God is our refuge, our peace, and what we are required is not understanding but faith. The throne is not vacant... God is still God today.

Can't love God and Trash People 8-28

The book of Amos is a tough read due to the many references to nations we aren't familiar with, and the divide between Israel and Judah.

One thing is clear, the people of Israel prided themselves of being religious, while at the same time oppressed people and tilted justice for their benefit at the expense of the poor. It's the "my faith is personal" taken the wrong way. Of course faith is personal, but the consequences of our faith ought to be public.

In this vein the prophet Amos writes:

"But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" Amos 5:24 NIV

In the words of a Facebook inspirational quote I saw a few days back: you can say you love God and treat people like trash.

In that Day... 8-29

From the flood there was one family preserved. From Sodom and Gomorrah there was Lot and his family. From Egypt's captivity there was a Moses. From the incredulous spies there was Joshua and Caleb. From Rahab the prostitute there was king David.

From all the mess Israel and Judah have made of themselves the prophet Amos declares today:

"In that day "I will restore David's fallen shelter— I will repair its broken walls and restore its ruins— and will rebuild it as it used to be,"
Amos 9:11 NIV

God is a specialist in rebuilding projects. From ruins he builds strong towers. From yesterday he builds a tomorrow. From death God brings us life, here in the present and even after we die.

No matter how chaotic our lives might be, our God is a God of hope and restoration. In that day, says the prophet Amos... in that day.

Christmas today. 8-30

For those of you outside of Florida, right at this moment we are all paying close attention to hurricane Dorian and it's trajectory. Hurricanes aren't new to us nor to me personally since I was born in the Dominican Republic in the thick of hurricane David in 1979 as my mom and grandparents tell me.

In today's reading we see the prophet Isaiah in the midst of political and societal chaos. Both sides were about to be conquered by the Assyrian empire and it is in this climate (pun intended) that he writes:

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6 NIV

This is a verse I remember my daughters memorizing for Christmas plays. For to us (to you and me) a child is born. Hope comes in the form of a child, that's why we celebrate birthdays, we celebrate life!

My prayer is for us to keep our hope in God in the midst of the storms in our lives. Here in FL we are dealing with a physical storm, but many of us are dealing with other kinds of situations looming to wreak havoc in our lives.

Sometimes God calms the storm. Sometimes God doesn't calm the storm. But God always brings us peace in the midst of any storm. He brings us Christmas today.

To Walk Humbly 8-31

What does “walking humbly” means? The image that comes to mind is the dependence I remember seeing in my kids faces as they were growing up.

Yes, they're still growing up but there was a season in which pretty much everything was NEW to them and they literally looked up to Tracy and me for guidance. Granted they were still mobile (some more than others) but there was an air of “checking up”. Sometimes it was in form of a question, other times in more subtle ways such as a glance, or simply the mere comfort of our presence was enough.

The prophet Micah tells us today what God requires from all of us:

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

Micah 6:8 NIV

How can we do this today? This is our charge: to act JUSTLY and to love MERCY and to walk HUMBLY with God.

Let us meditate in those words and seek ways to implement them today.

Becoming what we Follow 9-1

About a month ago I saw the following quote on from Nietzsche: “He who fights too long against dragons becomes a dragon himself; and if you gaze too long into the abyss, the abyss will gaze into you.”

Today the book of 2 kings drops a similar line in the midst of a sentence:

“...They followed worthless idols and themselves became worthless. They imitated the nations around them although the Lord had ordered them, “Do not do as they do.””
2 Kings 17:15b NIV

They followed worthless idols, and themselves became worthless. In other words they became what they were following. This isn't too far from becoming “what we fight” or what we “gaze” since in order to do either we'd need to invest time, we'd need to “follow”.

This is the time most people make it an “either/or” proposition. Either follow God OR follow you dreams/career/relationship/etc. I personally believe this can be a follow God AND do your best at xyz.

The key is to keep our priorities in order. If we follow God our peace and joy will not depend on anything other than God. If we follow other people/places/things, our peace and joy will depend on those people/places/things.

We become what we follow. Let's follow The Lord with all of our heart today.

My Way God. 9-2

Today we have the story of a high ranking commander of an army who was in need of one thing: to be cured from leprosy.

With this in mind this decorated official went to the prophet Elisha for healing. Elisha told this commander a simple prescription: go and wash yourself 7 times in the Jordan river and you'll be cured.

You'd think the commander would've been ecstatic, but instead he replied:

“But Naaman went away angry and said, “I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy.” 2 Kings 5:11 NIV

In other words Naaman asked for a miracle, but he not only expected the result but he also expected the method to make sense to him. At this point the commander was jeopardizing the end result because THE WAY wasn't what he thought it'd be.

Many times we want healing, a breakthrough, but we want God to take suggestions from us. Surely we have a better way. Let just say if our way was the way we wouldn't need God in the first place.

Jesus says I'm THE WAY, the truth and the life. It's not our way, but God's way. Let us approach God in His terms and be OPEN to a way different than ours.

YOLO 9-3

The book of Isaiah is a tough book to tackle. It's full of historical references mixed in with prophetic messages.

There's however a little gem easily overlooked in one of the chapters from today's reading:

"But see, there is joy and revelry, slaughtering of cattle and killing of sheep, eating of meat and drinking of wine! "Let us eat and drink," you say, "for tomorrow we die!""
Isaiah 22:13 NIV

The context refers to a time in which it was appropriate to mourn and to pause. Instead of that these folks were feasting and living large. What caught my attention was that last phrase "let us eat and drink... for tomorrow we die!"

As someone who travels for a living as part of my livelihood there are a million things I can do in isolation miles and miles (sometimes countries) away from those who love and know me under the same motto, "let me do xyz... for tomorrow I'll die".

Couple of things:

- What we do in private has PUBLIC consequences. I'll just leave that at that.
- We don't die tomorrow. In one hand I believe our time here on earth is a rehearsal for our next life, but even if you don't believe that trust me, our REPUTATION never dies... it lives on.

In God we live today and tomorrow. Let us live life's that honor our Maker and those who know and love us.

Peaches and Dorian 9-4

Yesterday I woke up in ready to go to work in sunny Gainesville, GA. Southern hospitality, sweet tea, and burgers with coleslaw greeted me and made work fly by.

Today I wake up in Ocala, FL. It's rainy outside, with the outer bands of Dorian reminding everyone we're still dealing with a hurricane out there.

This vast difference is the perfect backdrop to our reading from Isaiah:

"Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord himself, is the Rock eternal." Isaiah 26:4 NIV

We are called to trust in the Lord in the clear days and also in the gloomy forecast. Both seasons will come upon us as we travel through life, it's not a matter of IF but a matter of WHEN.

Let us set our sight in the eternal Rock as we drive through the different seasons of life.

After a Dodging a Bullet 9-5

At this point the kingdom is divided in 2 nations, the north (Israel) and south (Judah). The northern nation had just been captured by the Assyrians and taken into exile. After seeing this the southern nation made "foxhole" prayers, sought to do well in the eyes of God and miraculously were not conquered by the Assyrians. You may say they dodged a bullet.

The way the "sought God" was by going from town to town and literally encouraging their people to go back to their roots, to their faith in God. As you might guess, some did and some did not. However those who did, those who recognize what have just happened up north and decided to mend their ways they did so in this way:

"Nevertheless, some from Asher, Manasseh and Zebulun humbled themselves and went to Jerusalem."
2 Chronicles 30:11 NIV

The way the people from these 3 cities came back to God was not by acknowledging there was a God. Not by paying a visit to church/temple. No, they did so by HUMBLING themselves.

Have you "dodged a bullet"? First off I'm glad you dodged it! Now let us humble ourselves to God. Do not waste this opportunity.

Today is the day to submit our ways to God, to open up to God and community, and to surrender to His will.

The Beauty of New 9-6

It's called honeymoon for a reason right! Think of that first time in your new car, opening that gift, visiting that place, meeting that special person. You get the idea. There's something almost magical that takes place. Sure nothing is perfect, but we are too enthralled with the new experience to worry. Yes we all have been there and is an awesome place to be.

In today's reading God is asking something similar out of His people:

“...There she will respond as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.”

Hosea 2:15b NIV

God is desiring His people to simply love Him. At first this seems egotistical and needy to me, but the more I love God (wait for this...) I actually love myself and others even more! How could this be? I have no clue but personally I'm at peace with the way I'm wired. Yes, yes, yes, there's always room for improvement but there's a core of who I am that ain't changing much and I'm at peace with that.

How can we love God? Well, if we look at the verse God reminds them of the time they were liberated from Egypt. In other words the path towards loving God is paved with GRATITUDE.

How grateful are we for our _____ ? Keep meditating on that and we will be on our way towards loving God.

It wasn't Santa 9-7

Santa Claus was never really big in our family. Partly because I'm pretty sure I wasn't too discrete about who was making the purchases, and partly because it just wasn't that big of a deal for us (for me).

Needless to say our kids early on knew it was “Santa”, but us the ones getting the list, getting the presents, wrapping and doing it all. Now, imagine if after they knew, after we told them the truth, they still honored and lived their life's after Santa Claus' rules.... wouldn't that be weird? That's what Israel did and that's what we do:

“I cared for you in the wilderness, in the land of burning heat. When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me.”
Hosea 13:5-6 NIV

God said it has always been me! Your life, health, sobriety, family, children, job opportunity, and every good gift comes from God.

Let us know allow the gifts get into our heads and lead us astray, lead us the way of pride.

Therapist Mr. Echo 9-8

In addition to my accountability partners, mentors, and pastors I do reach out to therapists from time to time for assistance. The last time I had one was about a year ago and typically this therapist would listen to the things I've been piling up to talk about and then it was my turn to listen for “recommendations”.

These recommendations usually challenging, to the point, and generally speaking not something I wanted to hear... but I'm better today because of it.

In today's reading we see a people who didn't want to hear truth. They wanted to hear their own echo. Check this out:

"They say to the seers, "See no more visions!" and to the prophets, "Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions." Isaiah 30:10 NIV

They wanted only good feeling stuff, they didn't want truth... they wanted illusions.

As a photographer myself let me tell you who sells illusions: the media industry. The recipe is simple... you don't have/look this or that but there's an easy hack to get it. Meanwhile feel bad and cheat your way into it.

Good feeling stuff alone will make us soft, victim-like, and egocentric. The real stuff is more difficult to digest but it makes us stronger, servant-like, and make us shine the light of God.

Let us seek and embrace the truth today.

Safest Bet 9-9

Everyday we wake up with many things on the line ranging from schools deadlines to money goals. In between we have relationships, work environment, job hunting, fitness regimen, and it can feel downright overwhelming from the get go.

Do you know one thing all of us can achieve everyday? There's one battle that's winnable every time. It takes no effort, no studying, no competing. Here the prophet Isaiah tells us about this one thing:

"Lord, be gracious to us; we long for you. Be our strength every morning, our salvation in time of distress." Isaiah 33:2 NIV

The Lord is our winning bet every day. The Lord is the one thing we all can win at, every single time. There has never been anyone I know that has spent time with God (in prayer/meditation/reading Scripture/church/giving/serving/etc) that has told me "I failed at that..."

Do you want to win today? Are you tired of waiting for the odds to be on your favor? Go for the SAFEST bet today, the one you are guaranteed to win... go for The Lord.

There's a Sequel 9-10

This life can't be all there's is. Can't you feel it? I mean we think we will be happy when/ with this or that, only to realize it all lasted way too short or it wasn't all we made it out to be in the first place.

What about all the pain around us? I'm not talking about the self inflicted one (that one needs no explanation) but the one that just doesn't add up. Did you see how that hurricane literally parked on the Bahamas? Why them and not us? Are we by any stretch any better?

Luckily this world is not all there is. I believe this world is a rehearsal for another one. This is no excuse to unplug, but rather to treasure those we love and take life on life's terms.

The prophet Isaiah tells us today:

“and those the Lord has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.” Isaiah 35:10 NIV

On this side of heaven we sometimes go through hell. But there's a place in which “all sorrow” will be taken away.

Until that day let us not expect more out of this life than what it can give. Ultimate freedom and happiness is found in Christ now and in eternity.

Trouble at the Gates 9-11

Judah's king had a big problem in his hand. An envoy from the largest empire known to man to that point was sieging Judah and to make matters worst they were ridiculing Judah's reliance on God.

Up until this point the enemy at the gates, the Assyrian empire, was on a roll. No one had successfully stand against them and now they were fixing their eyes on Judah.

The king of Judah knew they didn't stand a chance. What did he do then?

“When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the Lord.”
Isaiah 37:1 NIV

Simply put he humbled himself (God's soft spot) and went to church. There he prayed and cried and prayed and claimed to God for support. How did God respond?

“By the way that he came he will return; he will not enter this city,” declares the Lord. “I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant!”
Isaiah 37:34-35 NIV

God became their defender. God became their refuge and strong tower.

That's the beauty of the God we serve. He loves when we go to Him. He responds to our petitions. He wants us to claim to him in our hour of distress but also in every other time. What a great deal! We have season tickets with God!!!

Through it All - Sep 12

There are many people/things/places that want to make us believe there's a "pain free, easy access, shortcut" way to life.

If there's 1 thing I appreciate about the God we serve is that He doesn't shy away from pain. The Bible acknowledges there's pain in this world... regardless if you're a "good person" or not. Pain doesn't discriminate. This is however what our God promises:

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."

Isaiah 43:2 NIV

He promises to be WITH us, AS we go through the rivers and even through fire.

Thank you God for being a God that mourns, suffers, and even walks with us through the reality of life 🙏

I've Messed Up... now What? - Sep 13

I think I've learned more about God after having my own kids. When things go well there's not really a way to check on my daughter's heart. However when things go wrong that's prime time to see how they react towards us the parents.

Growing up my first instinct was to hide my mess from my parents, specially my dad. What happens next is what you probably know by now, one little lie leads to another, I try to avoid conversations and next thing you know I'm avoiding people altogether.

There's no need to do this with God. Here's why:

"I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you."

Isaiah 44:22 NIV

You are already forgiven. I am already forgiven. If this seems/sounds unfair is because it truly is. Our sins will come with their own consequences.

In God we have “our Father...” and in Him there’s no condemnation. Let us come to God, there’s no surprising Him. Let us come to our Heavenly Father.

Be Still... Sep 14

This week at our Thursday bible study we were talking about the things God uses to make us realize what’s His competition in our hearts.

For the “rich young ruler” it was his riches. For me is the “waiting game”.

This is funny because part of my strength is to DO, but there are times in which God pretty much forces me to a position in which there’s nothing left for me to do... but wait.

“He says, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.””

Psalms 46:10 NIV

God is always at work, He’s working when we are doing and He’s working when we are waiting. I do think however when the spotlight is on that which competes with God in our hearts, it has the potential to draw us closer to God or to our own self.

The rich young ruler picked his own self and walked away. Today that’s all we know about him. However we know more, and even name our kids, after those who did not walk away.

Let us learn to “be still” when that which competes for our hearts is brought to the forefront.

None of Us - Sep 15

I’ve made the “Lord’s Prayer” when I was about 8 years old. Grew up attending a Calvinist church, and switched to an Arminian one as a teen.

Graduated with honors both in high school and college, obtained a bachelors degree in theology and went to seminary (think pastor/priest) for my post grad work. For work I’ve been a youth pastor, missionary, photographer, short filmmaker and a Chaplain (Spiritual Advisor) at a rehab center.

All of this means NOTHING as it relates to my goodness. None of this can get me any closer to God. None of this makes me 1 iota better than anyone.

“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Isaiah 53:6 NIV

All of us, says the verse. That’s you and that’s me. We all need a Savior and thank God he has carried my sins of us all.

Let us not measure our self perceived goodness against others to put them down. For one, no one has this god-like goodness and two doing so proves the point we are all sick to the core.

None of us... God for all 🙏

While You Can Sep 16

This past week I had the chance to grab coffee with a mentor on Monday morning, go to a Bible Study on Thursday, and go to church on Sunday.

At a personal level I’m still getting on my knees first thing out of bed, saying the Lord Prayer, and then reading Scripture. Burdensome? Not one bit.

Isaiah reminds us of this today:

“Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.” Isaiah 55:6 NIV

There will be times I’ll in situations where I won’t be able to do much of what I said in the first paragraph. Today however is not that day.

Let us delight in all the offers available to us at the table of the Lord. If you can, go for it. You will not regret it.

5 years and 6 weeks. sep 17

This last week I heard the story of how long does it takes for Japanese bamboo to grow. According to the story as beautiful as they are, bamboo trees take 5 years to grow. In that time you’re watering and caring, while absolutely nothing appears. Not a bud, twig, nothing. However after 5 years the bamboo tree grows over 80 feet tall... in just 6 weeks!

The point of this story is not that it takes 6 weeks to see results, but that it takes “5 years and 6 weeks” altogether. The bamboo was growing, developing, even when we couldn’t see any above ground activity. There was an underground system at work and it only became evident, public, after 5 years.

From today's reading this verse caught my attention:

"The least of you will become a thousand, the smallest a mighty nation. I am the Lord; in its time I will do this swiftly."

Isaiah 60:22 NIV

When? In ITS time. Sometime it's when we think it'll happen. Most of the time, in my limited experience, it is not. What's the key? To stay in the system, in the fight, connected with God and others as you go through life.

God will bring forth the fruits in its time.

Proper Rank - Sep 18

Today is easy to go with the flow and accept egalitarianism as the ultimate achievement of openness and progressive thinking. I do believe all things/people have intrinsic value/worth, but not all things/people are not ought to be the same.

Families need structure, and this is provided by parent(s). Missions need leadership, and this is provided by subject matter experts. You can see my point.

Much like that our relationship to God follows a pattern: He is God and we are not. Or as Isaiah says it:

"Yet you, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand."

Isaiah 64:8 NIV

Our job is to surrender to his artistry, not fight it. The more we walk away from our God the "drier" we become in our ways. By the same token, the closer we are to our Maker the more malleable we remain as He continues to mold us to a masterpiece.

His creation, our will. Let us stay close to our Maker.

The Opposite of Love - Sep 19

As you can probably tell out of the 40 kings of Israel/Judah there were very few that followed God "wholeheartedly". Most of them completely disregarded the prophets and instead just went with what seemed right "in their own eye".

Those who followed God did so by reacting to Him. By engaging with him. In contrast those who did not simply ignored God altogether. This is exactly the opposite of loving God, ignoring Him.

“Remember, Lord, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.” 2 Kings 20:3 NIV

Most of us think hate is the opposite of love, but the Bible show us we can even wrestle God and He welcomes that! It is apathy, what drives us away further from God.

King Hezekiah was far from perfect. He was not even a good statesman. But he “reacted” to God. He cared about God, and God rewarded that.

Let us care about God today 🙏

God's Language - sep 20

I'm halfway through Malcolm Gladwell's book "Talking to Strangers" and is just fascinating the nuances of communication and how easy is to misread people.

In regards to communicating with God we must know how to interact, how to connect with God. Today we have yet one more of those kings who "did evil in the eyes of the Lord" however did something out of character:

“In his distress he sought the favor of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors.”
2 Chronicles 33:12 NIV

Everybody faces distress. Not everybody seeks the favor of The Lord. How did he do so? It says it right there in the verse, by HUMBLING himself. That's the language to connect with God, humbleness.

Notice I said that's the language to "connect" not the language to "get God to do xyz". What we get from our God is communion, not a vending machine.

Let us seek God at all times and cherish the goodness of being in good standing with Him through Christ... amen 🙏

Thinking of Oprah - Sep 21

Today's verse that caught my attention was a verse that per Oprah's own remark, it "led her away from God".

“The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath...”

Nahum 1:2a NIV

The context of Oprah’s remarks were related to God jealousy and how “needy/weak” this was from an all powerful and loving God.

Unfortunately if we frame it through the lens of an dysfunctional relationship I’d have to agree with her. However God doesn’t need us, he loves us.

Since God loves us He’s jealous of us buying into the lies of our own mind, our own fantasies. God is the good shepherd, all the others are thieves and come to lure us and hurt us. In this sense being jealous is God’s way to mourn all we miss out when we turn and walk away from Him.

God doesn’t need us, he loves us. He loves Oprah and He loves you and me.

God’s Phone Number - Sep 22

I’d say most of us would want to have a “direct line” to God. In fact sometimes people tell/assume I have a special way to connect with God. The reality is that there is a way for you and me to get God to hear us.

Today we learn about the king Josiah and his reaction when he first learned about God:

“Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before God when you heard what he spoke against this place and its people, and because you humbled yourself before me and tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the Lord.”

2 Chronicles 34:27 NIV

God heard Josiah, “because his heart was responsive” and he “humbled himself”. In other words because he cared and he said in his heart not my will, but Thy will God.

God help us to be sensitive, to react to You, and to chose Your will over ours 🙏

Same Fire - Sep 23

The book we read today is a tough one given its localized and somber poetry, but there’s a common theme that is evident even in a short book like this: fire can consume us or fire can purify us.

The same fire that brings destruction is the one that makes us shine and be set apart.

“Then I will purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord ...”

Zephaniah 3:9 NIV

At this point you might ask what decides the outcome... I'm glad you asked:

“Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility...”

Zephaniah 2:3a

Those who:

- a) seek the Lord
- b) the humble ones
- c) obey Him

What does a purified outcome look like? What is the promise?

“At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes,” says the Lord.”

Zephaniah 3:20 NIV

We will be gathered, we will be brought HOME. In other words we'd be at a place of shalom, inner peace, joy, and a place of no lack... a place of restoration.

Two Sins - Sep 24

The book of Jeremiah is a fascinating one since it shows us God dealing directly with this prophet and how he was chosen literally “from the womb” to be a prophet, amazing.

Through Jeremiah God communicated his people have committed 2 sins:

“My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.”

Jeremiah 2:13 NIV

How many times have we invested our time, money, and resources in “broken cisterns”. Keep in mind these cisterns do hold water and are useful. I can think of good jobs, relationships, education, etc. However we should not build our source of LIFE/identity from any of these places! Nor what we drive, who we are with, or what we know!

This was their 2nd sin. Their 1st explains the 2nd: forgetting altogether about God, the source of LIFE.

The moment we infringe on the first one, the second one is an automatic move for all of us. Let us work on keeping God in our foreground at all times 🙏

Loving the Lie - Sep 25

This is an excerpt from my most memorable standup/acceptance from the one and only Jerry Seinfeld:

“I love advertising, because I love lying. In advertising, everything is the way you wish it was. I don’t care that it won’t be like that when I actually get the product being advertised, because in between seeing the commercial and owning the thing, I’m happy, and that’s all I want.” Jerry Seinfeld Clio Award

Most of us, if not all, of us are just like that. We love the lie. We know it’s not all we thing it is, but we go for it anyways.

God through the prophet Jeremiah calls out his people under the same charge:

“The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way. But what will you do in the end?”
Jeremiah 5:31 NIV

There will be one day in which we will gain 20/20 vision, and all will be made clear. Let us invest in real, meaningful, eternal stocks while we can. Let us wake up from loving the lies we want/chose to believe and embrace the Truth as uncomfortable as it might be.

My Way - Sep 26

Each of us have a preferred way of going about things and get things done. If we are honest some of those ways work well and some not as well. That’s my point, at our BEST we produce 50/50 chance of harmony and wholesomeness.

What do we do with the rest? I’ll tell you what most people do: nothing.

“I have listened attentively, but they do not say what is right. None of them repent of their wickedness, saying, “What have I done?” Each pursues their own course like a horse charging into battle.” Jeremiah 8:6 NIV

Most people just keep on marching forward. No double take, no “I wonder if I should’ve...” just business as usual.

God wants us to evaluate our ways. To consider the ways we go about doing life might just not be perfect. I think that’s reasonable.

Would you want to join me in evaluating our ways? I think it makes sense. I think it’s the only way to grow closer to God, others, and our true self.

Communion with God - Sep 27

This word “communion” is a compound of the Latin words “common” and “to be in a state of”, literally translating to being in a state of commonality with something or someone.

In this case the chief yearn of all believers is to be in communion with God and therefore being in communion with others and self.

The prophet Jeremiah after listing a bleak picture of what’s to come to Judah declares the reason for these catastrophes:

“This is your lot, the portion I have decreed for you,” declares the Lord, “because you have forgotten me and trusted in false gods.” Jeremiah 13:25 NIV

All disruption, noise, and darkness comes from “forgetting God”. Or said in another way, it all comes from not having communion with God.

Let us be in harmony the Lord today. Let us have communion with God in our thoughts and actions today 🙏

Follow your Heart (not) - Sep 28

I absolutely LOVE Spanish boleros/ballads and you better believe I sing those to the top of my lungs. I’ve always had, ever since I played with my grandfather’s vinyl records of Jose Jose (Mexican songwriter).

A friend of mine who didn’t know Spanish, seeking for some sort of alignment, blurted “I’ve noticed all Spanish songs say the word CORAZÓN in it...” Not only that’s not true... 🤔 but but but I can see her point.

We love singing about our heart (corazón), our emotions, and impulses. However if I look at my heart at least half of its emotions I'd be embarrassed to share in public!

The prophet Jeremiah wrote the following regarding our hearts:

“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”
Jeremiah 17:9 NIV

Yes, take your heart into consideration, but do not follow after it! If we all follow our hearts we'd have no savings, no long-lasting relationships, no friends, no fitness, and zero credibility.

Keep on singing about the heart in whichever language you please, but be aware... our emotions are a part of who we are, not our identity nor the gold standard for our actions.

Location, Location - Sep 29

Sometimes because of my traveling job is hard for me to make it to church every Sunday. Come to think about I think I average 3 out of 4 church visits per month... on a good month 🙏

Today we read about God telling Jeremiah to go to a specific LOCATION:

““Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message.””
Jeremiah 18:2 NIV

Yes, the important part is The Lord's presence and message. But do not miss how PLACES can work out positively for us.

Usually we hear about people/places/things in a negative connotation, but the truth is that those same pieces could be flipped for our enrichment. Think about it.

Today is a great day to position ourselves in a special location, in a place where we can hear God communicating with us in high definition.

Be the Fire 9-30

The prophet Jeremiah is delivering a harsh message to the people on behalf of God. In a nutshell they will all be exiled for 70 years to the Babylonian empire.

That's a lot of people, and as you can imagine not all of them were evil and wicked. So what does God do? He shows Jeremiah a basket full of mixed figs, some good and some bad:

“This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Like these good figs, I regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I sent away from this place to the land of the Babylonians. My eyes will watch over them for their good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them.’”

Jeremiah 24:5-6 NIV

You got that right, all the figs are in the same basket. Calamity will come upon all people. However those who are considered “good” will not be destroyed, but rather strengthened.

As Nassim Taleb wrote “Wind extinguishes a candle and energizes fire.” Let us be the fire today.

Your Best Now 10-1

Some of us find ourselves in places, careers, situations, finances, less than our ideal. Is like we've been in this “transition” for awhile now, we are starting to think if this is our “new normal”. What do we do while we wait, while we are “in between” stages?

The prophet Jeremiah told his fellow Israelites exactly what to do while in exile:

“Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.””

Jeremiah 29:7 NIV

Seek the peace and prosperity of where YOU are NOW. Are you in school? Do your best. Working a job that underpays? Do your best. New to parenting? Do your best. Still living in a halfway house? Do your best.

The following verse is a popular one among Christians, but I wonder if “doing our best” is a precursor of the following:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Jeremiah 29:11 NIV

The way I marry these two concepts is: Do your best now, today.... and God will prosper your effort.

It's easier to steer a car while moving. Have you tried to steer a car while parked?

What if I don't Feel it? 10-2

The prophet Jeremiah tells us today that God will be a refreshing source of life to all:

“I will refresh the weary and satisfy the faint.”
Jeremiah 31:25 NIV

When I first read this I wonder if God could still “refresh and satisfy” even if we don't feel like we need to be refreshed and satisfied. In other words, can God heal us if we don't feel/think we need healing?

Contrary to medicine which works independent from our cooperation, I do not think God operates the same way. It takes 2 to dance and one partner must follow the other. With no following (surrendering) there's no art, not flow, no movement.

God will satisfy and refresh those who are in tune with their drought and hunger. Let us be humble in spirit since theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Awkward Walk 10-3

Here's a verse I kept looking at time and time again this morning:

“They turned their backs to me and not their faces; though I taught them again and again, they would not listen or respond to discipline.”
Jeremiah 32:33 NIV

The prophet Jeremiah is describing his people as one who literally walks away from God (live their lives in whichever way it pleases them) while still looking at God! This must make for an awkward picture. Imagine someone walking away from you... while having his/her face looking towards you. I know, weird.

That's exactly what some of us do. While knowing the Light, we made a decision to walk into the shadows and somehow manage to still “appear” as if we are connected with God.

The Bible teaches us to either be hot or cold. To either be in or out. To either live in light or live in darkness. There's no in between here.

If we decide to live in the “gray area” let us recognize that as it pertains to God we are living in darkness, not light.

Let us make a decision to live today, October 3rd in light. Looking and walking towards God and not away from Him.

Beyond Black and White 10-4

As we near the end of the book of Jeremiah we are introduced to another group of people we haven't heard before, the Rekabites. There was something particular about this group of people: their forefathers have told them to abstain from building houses and drinking wine.

“But they replied, “We do not drink wine, because our forefather Jehonadab son of Rekab gave us this command: ‘Neither you nor your descendants must ever drink wine.’” Jeremiah 35:6 NIV

These weren't religious folks, they just practiced something that made them stand out.

I don't want to make this about promoting or opposing wine, but about practicing self-imposed discipline. Some of us will do well by abstaining from wine. Others from credit cards. Others from sugar. Others from music with questionable lyrics.

We don't need to “hear from God” to discern there are certain things it will do us well to refrain from. Not because they're bad or illegal (we shouldn't do that either by the way) but because we know better.

God has not given us a spirit of fear, but rather a spirit of “power, love and self-discipline.”
2 Timothy 1:7 NIV

Angry with God 10-5

This year I've been turned down from a couple great job opportunities. In plain English I was told a big fat no.

I'm known for taking things well at first, but it isn't until later on that I start feeling the feelings. For some odd reason I've been feeling those two rejections this past month and my frustration has been directed at God himself.

In the psalms we find I'm not alone. There have been those who also feel despair from God:

“O God, why have you rejected us forever? Why does your anger smolder against the sheep of your pasture?” Psalms 74:1 NIV

I find solace in knowing our God is a big enough God to take us even with our myopic warped up feelings. There's room to wrestle with our God, he welcomes it.

Let us not walk away from our Father when we are in our feelings, but instead go to Him with all we got.

The Words of the Lord 10-6

Today's reading was a formal rendition of the last few chapters from Jeremiah. Yes, in the Bible you'll find the same stories told from different authors sometimes:

"The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah."

2 Chronicles 36:21 NIV

The key phrase here is "in fulfillment of the word of the Lord".

The words of God are powerful. It was through his words that he created heaven and earth and literally spoke humanity into existence. This text remind us that his words will be fulfilled, they will be accomplished.

Here's why I love learning this, because in another part of the Bible God declares this about you and me:

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Matthew 11:28 NIV

Rest, peace, and contentment WILL happen because God has said it. Our part? Let us go to him!

Win/Loss Record 10-7

This week I started reading "Thinking in Bets" by poker world champion Annie Duke, and she said:

"A great poker player who has a good-size advantage over the other players at the table, making significantly better strategic decisions, will still be losing over 40% of the time at the end of eight hours of play."

That's a lot of losing! But think about baseball. A great batting average is .300 which means that batter missed 70% of the time. Similarly we can look at other sports and see how losing is actually a part of the game.

Life is much more complicated than a game and yet for some reason we shy away from embracing loses. Listen, not everything we do works out, not everything we want we get, regardless of how apt we are.

It is in a dire circumstance that the prophet Habakkuk says today in our reading:

“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.”
Habakkuk 3:17-18 NIV

I truly wish we all accomplish everything we set our hearts to, but let's be honest... sometimes we get it and sometimes we do not.

Let us be consistent in 1 thing, let us rejoice in God regardless of our win/loss record.

Resulting 10-8

Today we see the people asking prophet Jeremiah for a message from God. After the message is delivered this was their reaction:

““We will not listen to the message you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord! We will certainly do everything we said we would: We will burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and will pour out drink offerings to her just as we and our ancestors, our kings and our officials did in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. At that time we had plenty of food and were well off and suffered no harm.”
Jeremiah 44:16-17 NIV

I'd like us to focus on 2 things:

- A) we will do everything we said we would
- B) at that time... we were well off and suffered no harm

Point A could be translated as “taking our will back”. We know what God wants us to do, and yet we go with a thanks-but-no-thanks.

Point B is really interesting because we equate results with solid thinking. Is like assuming we won a game because of our skill, not luck. Or we made it home while driving drunk, therefore drunk driving is okay.

You see, just because something “works” doesn't mean it's meant to work like that. That's what is called resulting.

Last week I was facilitating a rehab group and a client said, “I disagree with you mr. Arturo... when I'm on XYZ I'm more focused, happier, have a better outlook and even last longer in bed”. Thankfully another client saw the gap on this argument and said, “then it was drug XYZ doing all those things... not you”

There are many things that can result in wins, or solutions. But just because they work doesn't mean they're right. Focus on the system, in the process, in the habits. Let us not be blinded by resulting.

Action / Consequences 10-9

These passages from Jeremiah are tough to swallow. It basically boils down to God telling them that the consequences of their actions are now in their doorstep:

“Do not be afraid, Jacob my servant, for I am with you,” declares the Lord. “Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only in due measure; I will not let you go entirely unpunished.””

Jeremiah 46:28 NIV

I wish I could tell everyone that their credit card debts will be wiped out. That that court ruling will be favorably. That this or that life/health choice will work out because things “always work themselves out”... but I can't in all honesty.

Someone once said “God always forgives, we men forgive sometimes, but nature never forgives”. I don't know where you land here, but regardless the important thing is that God promises to BE with us throughout and in my observation some of the best life lessons we learn while rehabbing, paying off debt, healing... getting back up.

Let us face up the reality of our actions and place our faith in God to strengthen us as we find our way back.

God is Against... drumroll... 10-10

We hear stories that God is all love, all goodness, and all just sweet. While I do agree, there's an aspect of God that we don't hear much and is his absence.

But wait, some may push back and protest saying God is always present! Correct, but He can be near while we still deliberately give Him our back... or cold shoulder. That's called arrogance.

““See, I am against you, you arrogant one,” declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty, “for your day has come, the time for you to be punished.”

Jeremiah 50:31 NIV

There are things that we will not understand (Deut 29:29) and pain and punishment is one of them. But whether it comes from XYZ the truth is that our arrogance will cost us.

Let us be humble and acknowledge there's so much we don't know/control in this world. Let us always be openminded, bring God to our day, and accept the mysteries of life.

My Portion 10-11

Again, as we near the end of the book of Jeremiah it feels like we are reading a war log, just hard stuff.

In the midst of it all there's a verse, a concept that caught my attention:

“He who is the Portion of Jacob is not like these, for he is the Maker of all things, including the people of his inheritance— the Lord Almighty is his name.”
Jeremiah 51:19 NIV

Here's the concept of God being the “portion” of his people. This concept is sprinkled throughout scripture and it communicates a sense of “my God is enough”, a sense of deep down satisfaction.

I promote action, drive, and doing leg work for your hopes and dreams, but there's a sense in which we ought to know that we are already okay, we are already loved, we are already at peace.

Let us today eat, delight, and partake in God as our portion.

Go swing for the fences, but know that you've already made the team, God has recruited you, out on a new uniform, and your spot is secured. You are in! 

Seasons 10-12

From the prophet Jeremiah we now go to the first two chapters of Lamentations. Needless to say, not the most upbeat back to back.

In fact this morning as I read, and read again and again these 2 chapters I struggled finding a verse, something that I can neatly pack and carry with me throughout the day. If you find something feel free to share it with me.

Instead, after walking away from the text and getting some breakfast, I thought Lamentations is more like a season, a realistic X-ray of all of us during the normal passing of life. In other words we all go through periods (seasons) of winter in our lives.

Our culture here in the USA doesn't embrace seasons of winter well. I remember growing up in the Dominican Republic after certain tragedies people would “just be” for 9 days, business would close, and celebrations and pain were interweaved and normalized.

Here we know how to protest, be offended, and ignore (or block people). But we don't embrace “not feeling well” as a normal part of life. We want to jump out of it as soon as possible, and by any means.

Spring, summer, fall, and winter they are all a part of life. Lamentations reminds us to acknowledge it and accept it.

More than Words 10-13

Ever since I can remember I've been serving and facilitating Groups. For the longest time Youth Groups and churches and camps and these past couple years at a Rehab facility.

In every Group you typically have a few really interested (very few), a majority in and out, but every now and then I have a combative fellow.

At that moment everything in me wants to prove my point sometimes at the expense of the person. This is when verses like the one from today's reading help me out:

"Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord."

Lamentations 3:40 NIV

We can do all the talk we want, but is our life "working out"? How are the quality of our relationships? Are we growing and living a positive legacy to those we know a love?

Let us all (regardless if group facilitator or participant) examine our ways, says the Bible.

The result will always be = let us go back to The Lord.

What we Eat. 10-14

Here's an interesting "word picture" from the book of Ezekiel:

"Then he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it." So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth."

Ezekiel 3:3 NIV

I've heard of listening, reading, meditating on the words of God, but never EATING it!

If I think about it this is what I "eat" on a regular basis: Facebook, looks, purchases. How does this taste? Empty, never enough, and in debt.

I don't know what you "eat" not how it leaves you, but today we are encouraged to do as the prophet Ezekiel: to EAT the words of God, and we will be left with a sweet taste in our mouth 😊😊😊

The Little Things 10-15

The story of the people of Israel is parallel to our own stories in so many ways...

Chosen by God out of bondage to a promise land, told to drive away all of the tribes, and be a blessing to the world. Much like them we've been set free by God, told to crucify sin in our lives on a daily basis, and to be a blessing to others.

Well, Israel had a "better idea" and kept some of the tribes in the midst. Many years later this is the result:

““This is what the Sovereign Lord says: This is Jerusalem, which I have set in the center of the nations, with countries all around her. Yet in her wickedness she has rebelled against my laws and decrees more than the nations and countries around her. She has rejected my laws and has not followed my decrees.”

Ezekiel 5:5-6 NIV

Now those same tribes have influenced Israel to the point that now there's little difference between them.

In a similar fashion we have a keen way to keep around "little habits", nothing terrible, just a bit off. Sooner or later those little habits find a way to seem normal and next thing we know there's no separation, we become our habits.

God, help us put away those seemingly innocuous habits of ours. We already know what they are, let us stomp them out before our lives get out of control.

Feeling Feelings 10-16-19

One of the many lessons I've learned while serving addicts in recovery is this concept of "feeling their feelings".

If you aren't aware, after some time away from their last drug use, our brothers and sisters in recovery start literally "feeling their feelings" once again. This is a critical stage in their sobriety and some can't cope with it all and thus need our support and care.

To have a heart of flesh is an indicator of being connected with God, self, and others. Today the prophet Ezekiel tells us:

“I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.”

Ezekiel 11:19 NIV

Let us welcome the feelings of being alive. The feelings that connect us with God, ourselves, and others.

God of our Imagination 10-17-19

In the substance abuse community it is common to hear the phrase “God of our Understanding” as we refer to the amount of knowledge/light we’ve acquired/received regarding God.

Many times however what I’ve noticed is that we don’t have much of a God of our Understanding but instead a God of our IMAGINATION.

““Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who are now prophesying. Say to those who prophesy out of their own imagination: ‘Hear the word of the Lord!’”
Ezekiel 13:2 NIV

The God of my Imagination tells me that everything will always be okay, that if I declare it to the universe I shall get it, that pain is an illusion, and that the world must do my right now that I’m doing the right thing.

Not so fast. Let us pause and ask ourselves where in the world have we gotten those ideas? You guessed it, we’ve made them up. It sounds good/fair, we’ve seen it in a quote, or something like that... but it’s not the product of our intellectual diligence but the product of our lazy imagination.

Let us put some effort into our understanding of God today.

What we Wish For. 10-19-19

Today after reading our 3 chapters from Ezekiel I kept coming back to this one particular verse. I read it, re-read it, and read it again and still I knew I had to meditate on it but honestly I couldn’t understand it. It wasn’t until I switched the translation from NIV to “The Message” transliteration that this verse made sense and came alive to me:

““What you’re secretly thinking is never going to happen. You’re thinking, “We’re going to be like everybody else, just like the other nations. We’re going to worship gods we can make and control.”” Ezekiel 20:32 MSG

Why wouldn’t God say “whatever you wish that’s what you’re getting”?... instead God says “what you’re wishing isn’t going to happen”... but why???

I think a hint is on that last sentence: “We are going to worship gods we can make and control”. I think God says that’s not going to happen because there’s nothing we can make and control.

We can influence situations, but we cannot determine outcomes. We can decide to follow/worship others, self, or things, but we cannot control others, things, and there’s very little we can control about ourselves.

So, what's our best best? To stop wanting to be/do as everyone else and to direct our attention to our Maker. By doing so we will come to our best self and be a blessing to others.

The Solution Paradox. 10-20-19

Yesterday my good friend Dino wrote on his devotional something to the effect of "it isn't until we surrender that God operates."

As a matter of fact last night I was having dinner with a friend and she asked me about how is it that I'll be celebrating my "19th wedding anniversary in a few months?" The answer is pretty much the same, I'm aware of how bad/fast things can get when I let my ego run the show... so I talk about it, laugh about with with my friends, and give it up (surrender) to God.

Today the prophet Ezekiel tells us about this paradox of power-by-surrendering:

"this is what the Sovereign Lord says: Take off the turban, remove the crown. It will not be as it was: The lowly will be exalted and the exalted will be brought low." Ezekiel 21:26 NIV

We all have "our ways" and that's fair, but if our ways aren't working for us we've got to stop and reconsider.

Let us walk humbly in God and not be humbled by our selfish decisions.

Faith w/o Works 10-21-19

We tend to do things on extremes, specially in the beginning stages of a thought or even a movement. As one who grew up Methodist/Baptist I've always heard "faith alone" or "is all about what we believe".

All that is true, but incomplete. Later on in the New Testament James reminds us that "faith without works is dead" and here Ezekiel seems to hint the same:

““ ‘I the Lord have spoken. The time has come for me to act. I will not hold back; I will not have pity, nor will I relent. You will be judged according to your conduct and your actions, declares the Sovereign Lord.’ ””
Ezekiel 24:14 NIV

Did you catch that? The Lord says that people will be judged "on their conduct and actions".

I've met many people that believe the same things I do (faith) but live in complete disregard for others or even themselves (works).

Let us do right with the limited amount of knowledge we have. I believe if we all put in practice what we already know we all will be much much better. Just do it!

The Best Lessons. 10-22-19

Man, Ezekiel is such a hard book... is like the sequel to all the bad moves Israel (and others) made in the books of Judges and Kings.

Out of all 3 chapters from today's reading I couldn't find something practical/uplifting to meditate on. There's however this little line that keeps repeating throughout the book:

“and I will inflict punishment on Moab. Then they will know that I am the Lord.’ ”
Ezekiel 25:11 NIV

There seems to be a direct correlation between “knowing God” and “suffering”. In fact I'd argue we learn MORE from our falling down than when things go smooth.

I'm not going to make a case where's this suffering coming from, whether is from God, ourselves, the world, demons, etc. That's another topic for another day.

What we need to know is to not WASTE our suffering and to seek God in the midst of it.

To Be Like God 10-23

This was the earliest temptation recorded in the Bible. The serpent offered Adam and Eve the opportunity to eat from the fruit of knowledge of good and evil in order for them to “be like God”.

But what does that mean? Today in Ezekiel we have the example of the king of Tyre:

““Son of man, say to the ruler of Tyre, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: “ ‘In the pride of your heart you say, “I am a god; I sit on the throne of a god in the heart of the seas.” But you are a mere mortal and not a god, though you think you are as wise as a god.” Ezekiel 28:2 NIV

As “a god” this king thought as one in charge and accountable to nobody. Some might even say this is exactly how “being free” feels like. However calling our own shots, living in complete disconnect from others and reality leads us to shackles... even if we feel we are winning.

We cannot try to be like god without becoming a slave to someone or something. The only way to freedom is to surrender to the one and true God.

What Cat-Woman Wanted. 10-24-19

During my 9.5 hours flight from Oslo to Fort Lauderdale I had plenty of movies to watch, mostly classics sprinkled with a couple new releases.

From the classics I watched “The Dark Knight Rises” with Christian Bale and Anne Hathaway. One of the base storylines was cat-woman (Hathaway) wanted to find a way to start over again, to have a new life.

In today’s reading we have God making a sweeping and incredible offer:

“None of the sins that person has committed will be remembered against them. They have done what is just and right; they will surely live.”
Ezekiel 33:16 NIV

The entire chapter 36 is pretty cool, but the gist is that God makes a promise, a promise to give us a true clean slate, a new life.

None of our guilt, shame, hang-ups, dependencies, insecurities will be weighing us down. We are at our most free when we are in the Light.

2 for 1 Deal 10-25-19

A week ago Tracy and I were window shopping in Russia and saw many signs like this:
 $1+1=3$
For those of you who aren’t shoppers this translates as a great deal!

The book of Ezekiel also tells us of an even greater deal:

“And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God.” Ezekiel 36:27-28 NIV

By seeking God first, we also get the desire to do His will! Amazing!

In other words we can focus on learning to stop all the “bad” things and do all the “good” things... OR or or we can seek God and He will plant the desire in us to do His will.

1+1=3 in Russian stores, but God in us is even a better deal 😄🤑

👤 **Bones** 🦴 10-26-19

One of the most popular passages from Ezekiel is this one of the “dry bones”. A couple of days back we learned how God makes himself known through hardships, but here’s another way:

“This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.’ ””

Ezekiel 37:5-6 NIV

Nothing shocks me more than seeing someone I thought I “knew” behave in a complete different way! I get the privilege to see this first hand in my line of work.

I see men and woman spiritually, financially, emotionally, and physically broken come in and out our churches and rehab centers, but every now and then these men and women show up and I hardly recognize them. Why? Because the breath of life, the breath of God is now living inside of them.

They (as well as me) are still broken, but God is now in charge and giving life.

Such a beautiful thing.

By far my favorite part of my job!

Don't Get It. 10-27-19

These 3 chapters from today’s reading are a tough read. Not because of judgments or anything like that, but because of math.

These chapters are full of measurements, angles, amounts, and while I passed math while in school I must admit I never really excelled at it.

The reason I’m not backing down from chapters like these is because the Bible is not about me. I should be able to read through stuff I don’t understand and/or like an adult.

Many times our approach is “if it’s not my fav flavor I don’t like it” well, much like the Bible there are seasons, situations in life that we just don’t get but we should avoid the temptation to make everything about us.

Bring it on Ezekiel, don’t understand much about all these triangulations but is all part of the story.

Change by Awe 10-28-19

Today I switched from the NIV translation to “The Message” transliteration of the Bible to bring the spirit of this verse from Ezekiel:

““Son of man, tell the people of Israel all about the Temple so they’ll be dismayed by their wayward lives. Get them to go over the layout. That will bring them up short. Show them the whole plan of the Temple, its ins and outs, the proportions, the regulations, and the laws. Draw a picture so they can see the design and meaning and live by its design and intent.”

Ezekiel 43:10-11 MSG

God was instructing Ezekiel to literally draw a picture in order to promote change. But how? By inspiration and awe.

Do you know your life is a picture God uses to bring people to him? The way we treat others, relate to our family members, the things we post on social media, everything is a picture God can use to inspire others.

How about us though? Are we seeking people/relationships/ideas that inspire us to change?

Some of us are great at looking out after ourselves but lack in seeing the bigger picture. I assure you there are eye balls looking at our lives right now. Let us be aware many times it isn’t God parting the Red Sea, but God using YOU and ME to inspire others.

Borders. 10-29-19

The last chapter of Ezekiel comes packed with FIFTEEN mentions of the word Border/ Limit/Boundaries.

Serendipitously a copy of Psychology Today magazine come to our house with the title “The Power of Boundaries”, so my mind is automatically prone to meditate on this concept.

Henry Cloud writes “Boundaries define us... it shows me where I end and someone else begins... knowing what I am to own and take responsibility for gives me freedom.” Did you catch that? Freedom comes through boundaries!

This is one of those easier said than done, but God cares about boundaries because God cares about freedom.

Fasting. 10-30-19

This past weekend while attending a continuing education certification in Miami I had the opportunity to meet new friends and have meaningful conversations.

One of those conversations was with a friend from Brazil and how much fasting has improved her life. She first tried it as a last resource (pretty much out of desperation and frustration with life) but now is an allied in seeking clarity and centeredness.

This is why this verse from the book of Joel jumped out of the page this morning to me:

““Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.”” Joel 2:12 NIV

I got to be honest, fasting is one of my least practiced spiritual disciplines but I’m noticing God is nudging me, inviting me to up my game....

Let us always keep reaching for new spiritual goals. Maybe for you is attending church this weekend, start meditating, volunteering, or even calling a family member ldk... but we all have a spiritual “next level” to aim and pursue 🏃🏃🏃

Resolve. 10-31-19

Today we enter the book of Daniel and I’m torn between 2 passages that def grabbed my attention:

“But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.”
Daniel 1:8 NIV

And this one:

“If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.””
Daniel 3:17-18 NIV

- 1- Daniel and his friends RESOLVED to xyz.
- 2- Daniel’s friends paid the consequences of their convictions.
- 3- They trusted God’s ABILITY to change their outcomes, but even if their circumstances didn’t change... they still stand by their convictions.

I’m not sure I need to unpack this any further. I’m already convicted.

There are many things that I do that aren’t wrong by any cultural standard, but in most cases I’m just following suit... not following my convictions.

Convictions take time, pondering, and the willingness to pay a price. I've got to sit more on this concept...

Eating like an Ox. 11-1-19

No, this isn't about all the Halloween candy I may or may not have eaten... 🤢 it's about how we all live is a state of bottom-feeders when we fail to acknowledge and surrender to God.

Today's reading from Daniel needs little explanation:

"You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes." Daniel 4:32 NIV

We all have been there. Hurting and acting out of insecurities, feeding from the bottom of the barrel, barely getting by.

A couple of weeks back I heard from a client "be humble or life will humble you" and that's why I choose to surrender. Already life is hard enough, let's not make it harder.

Not earned. 11-2-19

From a religious stand point most people are either respectful, apathetic, or devout. A minority is antagonist and another minority fanatical.

They all have something in common: is about them. Their efforts, intellectual stance, affinity, suspicious, or ignorance.

Today we see how Daniel approaches God not on the basis of his good behavior, knowledge, or even depravity... but based on God himself:

"Give ear, our God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy." Daniel 9:18 NIV

I know we, religious people, sometime middle things and make it seems is all about earning our share with God. However no one, absolutely no one can gain this status. It is a gift, a grace given to all of us because who God is, not because of us.

Thank you God for your unmerited mercy towards us!

Set The Mind. 11-3-19

Daniel is a fascinating book. There's a lot of content that requires thoughtful and academic expertise to dissect, but in between we all can glean how God interacts to people:

"Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them."

Daniel 10:12 NIV

We all want to be heard by God. We all want to be given a response by God. But did we catch 2 things that attracted God's attention towards Daniel? He set his MIND and HUMBLER himself.

Daniel set his mind by being intentional, making hard decisions, while still being an excellent citizen, employee, and leader.

Someone once said "**Intentional** living is the art of making our own choices before others' choices make us."

Worth reading that last quote again. Let us live intentional lives before God and others.

Not just my God. 11-4-19

I'm going to make a statement that I think is elementary but could be taken as controversial: God isn't just YOUR God.

He's not just the God of the Israelites, the God of the Christians, my God or yours. He is the God of the world and while He delights in dealing individually with each and everyone of us, He also deals with all people, from every walk of life.

Today we see this through the very first verse of the book of Ezra:

"In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing:" Ezra 1:1 NIV

God moves the heart of the priest as well as the heart of those as far away as we think they might be from anything sacred.

To me this produces gratitude, not jealousy. It invites me to keep praying, keep asking God to soften hearts, to make His light shine upon our loved ones even if we think they're too far away.

Non Negotiable 11-5-19

The book of Ezra continues and it brings us to a point in which the Israelites blatantly declined the help of their enemies in the building of the Temple. To them this was a non-negotiable.

“But Zerubbabel, Joshua and the rest of the heads of the families of Israel answered, “You have no part with us in building a temple to our God. We alone will build it for the Lord, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, commanded us.””

Ezra 4:3 NIV

This morning as I’m running errands I’ve been thinking about my own non-negotiables. To be honest I don’t think much in absolute black and white situations, so this is taking me a while to process.

Something tells me I’m not going to arrive to a pretty and finished solution this morning. Instead this is something I’ll need to chew on for a little while.

I encourage you to do the same. To take time to meditate the Word of God, to ask yourself questions, and to avoid rushing to a quick answer.

Let us read, meditate, and let the Word sink deeper and deeper in our day.

GOD? Tomorrow. 11-6-19

Today we jump to the prophet Haggai and right off the bat there’s a tension between people not wanting to build the Temple of God and instead wanting to build their own houses:

“This is what the Lord Almighty says: “These people say, ‘The time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord’s house.’” Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: “Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?””

Haggai 1:2-4 NIV

Today God inhabits in people’s hearts however the parallel still applies: we seek first our own business and neglect our spiritual wellbeing.

Today is the day for ourselves, for others, and for everything and for nothing. We tend to take God for granted and keep postponing for tomorrow the communion, the intimacy, the satisfaction we can only find in Him.

Let us seek God first, today, right now.

Don't Get It 11-7-19

The book of Zechariah opens with this bold and out-of-the-world statement:

“Therefore tell the people: This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Return to me,’ declares the Lord Almighty, ‘and I will return to you,’ says the Lord Almighty.”
Zechariah 1:3 NIV

One of the many consistent themes in the Bible is this God who in spite of our best efforts to walk away always always is there to meet us at our every turn.

God takes a thought, a prayer, a church visit, a gentle response, anything literally any hint of turn as a step of faith and meets us right there.

This is what I know about this God: in spite of my best efforts to run life on my terms (and running it to the ground in the process) He'd take a mustard seed of faith from me and redirect my storyline.

If that's not Good News I don't know what it is 

What it Doesn't Say 11-8-19

A word from God came to the prophet Zechariah to the people:

“Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.”
Zechariah 7:10 NIV

The context was how to “live out” their faith. Pretty standard stuff here. What shocks me is what The Lord doesn't say:

1- Just believe: yes believing/trusting is the only prerequisite, however it is not by any stretch the ceiling, the end of it all. Quite the opposite, believing is the FLOOR, the stage we use to treat others with love and compassion.

2- Judge one another: only God can judge without condemning, we can't. The moment we judge people we incriminate ourselves.

Yet, even though God's expectation of us seems pretty commonsensical, we tend to drift to those 2 points...

In short:

Love God.
Love people.

People are Looking 11-9-19

This week the topic in one of our Spirituality Group was "identity" and how this relates to "character and reputation".

The thing about reputation is that it doesn't depend on us... is solely on what others read/perceive in us.

The prophet Zechariah tells us about the reputation one city would have among the others:

"Then the clans of Judah will say in their hearts, 'The people of Jerusalem are strong, because the Lord Almighty is their God.'"
Zechariah 12:5 NIV

The people around us might or might not know about God much, but they know about you and me. They might or might not voice it out, but in their hearts they'll say things like:

- x amount of time in sobriety!
- Look at their family
- Look at how he/she treats others
- Look at their relationship
- Look how they treat their parents
- Look how content they are
- Etc

At this is their bonafide hint that there's a God.

People might or might not know of God, but they know about you and me.

The Bachelor 11-10-19

If you want to read the biblical version of the popular TV show The Bachelor look no further than the book of Esther.

I'm not going to tell you the entire plot (if you've seen the bachelor then you already know half of it), but at this point Esther needs to make a decision, a decision that could cost her life: to enter to the King's court unannounced (punished by death) to save her people.

The following is an excerpt of a conversation she's having with a relative encouraging her to step up to the occasion:

"For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" Esther 4:14 NIV

I cannot relate to the Bachelor, the Jewish struggle, nor to royal matters. I do however can relate to the last sentence: And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?

Why do I live in Boca? Why do u have this education? Why do I drive what I drive? Why do I have social media? and the list goes on and on... who knows... but that I have all of this for a REASON... 🤔

I think Esther reminds us to be on the look out for opportunities to use our situations for a greater purpose.

Hard Time Sleeping? 11-11-19

One of the challenges of traveling across time zones is that it messes with my sleep. More often than not I find myself watching who-done-it kinds of tv shows until I pretty much pass out.

King Xerxes couldn't sleep one night and instead of mindless entertainment he sought to be reminded:

"That night the king could not sleep; so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him." Esther 6:1 NIV

Through this practice the king realized people have done good to him and was prompt to return the favor the very next day.

Addicts in recovery call this a "gratitude list" and I believe (someone correct me if I'm wrong here) they do it at the end of their day.

Let us learn from our brothers and sisters fighting for their lives with gratitude lists. Let us do a little less entertainment (I'm talking to myself here) and a little more thankfulness.

The Sum of 5 11-12-19

Today's passage is one of those we need to take in context and resist the temptation of applying revisionist history.

In a nutshell there were nations around Israel and God instructed them not to mingle with, do business, or the likes due to their evil practices (sacrificing their own children for example), and many other things.

“After these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, “The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites.” Ezra 9:1 NIV

To me this was not an issue of racial supremacy but an issue of being selective with whom we decide to spend our most precious asset: our time.

Jim Rohn is attributed saying “You're the average of the five people spend the most time with” and I believe this.

I've seen it in youth ministry, working in rehab, as a father, and my personal life.

Let us be judicious with our time and who we invite into this special space.

Bad News? 11-13-19

Today we open the book of Nehemiah and pretty quickly we learned the author received a bad report regarding the well-being of his family and friends in Jerusalem.

“When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.”

Nehemiah 1:4 NIV

It caught my attention Nehemiah immediately FELT then he went to God FIRST before launching into any action.

This is so foreign to me. Usually I react, and as I react my feelings come along with that reaction. God? That part I usually don't visit until there's a mess around me due to my impulsivity.

May God help us go to Him first and foremost with everything, but specially when we receive a bad report.

Yes, by saying No 11-14-19

Yesterday during the last session of a training taking place near Bogota, Colombia one of the participants shared with the Group what he learned. He said “I’ve learned it is okay for me to say no... without feeling guilty”

In today’s reading the servant Nehemiah had to say no four times to the same invitation:

“so I sent messengers to them with this reply: “I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?””
Nehemiah 6:3 NIV

Saying no makes us feel guilty at times and even it can make us feel as if we are sinning. The way I’ve made peace with saying no is knowing in my mind that in reality I’m saying YES to other things when I say no.

Besides, and this is at a practical level, it’s much easier to go back and flip a no into a yes, than backing down after you’ve committed yourself to something.

“It’s only by saying no, that you can concentrate on the things that are really important.” Steve Jobs

Rest Stops 11-15-19

Thinking back I make most of my blunders not in the heat of the day but when I unwind, when I take a sit back, relax, and lower my walls, and my standards follow suit.

Today the book of Ezra makes the same point with the people of Israel:

““But as soon as they were at rest, they again did what was evil in your sight. Then you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies so that they ruled over them. And when they cried out to you again, you heard from heaven, and in your compassion you delivered them time after time.”
Nehemiah 9:28 NIV

Two things A) when they were at rest they relaxed and “did evil” and B) God did delivered when they cried out

What that passage doesn’t say is the pain that we cause ourselves and our loved ones, the heavy price that we pay between point A and point B.

Let us be aware and even intentional when we take rest stops

But God, 11-16-19

A couple of days ago, deep in the woods near Bogota Colombia, our team from Boca Raton was asked to sit in a Panel and field questions ranging from trivia, to professional and ending with personal questions.

The most important question was “what’s a quote you’d like to leave us with that has the potential to change our lives?”

When it was my turn I answered “BUT GOD...”

Nehemiah’s hints at this from today’s verse:

“because they had not met the Israelites with food and water but had hired Balaam to call a curse down on them. (Our God, however, turned the curse into a blessing.)”
Nehemiah 13:2 NIV

The Bible doesn’t have many parenthesis, but please do not miss this one: Our God, however, TURNED...

The leaders I was speaking to were from broken homes, destroyed economies, limited education, monthly salary ranging from \$100 to \$2 (yes, I said MONTHLY)... let that sink in...

But God, But God... God has the power to TURN nothing into something, darkness into light, despair into hope.

Regardless of what we are grappling with today let us know forget the power of these 2 simple words, BUT GOD...

Test Me, Says God. 11-17-19

I’m at fault. I haven’t been tithing. At the moment we are giving 4.2% of our income back to God in charity, where the norm is 10%.

This is a matter of conviction for me (and Tracy) and God himself asks to be “tested on this”:

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.”
Malachi 3:10 NIV

I don't know where you are, but the basic principle is to acknowledge that all we have isn't really ours, but God's.

The best place to start is with generosity. If we don't have money we can give our talents. If we don't have a particular talent, we can give our time.

No matter where we are at, we all can give something away and make someone's life better (spoiler alert: it'll be our own life).

New Testament! 11-18-19

If you haven't been keeping up with the reading, today is a great day to start (don't try to catch up) since this is the beginning of the New Testament.

There's SO MUCH in these two chapters, but what caught my attention was this simple verse:

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." John 1:5 NIV

Where does the light shine? In the darkness. If I think myself as whole, as light, am I giving God the chance to brighten my life? I don't think so.

I believe the light of God shines when we are aware of our darkness. I call myself a "sinner saved by grace" but you might see yourself as a journeyman, an alcoholic, or simply broken.

This is not a put down but rather a proper diagnosis of our frailty. When we embrace our weakness and surrender it to the Light, then God shines through us.

Do you want to shine, look inside, acknowledge our darkness and receive the gift of Light 🌞🌞🌞

ancestry.com 11-19-19

Early this year I bought an Ancestry DNA test to find out more about my family and genetic makeup. Turns out it was informative but nothing shocking or anything like that, no royalty or famous people in my bloodline.

Today we look at Jesus' family tree (genealogy) and someone unexpected makes an appearance, Judah:

"Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram," Matthew 1:3 NIV

Keep in mind the famous, pious one from Judah's house was Joseph. Remember Joseph? The one who got sold as a slave and ended up becoming 2nd in command in Egypt? Yeah, that one.

Judah was one of the brothers who sold Joseph. Not only that but he also slept around, had a baby with a prostitute, tried to deny it, and yeah... quality fellow here.

Yet he, like us, find his place in the family of Jesus. We all do. My story might be different than Judah's but I know I have no shot at being in the vicinity of Jesus, much less family.

If we don't remember anything about Jesus, let us hang on to this: we are welcomed on HIS merit, not ours. We are all Judah's.

Even the Bad Guys 🦴 11-20-19

Here's a hot take: i believe even those who inflicted rejection, pain, or simply paid no attention to me were part of a plan.

Today we learn about Herod, the Magi, and the birth of Jesus. This is the beginning of the story of redemption and one can be tempted to see Jesus as a victim... however it was all part of a master plan:

"Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared." Matthew 2:7 NIV

The plan however depends on our obedience to God. Simply put the more we obey the more we buy into the meta story of redemption. The more we follow/feed our ego the more we buy into a mere footnote at best.

Let us trust the intent of our Author and each day decide to yield to God.

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."
Romans 8:28 NIV

Rhythm 🥁 11-21-19

I'm a creature of habit. This morning I got up thinking of a tiramisu I needed to make for an office party at 12pm.

Prayer? Done. Reading scripture? Done. Meditation? Done. Journalism??? This is the time (around 3pmET) I'm circling around journaling... even though I was up since 6:30am.

The result? I feel off. My thoughts aren't holy, my mood is up-and-down, and I just feel flat.

Today we see Jesus' rhythm:

"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed."

Mark 1:35 NIV

Now, I get it, not all of us are "morning people". The idea is not to wake up at a certain time and do xyz. The idea is to find your won rhythm and start making music.

The Tempter 11-22-19

Today we are introduced to Jesus' temptations in the desert. These 3 temptations are worth studying, but the one I relate the most is the first one:

"The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."” Matthew 4:3 NIV

The tempter is simply trying to get Jesus to bypass the PROCESS and jump to the result. In this case is from a stone to bread. But in my case is from laziness to fit, from idleness to wealth, from neglect to fulfillment.

The end result wasn't the problem, it was the means to get to the end result. God honors the process. The tempter glamorizes the shortcut.

Wedding Drama 🤔 11-23-19

As a photographer I've covered over 50 weddings and nothing stresses the couple more than something missing or having to improvise last minute on something elemental. The larger the wedding the bigger the stress, and potential embarrassment.

Jesus' first recorded miracle takes place at a wedding. The couple was about to run out of wine and the staff began to panic.

"Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.” John 2:7 NIV

The miracle of water-into-wine took place AFTER the staff did what was commanded. In other words Jesus didn't just handed them the miracle, but asked them to get involved and AS they got involved the miracle took place.

Out of the 36 miracles recorded in the Gospels, 33 required the participation of the recipients. Let us adjust our perspective and be faithful in what we can, and let the miracle take place as we exercise obedience.

Currency of Miracles 11-24-19

Today we see a Roman centurion approaching Jesus with a request for one of his servants.

The centurion asked Jesus to simply "say the word" and he believed this was enough for the miracle to happen.

"Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that moment."

Matthew 8:13 NIV

The currency that made this miracle happen was faith. This faith was so "real" that the centurion didn't even needed Jesus to walk to his house, his word was enough.

What would it look like if we believe the promises God offers us...

FAQ ? 11-25-19

Today I'd like to zoom in one of the many questions Jesus asked in the Gospels:

"When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?""

John 5:6 NIV

This question was addressed to a paralytic man who has been disabled for 38 years.

One would assume the answer to that question is "of course! What kind of question is this?" But in my experience working with people, and doing some self-reflection, most of us WISH to do better but in reality do not want to make the necessary sacrifices.

Let me give you an example. My average screen time on my iPhone is 2.5 hours a day... I know... I know. Lately I've seen this number jumped to 4.5!!! The biggest culprit? Facebook.

Do I want to fix this or merely wish it'll solve itself? Well, yesterday I put a time restriction on this app (10mins a day). Coupled with YouTube and Instagram also under time restrictions I anticipate my usage to go way down.

Do you really want to get/do better, or do we merely wish things get better one way or another?

The Irony or the Plank 11-26-19

Today Jesus tells us a very popular teaching:

“How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

Luke 6:42 NIV

Do you know what I’ve noticed? When I take care of my own plank I pay less attention to my brother’s speck.

This past week we were sharing in a couples group every time Tracy and I go to therapy is me pointing fingers at her. But when I ask God to show me my own sins I realize I’m a truly messed up man and all of the sudden I pay little attention to my partner’s issues.

Did those issues go away? No, but I’m so aware of my own trash I honestly think is a miracle my spouse hasn’t dumped me yet!

Did you catch that? My relationship turned from a “finger pointing” to being grateful people still want me around.

Let us pay attention to our own s**t and I promise this world will be a better world.

Ask, Seek, Knock 11-27-19

These Gospels are full of parables and little/big teachings. Today I’ll share one from our reading:

““Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”

Matthew 7:7-8 NIV

This past Sunday our pastor was sharing one of the hallmarks of the Gospels is the exclusivity of Jesus (I am the way, truth, life...). At the same time everyone who asks, seeks, and knocks will receive, find, and have the door opened.

What am I saying? I believe people of all walks of life can turn to God even without full knowledge of the Light, Jesus. I see this everyday in my practice.

This is what I wish, I wish we can model Jesus to others, point them towards the freedom we all need, but not use the name of God to isolate others not to make us feel better about ourselves.

Let us provide questions so others may ask, roads so they may seek, and doors so they might knock. For as long as they're actively asking, seeking, and knocking the Bible says that they will find. I believe they'll find God.

Is this it? 🙄 11-28-19

Today Jesus' cousin, prophet, and forerunner, John the Baptist, was incarcerated, isolated, and send his friends to ask Jesus a question:

“When the men came to Jesus, they said, “John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?’ ””

Luke 7:20 NIV

In this state of scarcity, constrain, and isolation John the Baptist started to doubt it all, even his faith.

What was Jesus response? Start with the FACTS. He then went on and reminded John of all the good things happening around him.

It could be a fact so basic as “I’m grateful for waking up today” or so specific as “I’m grateful I have xyz next to me”.

Start with the facts, follow with thankfulness, and our faith and outlook will be strengthened.

11-29-19

Invitation 📧

The beauty of the Gospel is that it has an open invitation:

““Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Matthew 11:28 NIV

This invitation is activated, not by an app, mantra, or anything we can do, but by become self aware of our need, our lacking.

Once we do this we are primed to made good on this general invitation. At this point this goes from general to personal, from personal to intimate.

Are you tired and weary? Come to Jesus and He will give you rest.

11-30-19

The Power of the Eye

Today we have a teaching that hits close to home for me as a photographer and someone with multiple eye surgeries:

“Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness.” Luke 11:34 NIV

If my eyes are the “lamp of my body” I should care for them as much as I’d care about the headlights in my car as I drive through the night, right?

As a creator of images I am well aware of the power images carry. They can make us connect, but they can also make us lust. They can bring us closer or they can divide us.

Personally even though I create images, I am very judicious of the images I consume. No Snapchat, WhatsApp for me. Instagram has a cap of 10mins a day. Why? Because the eyes are the lamp of my body and I do not want my headlights to be clogged or murky.

I don’t think you should have the same restrictions as me, after all we are all differ you. But I think we all need to be more mindful what we expose our eyes to.

12-1-19

For the Nth Time

Christmas is right around the corner and the story remains the same: a child is born in a miraculous way in a manger, gifts are brought, and we give/receive presents.

This story, along with the significance of Jesus, is now common knowledge. So common I’d argue it has become familiar, ordinary, and mild.

Today we see Jesus coming back to his hometown, where he is known, familiar, ordinary and nothing special. The result?

“And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.” Matthew 13:58 NIV

Do we want a miracle in our lives? Perhaps we need to allow the story of Jesus to become OUR story. From darkness to light. From despair to hope. From death to life.

New life isn't much about adding, searching, or innovating. But about coming home, surrendering, and acknowledging what we already know.

12-2-19

Sound Mind

This phrase is particular to the English language. I can't find a word-for-word parallel in Spanish or Italian, and every time I hear/read “sound mind” it strikes me as peculiar and gets my attention.

“When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid.”

Mark 5:15 NIV

<https://www.bible.com/111/mrk.5.15.niv>

After doing some internet research this construct of “sound mind” is a translation from a Greek word which communicates that “God has given you a mind that has been delivered, rescued, revived, salvaged, protected, and brought into a place of safety and security so that it is no longer affected by illogical, unfounded, and absurd thoughts.”

This man acquired a sound mind after having an encounter with his Maker.

I just want to keep meditation on this “sound mind” word picture for the rest of my day today...

12-3-19

Grammar & Ego

From time to time I leave an open ended question on facebook and the one from yesterday gained a lot of traction: “Finish the Sentence: To Succeed is too...”

Did you catch the grammatical error? Well, I didn't about 6 hours later someone commented “succeed is to know the difference between TO and TOO”

Needless to say I was embarrassed. I reacted with a “smiley face” but I was mortified. Quickly I fixed the error and tried to make light of the situation by going to this person’s profile and liking a few of her stuff.

This morning this verse caught my attention from today’s reading:

“Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.”
Matthew 10:39 NIV

The reason I was so sensitive to that comment was because my ego was hurt. Everybody makes mistakes, specially on social media, and nobody really cares. But I took it as an attack to my intelligence, as a flaw to my English even though I’ve been speaking it now for almost 20 years.

There’s something beautiful about not taking things personal. Dr. Timothy Keller calls this “the freedom of self-forgetfulness”. Later on he describes this as “The essence of gospel-humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less.”

The freedom that comes from thinking about myself less... let us meditate on this.

12-4-19

Reality and Sight 🙄🙄

Today as I’m putting together a little message I’ll share in Chapel this passage is the one that’s talking to me:

“Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all.”

Mark 6:41 NIV

I’ve always heard the #1 rule of leadership is to “start with reality”. However this also applies to substance abuse recovery, fitness, education, and many other areas of life.

Here’s the key though, start with reality (I’m broken, I’m an addict, I’m ignorant, I’m a sinner, etc) but do not STAY there. Instead fix your sight upon the light, upon Jesus we will then shift from broken to whole, from addiction to recovery, from ignorance to wisdom, and from sin to grace.

The reality for the disciples was scarcity. Then given what they had (reality) to Jesus, the sight was then directed to heaven (not to the loaves of bread and fish), and next thing we know a miracle took place.

Start with reality, but look at the light. Start with your lacking, and hand yourself to Jesus.

12-5-19

To Whom? 🙋🙋

John chapter 6 is a hard chapter and towards the end the group of people following Jesus started to dwindle. It is at this point Jesus turns to his closest friends and asks:

““You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” John 6:67-68 NIV

Notice Peter’s response “to WHOM”. Following Jesus is personal and if we decide to go elsewhere we will actually trade not a location, but a person. In other words, if is not Jesus is someone else... if not God it is myself.

Following Jesus is not following ourselves and vice-versa. At the end of the day is either “Thy will be done” or “MY will be done”.

Following God isn’t the easiest choice, however is the only choice that carries life. Following ourselves is always the easiest choice because we are pre-programmed to do this, however it leads towards isolation, bruised/broken relationships, and emptiness.

12-6-19

Spitting a Miracle 💧

Here’s a strange way to perform a miracle:

“After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears. Then he spit and touched the man’s tongue.”

Mark 7:33 NIV

I say strange because if it was me I’d probably contest anyone sticking a finger in my ear. Moreover I’d be troubled to see the same man spitting, making mud I assume, and then touching my tongue. It feels gross and plain weird.

I feel that way because I’m disconnected with any sort of deafness and muteness. You see, I’m not in need and thus anything out of the ordinary is strange to me, because of my “I’m fine” state.

If I weren’t able to communicate/hear others, I think I wouldn’t mind a WHATEVER it takes attitude and I’d be game for anything.

A lot of my clients, and if I'm honest I need to put myself in that category as well, a lot of us over question the process of our miracle because we don't see ourselves in need.

Lord help us be in touch with our own need, everyday, all of the time.

12-7-19

How About You? 🤔

One could do a study just of Jesus' questions. Here's one of my favorites:

““But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?””
Matthew 16:15 NIV

How WE answer this question has the potential to change how we live our day.

I've progressed from answering this question like this:

- Us vs Them (childhood)
- Not practical (early teen years)
- Good teaching (late teen)
- It's between me and God (twenties and thirties)
- I'm a mess and God still loves me (today at 40 years old)

Think about this. To you who is Jesus? What is faith? Who are you?

I've learned more from my questions than from rushing to canned answers.

12-8-19

Mustard Seed 🌱

About a week or so ago I was meditating on this verse:

“He replied, “Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”” Matthew 17:20 NIV

I struggle with this verse because it kind of position faith as a currency, not to obtain intimacy with God/others/self, but to acquire anything. Yes, anything.

So, if I have enough faith I could have all my debts canceled? Upgrade to the latest model of my preferred vehicle brand? Be healed of every malady?

Well, let's see the life of the one who said they, the life of Jesus. He was debt free but living simple. He mostly walked. He died. The one who had all the faith in the world didn't do what I'd do if I had 1/2 of his faith.

Then maybe my faith isn't so much faith in God, but faith in what I want God to do for ME...

Let us ask God to search our hearts and let us be honest with ourselves. Yes, every good blessing comes from the Lord, but let us be with followers of Jesus for the loaves of bread and fish. That's a good start, but let us break from the crowd of thousands to the intimacy of twelve, to the circle of the few.

I bet in that circle of the few my understanding of this verse will vastly differ from what I think of it most days.

12-9-19

70x7 

Jesus is dishing practical teachings left and right. Here's one of his most popular ones:

"Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

Matthew 18:21-22 NIV

Now, why would Jesus tell us we need to forgive so many times. Isn't 3 times enough? Seven even?

Before we go really far here, forgiveness doesn't mean reconciliation. One can forgive and establish/keep safe boundaries. However in order for us to be truly free we must forgive. We do this as much for our own sake as for the sake of the other party.

Whenever I find myself struggling to forgive is usually because I let my ego get involved. When this happens I position myself at a "higher ground" spiritually/emotionally and overstate how "right" I was and how wrong the other person is. It gets personal, and it isn't about ideas but about people.... I AM right, so very right, and they (not their opinion) but they ARE wrong... borderline evil.

Jesus gives us the antidote as a challenge: forgive them. No one IS right before God. We've been forgiven... let us forgive.

12-10-19

Slavery 

Here's a word I don't use regularly and has a heavy, dark connotation: slavery.

The mere thought of it produces a visceral emotion and by all means we want to condemn it and dissociate ourselves from it. Yet Jesus today uses this word in the following context:

“Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.” John 8:34 NIV

Jesus makes a direct connection between our sins and our level of freedom. Meaning as we sin we also chose to be in bondage, we chose slavery for ourselves. By context it seems Jesus is referring to the sinful acts we decide to act upon, and not to our inherited sinful nature.

This makes me think about my day and my actions and motivations. According with Jesus we either decide towards freedom (via virtues) or towards slavery (via acting sinfully).

Do I want to be break free? I've got to stop acting on sinful behavior. What we do either liberates or enslaves us. That's the power of our decisions, that's the power of our actions.

12-11-19

I Don't Know 🙄

John chapter 9 describes the story of a man blind from birth and how he was able to see again after having an encounter with Jesus.

The story is a long one because at first the righteous people couldn't believe he was the same man that was blind. Then they couldn't believe it was Jesus who healed them. Then they interrogated his parents. Then they came back to him. Then they accused Jesus of acting with demon-powers. At the very end this formerly blind man says:

“He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!””

John 9:25 NIV

I love this story for its simplicity. We might not agree with all Jesus is. To some he might be a good teacher. To others the Son of God. To others a religious leader. But whatever we think of Jesus pales in significance when we stop and see the results: I once was blind, but now I see.

This is too my story. This isn't to say I don't struggle wanting to go back to the darkness... after all that's what is familiar to me. However I don't live in darkness. My spiritual sight has been restored.

Let us not get entangled in religious minutia. We either know light or we don't. We are either able to see or we are blind. In my life I credit Jesus for this miracle.

12-12-19

Amazing Baseline

We all go through highs and lows. As I pay attention to my mood/emotions I usually hit a wall after a big trip and/or towards the end of the year, around Nov/Dec which coincides when I usually finish my annual goals.

Today we look at 72 disciples who were sent out and great things happened to them: people were healed, they experienced the power of God, and even demons submitted to them. Here's Jesus' response:

“However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”” Luke 10:20 NIV

To the likes of me which go through mood swings almost on-the-clock Jesus tells me “rejoice that my name is written in heaven”. To the disciples that came off a historic trip Jesus tells them “rejoice that your name is written in heaven”.

This gives us an AMAZING baseline to be appreciate everyday regardless of how good/bad things go. Sometimes things go our way and sometimes they do not... but let me tell you something (Jesus says), “today... not because anything you did to earn it... today your name is written in heaven”.

There's a win no circumstance can take away from any of us!

12-13-19

Worrying

Today Luke shares a word Jesus said regarding our pursuit of goals:

“And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.”

Luke 12:29-31 NIV

Notice it says “do not set your HEART” on pursuing xyz. This reminds me of another verse that says “the LOVE of money is the root of all evil”.

Is not the the pursuit of sustenance, the chasing of necessities, and I even add the following through with our goals, that constitute a issue. Is when we gamble our heart in that pursuit.

No asset, status, image, or relationship has the capability to care for our heart. The moment we throw our heart into the mix is the moment we start worrying and acting out.

Only God can properly care for our heart.

12-14-19

Running Away

Today Luke tells us one of the most popular stories ever, the story of the Prodigal Son:

“Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.”

Luke 15:11-12 NIV

This is just the intro and it develops from there. However today I’d like father Henri Nouwen to share his insight on this story from his book *The Return of the Prodigal Son*:

“there are many other voices, voices that are loud, full of promises and very seductive. These voices say, “Go out and prove that you are worth something.” Soon after Jesus had heard the voice calling him the Beloved, he was led to the desert to hear those other voices. They told him to prove that he was worth love in being successful, popular, and powerful. Those same voices are not unfamiliar to me. They are always there and, always, they reach into those inner places where I question my own goodness and doubt my self-worth. They suggest that I am not going to be loved without my having earned it through determined efforts and hard work. They want me to prove to myself and others that I am worth being loved, and they keep pushing me to do everything possible to gain acceptance. They deny loudly that love is a totally free gift. I leave home every time I lose faith in the voice that calls me the Beloved and follow the voices that offer a great variety of ways to win the love I so much desire.”

Let us remain in the spaces where we can hear the God’s voice the loudest telling us YOU and I are the beloved.

12-15-19

The Little Things

In early recovery we encourage our clients to get a job once they leave the PHP portion of their treatment.

The most popular objection boils down to “I’m better than xyz job”. Sometimes is a matter of qualification, sometimes is a matter of their background check, but the notion that work, any work, cannot be found in South Florida is a tough sale in a single digit unemployment rate economy.

But why? Why would we encourage clients to find a job? Jesus gives us a hint in today’s reading:

““Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.”

Luke 16:10 NIV

The idea is to get us started on something and prove our faithfulness with “little things”. Qualifiers for little things could be a \$5 plus tips, a minimum wage, a volunteer commitment, attending 90 meetings in 90 days, making our beds in the morning, even keeping our word! there are MANY things that qualify as little things, but the principle is the same: as we prove ourselves trustworthy in little things, we will prepare ourselves for bigger things!

Let us not under appreciated, underestimate the little things in life.

12-16-19

Mummy 🧟

John chapter 11 tells us about the amazing relationship Jesus had with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. You’ll have to read it for yourself, but long story short Jesus shows up a few days after Lazarus passed, there’s a lot of commotion, and then Jesus calls Lazarus out of the tomb:

“The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”” John 11:44 NIV

Notice how even though Lazarus has been risen from the dead, he was still entangled and needed assistance from the community.

This is a picture of us, our family, friends and clients. Yes, a miracle has taken place and praise God for that. However it takes time, humbleness, and intentionality to let go of the “strips of linen and clothes around our face”.

This is what makes us literally trip and fall. Again, is not that we weren’t made anew, but we still have pieces of our “dead life” all around us.

Let us give thanks to God for the miracle AND be intentional about peeling off those linens that do not serve us any longer.

12-17-19

Disability Camp 🧑 🧒 🧑

This past year our family volunteered at a camp Little Rock, NC dedicated exclusively to kids with disabilities. Some of them couldn't walk, some couldn't talk, a few were almost unresponsive. Yet this camp had a zip line for them, a climbing wall, a pool, and just about anything you'd find at any other camp.

A pragmatic may ask why? Why would anyone put such an event for kids with such limited motor skills? Why make such financial/time investment?

Jesus tells us today in Luke 18:

“But Jesus called the children to him and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.””
Luke 18:16-17 NIV

These campers weren't an afterthought. They indeed are the true heirs of the kingdom of God! We were the one honored by serving them.

They teach so much by precisely not being like us. Let us learn from little children. Let us learn from those with child-like, limited development, since they are the one leading the way to heaven.

12-18-19

Is it About Money? 💰

Mark tells us like 5 little stories in one chapter. One of those stories is about a “young rich ruler” who approached Jesus wondering if he had enough to enter heaven.

Jesus praised the young man for his spiritual goal and gently pointed out he was basing his sufficiency not in “keeping all the laws” but in his possessions. Long story short Jesus asks him to sell all he has, he declines the invitation and walks away sad.

“Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”” Mark 10:23 NIV

For the longest time I've thought “if I'm a follower of Jesus I need to own nothing and give everything away”. Some have that calling, but I'm not sure this is the norm.

What is the norm is to not base our “ticket to heaven” on our own sufficiency. The moment we think we have enough, that we are good enough, that somehow we’ve “earned it” is when it’s hard to receive heaven because our heart is already filled with our self sufficiency.

12-19-19

It's what we DO 🚶

Matthew 21 tells us many stories but there’s a short one that sticks out, the story of the father and his two sons. The father asks both sons the same request and here’s how the story unfolds:

““ ‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.”

Matthew 21:29-30 NIV

Jesus then tells the disciples it was the first son who actually fulfilled the father’s will.

In recovery I encounter many, many versions of God. In fact if I run a survey I’m almost positive 1/2 of them will flunk a basic Sunday School curriculum test.

But you know what they have? ACTION. Last night in Group a couple people shared “I don’t even know what/who I’m praying to... but I prayed and I’m sober today!” To a religious person that sounds borderline blasphemous, but it was not what my addicts in recovery said, but what they DID with their faith that yielded fruits.

Let us be doers and not just hearers of the Word. Let us go beyond “knowing the right answers” to actually putting some action behind our faith.

12-20-19

Your Talent 💰

Today is one of my fav stories told by Jesus, the story of the talents. I believe this story is also told by other writers, but today Luke uses the word “mina” and literally this means a 3 months salary, so this talent/mina/gift has value.

Long story short a soon to be proclaimed king gives 10 minas to one person, 5 to another, and 1 to a third. The first two used their gift to double the initial investment. The third? Well...

““Then another servant came and said, ‘Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.’” Luke 19:20-21 NIV

Yes, the third one didn't double the initial investment. Not even lost the initial investment either. Instead, out of fear, he was paralyzed and did nothing with the talent.

It's interesting because I would be fine getting my initial investment back, but not so this master. This master appreciates our effort/faith more than passivity and fear.

Much like this I believe God places value on the faith we use as we deal through our days. The point wasn't if we did good or if we had a bad day. Everybody has those. The point, I think, is if we trusted God with anything today or not.

There's safety in doing things our own way, much like that 3rd worker. This level of safety isn't spiritually rewarded and it produces little transformation in our lives.

12-21-19

Not by Miracles 🙏

This week the topic in our Groups was Higher Power. In Recovery we use this term to refer to God.

We usually have 8-12 people in our groups and more often than not someone raises an objection, "I need more proof... maybe if God would've done this or that..."

However it doesn't seem we humans end up believing because of miracles. At least that's what I get from today's reading:

"Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him." John 12:37 NIV

Do you know what seems to work more than miracles? Trusting.

Anytime any of us decide to give God a chance by praying, meditating, walking away, etc that's when I see people aligning with God and growing in their relationship with Him.

The biggest miracle already took place 2000 years ago. Now is our turn to trust and take a break from ourselves.

12-22-19

Follow the Widow 👵

Time and time again I see Jesus using nature, masonry, and family dynamics to exemplify trust, faith. Today's reading uses money with the same intent:

“Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”” Mark 12:43-44 NIV

People were walking by and giving extraordinary amounts of money to the offering place, however Jesus singles out the offering of this widow. Why? Because the others gave out of their excess while she gave out of her trust.

The only currency that moves God is faith. This story is not about who gives more money but about who trusts more.

Are we trusting God with our entire life or with what we can afford to lose? Are we running our lives and trusting God for a specific advice here and there?

12-23-19

Not Everything 🙌

Today Luke gives us a warning Jesus issued to his Jewish hearers regarding the destruction of Jerusalem, but the same warning can be applied to us today:

““Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap.” Luke 21:34 NIV

That day Jesus is referring was to be announced by signs in heaven and only those “in tune” with the spiritual realm would recognize the signs.

I believe this teaching is appropriate for us because more often than not (specially during this season of Christmas believe it or not) we can get caught up in the day-to-day and lose sight of the spiritual realm, eternal things.

As we prepare our resolutions for 2020 let us also remember spiritual goals of solitude, prayer, meditation, fasting, retreats, silence, reading of Scriptures, attending church, etc.

Our day to day isn't everything there is. Let us also look up and pay attention to our spirituality.