

Good News Daily

SEPTEMBER 1 – OCTOBER 5, 2013

Volume XIII

September 1-7, 2013

Number 35

Sunday, September 1

1 Kings 8:22-40 *“And listen to the plea of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen in heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.”* (v.30 ESV)

Solomon prayed this at the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem, which was later torn down, twice. Today, what remains is the Wailing Wall, where robed men in black hats bob mouthing Hebrew and place scrawled prayers into the cracks asking God to hear them, as Solomon did.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, today Christians are the Temple of God. God dwells in us. Still, so many of us are emotionally attached to the brick and mortar buildings in which we worship. It is holy ground. When I walk into a church, I can immediately feel if God’s peace is there. I can sense if this is a place of faith and earnestly whispered prayers, of confession and absolution, of love and acceptance.

What we do and think and say in church matters to God. He is listening from Heaven as Solomon prayed He would. Even so, every time we walk out, we should be taking a piece (or peace) of church with us back into the world so others may know He is listening as well.

Psalms 148, 149, 150; 1 Timothy 4:7b-16; John 8:47-59

Monday, September 2

Mark 14:53-65 *And Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he was sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire.* (v.54)

Peter is like so many people. They will follow Christ at a distance, and perhaps enter into church. But, they will not fully commit. They stand on the edges warming themselves with the fire of the Holy Spirit, being careful not to risk getting singed in the process. They definitely do not want to stand out in the crowd and appear to be over-religious—a Jesus freak. Nope, just blend in. It is safer. Your religion is your business.

But as with Peter, people will recognize if we have been with the Saviour. His light glows in us. We may even look and act a bit different.

What do we do then? Shake our heads and claim he is not that important to us for fear of ridicule?

It is easy for me to straighten my back and declare, “No, way!” But as I look at my daily life I have to ask, am I being like Peter today? Do I dare follow Jesus all the way?

I think it is a question we each need to ask from time to time, don’t you?

2 Chronicles 6:32—7:7; Psalm 25; James 2:1-13

Tuesday, September 3

Psalm 28 *Oh, save your people and bless your heritage! Be their shepherd and carry them forever.* (v.9)

“Be their shepherd and carry them forever.” I love that image.

I am a fan of the little wooly sheep cartoons found in Christian bookstores. Years ago, I bought one which illustrated the 23rd Psalm. It is no longer in print, but the last page showed the back of Jesus walking away into beautiful green pastures on a sunshiny day. On his right shoulder was a little fluffy sheep with a contented, closed-eye smile across his face. The sheep almost nestled into the indentation of his neck. The picture oozed security and peace for me.

When I see a child blissfully snoozing on a father’s shoulder as they walk through a noisy, crowded mall, I think, “If only I could drown out the world and rest deeply like that.” Truth be known, I can. So can you. Our problems are never too big for God’s shoulders. There is nothing wrong in tugging on His robe and asking Him to carry us a while so we can rest in His grace. There are days I can’t think of any place I’d rather be.

1 King 8:65—9:9; Psalm 26; James 2:14-26; Mark 14:66-72

Wednesday, September 4

James 3:1-12 *If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well.* (v.3)

When I was little I took horseback riding lessons. We went around a ring again and again. Then, as we got better at staying in the saddle, we followed a dirt path. The horses knew the path and rarely veered off of it. It was part of their daily routine. However, one day I got a stubborn, fat horse named Snowball. He loved to veer off to the trail find the juiciest patch of Johnson grass. No matter how hard I tugged the bridle, he wouldn’t budge. His mouth had been hardened by the bit. After years of tugging, it had little effect.

What habits am I stubbornly holding onto which lead me time and again to veer off the path God wants me to follow? Has my mouth hardened so much that I can barely feel the Holy Spirit tug me to correct my course?

Dear Lord, don't let me be like old Snowball. Keep me on the straight and narrow.

1 Kings 9:24—10:13; Psalm 38; Mark 15:1-11

Thursday, September 5

1 Kings 11:1-13 *Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, "Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant. Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son."* (vv.11-12)

Solomon turned from God. He had broken covenant, or the promise he had made when he became king. As king, he was the example setter and God's covenant was with the nation Solomon ruled. Yet later, through the prophets, God declared He would bring about a New Covenant where the sins of the fathers would no longer be visited upon the sons. That covenant was His own Son—Jesus. Now Jesus, the King of Kings, sets the example through his teachings, and through his obedience unto death. In his last breath on earth, salvation became an individual thing, not a national one.

For me that is significant. What was taken away in the Old Testament was restored in God's perfect timing in the New Testament. Covenants broken by God's people time and again were made whole on the Cross. God always provides a way for His children to be reconciled to Him. For us, Jesus is that Way. Whatever you have done in the past, if you come to Christ and seek forgiveness, covenant will be restored.

Psalm 37:1-18; James 3:13—4:12; Mark 15:12-21

Friday, September 6

James 4:13—5:6 *You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.* (v.5)

Harsh words—especially so to us who live in the U.S. We live in such luxury compared to so many others, especially in Asia and Africa. We hear Scripture about the camels through eyes of needles and the parable of the rich young man. We also hear to whom much is given, much is expected (Luke 12:48). That is the key to James' message.

Christ gives the richest gift of all—himself—so we may approach the Throne of Heaven as clean and pure for eternity. It is nothing we can earn. When we keep that in perspective and realize that all belongs to Christ and comes from him, we are truly rich beyond measure, no matter our

current finances. If you seek first his righteousness, Jesus says all the earthly things we become anxious about having will be added unto us. Not that accepting Christ as your Savoir leads to instant wealth, but since he has already paid your debt in full, it makes you rich beyond measure. That is true debt-free living. Share that wealth with others!

1 Kings 11:26-43; Psalm 31; Mark 15:22-32

Saturday, September 7

Mark 15:33-39 *And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"* (v.39)

When a relative passed away who never came to Christ, I went to my knees and asked God if she had received Jesus as her Savoir in her dying breath. The response which was placed on my heart was that as soon as she saw the Light, she fell into his arms. He received her. When she finally saw him face to face, like this centurion, revelation occurred which led to salvation.

I believe God so desires that not one of us be condemned, to be separated from Him for eternity, that He will provide every chance for us to repent and seek Christ, even if it is in our last breath. Those of us here on earth who have made that choice should do everything in our power to lead others to the Cross. But each individual must choose to face him. Some may look away. Some, like this Roman soldier in today's reading, may finally look up. He, who had been sent to kill the Son of God, was probably the last soul Christ saved while on earth. Praise God, Christ continues to do that from the Throne.

1 Kings 12:1-20; Psalms 30, 32; James 5:7-12, 19-20

by Julie B Cosgrove

Volume XIII

September 8-14, 2013

Number 36

Sunday, September 8

Acts 4:18-31 *But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."* (vv.19-20 NIV)

In this account, the rulers, elders, priests, and lawmen of Jerusalem were stupefied after the complete healing of a crippled man in his forties performed by Peter and John in the name of Jesus Christ. Roughly five thousand

people were converted after witnessing the healed man walk and hearing the message of Jesus Christ. What were the elders of Jerusalem going to do to stop John and Peter from spreading the Gospel? Nothing, they could do nothing.

Recently, I was engaged in a conversation concerning differences in religious doctrine. One of the people in the group asked me point blank, “So, you are saying that you think Jesus is the answer?” I gently replied, “Yes, because I have seen how my life has been transformed.” Nobody can ever discount our personal relationship with God and our transformation through the power of God. I am in full accordance with John and Peter, “we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (v.20).

1 Kings 12:21-33; Psalms 63, 98; John 10:31-42

Monday, September 9

Philippians 1:1-11 *And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.* (vv.9-11)

God has graciously given me the gift of exhortation, but discernment does not come naturally for me. That is why it is vitally important for me to read my Bible daily and attend Bible studies. The more knowledge I gain from reading my Bible and studying the word of God with other believers, the more I become equipped to discern what God’s will is for my life. I have come to realize that when the directive comes from God, and not from myself, the motive is wrapped in love, purity, and selflessness.

A short time ago, I happened upon a family in crisis. Without consulting God, I jumped right in to help. I even rallied other people to help fight this crusade I believed was my duty. I soon recognized that I was in way over my head and found out details that I did not want to know. I spent way too much time in distress regarding this family and lost focus on my own family, and dampen my sense of joy. After consulting some of my friends, I realized I was enabling this situation. I repented and prayed for a Scripture to be laid on my heart to give me guidance. I found the needed Scripture in Isaiah 48:17-19.

1 Kings 13:1-10; Psalms 41, 52; Mark 15:40-47

Tuesday, September 10

Philippians 1:12-30 *Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.* (vv.12-14)

The apostle Paul is an inspiration to me and I often find myself reflecting on his character. The language that comes to mind is confidence in Christ, absolute trust in the Father's will, and inexhaustible strength attainable through the Holy Spirit. Nothing can shatter Paul's spirit; he knows where he is, where he needs to be, and where he is going. I pray that the power and strength of the Holy Spirit penetrate your heart when you venture out into the world in which God gave you. May the peace, joy, and love of Christ our Lord carry you from here to eternity!

1 Kings 16:23-34; Psalm 45; Mark 16:1-20

Wednesday, September 11

Philippians 2:1-11 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. (vv.1-4)

My friend and I were driving home from a retreat a few weeks ago. Before entering the interstate that would take us directly home, we took two wrong turns and laughed knowing that in the whole scheme of life, the time lost would not matter. We were surely mistaken. We encountered a woman in need along the side of the road who was in a temporary state of dementia. She had no idea where she was, where she was going or even who she was. The poor woman kept complaining that her brain hurt and then proceeded to vomit. Much to our dismay, my friend was instructed, by the 911 operator, to leave me with the woman and drive one half mile down the road to a call box to reach an emergency team. I prayed to God to send protective angels over this situation.

Seconds later, a man in a van pulled over to help us. He had a bumper sticker that read, "My boss is a Jewish carpenter." I briefed him on the situation and told him how uncanny it was that my friend and I got lost twice before pulling over to aid this helpless woman. In complete awe he then said, "Well one thing is for certain, the Lord's hand is involved." My friend returned and was relieved to see I was all right, and in the company of a fellow believer. After the emergency team swept this woman away to the hospital, my friend, the man in the van, and I prayed this prayer: "Father God, we do not know all the answers to this situation, nor do we need to know; we are certain that it was You who placed us here this afternoon. We praise You and thank You for the honor to serve You."

1 Kings 17:1-24; Psalm 119:49-72; Matthew 2:1-12

Thursday, September 12

Philippians 2:12-30 *Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain.* (vv.14-16)

This week in 2001 our nation was traumatized. This tragedy caused people to become gripped by fear. Some would not fly, others were afraid to go back to work in tall buildings, some began to question their mortality, and many were afraid of the changes made to our country. Our freedom was shaken. I often heard people inquire, “Why would God allow this to happen?” Well, he didn’t! He is a God of love, peace, and joy. He desires to fill our hearts with blessings. God would not condone an operation to kill and terrorize thousands of innocent people. The silver lining in this horrid event was that it catapulted many to embark on a quest for the meaning and purpose of life. All of a sudden, the need to attend church became a priority.

The explorers who founded this great nation of ours have always fascinated me. Explorers should be an inspiration to us all. They remind me of the Scripture verse “for we live by faith and not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). When Ponce de Leon landed at St. Augustine, Florida, he uttered these words, “Thanks be to Thee, O Lord, who hast permitted me to see something new.” I do know that the one constant we will find in this precious world in which we temporarily reside is God. Praise be to the Lord, Christ.

1 Kings 18:1-19; Psalm 50; Matthew 2:13-23

Friday, September 13

Philippians 3:1-16 *Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.* (vv.13-14)

One way I place a barrier within my relationship with God is to beat myself up regarding mistakes I have made in the past. I struggle with forgiving myself. I want all my actions and words to be pleasing to God. Recently, while attending a retreat, the group was being anointed and prayed for. The prayer spoken to me was this: “God loves you so much. Your sins are forgotten and forgiven. May the Holy Spirit be evident in all realms of your walk.” At the time, this was precisely what I needed to hear to strengthen my faith and purify my trust in God. The victory I have received through the power of the Holy Spirit has been life changing. It’s as though I have been inhibited from looking backwards. I know what Paul means when he speaks of Christ, “straining towards what is ahead” (v.13).

1 Kings 18:20-40; Psalms 40, 54; Matthew 3:1-12

Saturday, September 14

Philippians 3:17—4:7 *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* (v.7)

Several months ago, I was studying chapter four of Philippians. I read this passage and ached to receive the “peace of God” in my life. What I did not realize is that I was focusing on the result and not the cause. I read on to verses 4:8-9—“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable— if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” 500 hundred miles away, three of my dearest friends were attending a lecture on this very same passage. The speaker directed the focus to the words “whatever is true.”

It is the spiritual battle within our minds that my friends and I discerned we needed to change. Our enemy is the “master of doubt,” it is God that is the “master of truth.” On occasion, I tend to over-analyze or get hurt in conversations I have with people. I began to understand that I needed to redirect my thought pattern when receiving messages from others and focus on the truth of the matter. As I began to practice this application, I suddenly received the peace and joy in my life that God promises. Because I have some clarity in this area, I combat the unhealthy thoughts in my head by reciting to myself, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (4:13).

1 Kings 18:41—19:8; Psalm 55; Matthew 3:13-17

by Julie Garcia

Volume XIII

September 15-21, 2013

Number 37

Sunday, September 15

Psalm 29 *The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.* (v.4 NRSV)

Do you wonder what the voice of God sounds like? In 1 Kings 19, God told Elijah to wait for Him to pass by. First came the roar of a great wind that split mountains; then came an earthquake and then a fire. God is powerful and mighty, and maybe you, like Elijah, expect God’s voice to be a roar that flattens you to the ground in terror. But God did not roar at Elijah.

“...and after the fire, a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him” (1 Kings 19:12-13). God’s voice

came in sheer silence. Other translations describe it as a gentle whisper, a thin sound. Elijah's response was to come to attention, to listen carefully. Would you hear God if He spoke to you in a gentle whisper? Beloved, commit to listen for God's gentle whisper today and respond like Elijah, ready to obey whatever He may say to you.

1 Kings 19:8-21; Psalm 24; Acts 5:34-42; John 11:45-47

Monday, September 16

Psalm 56 *You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your record? In God I trust; I am not afraid. What can a mere mortal do to me?* (vv.8, 11)

God sees all. In times of difficulty, particularly when we are being attacked or persecuted, it is hard to believe that God sees, that He will respond, that He is a God of justice.

Recently, I found myself in a situation where, because of my faith in God, I took an action with which many did not agree. It was a hard decision to make, but I knew that it was the right thing to do. As word got out and others heard, the rumors began and I was called all manner of names. My temptation was to fight back, to justify myself, to correct the slanderous gossip. Some days I fumed with anger at the injustice of it. Other days I could have filled jars with tears of anguish. But in the midst of it, I learned that God sees. He kept count of my tossings; he collected my tears. He is a God of justice, who fights on my behalf. I can trust Him.

In the midst of your tossings and tears, will you choose to put your trust in the God who sees?

1 Kings 21:1-16; Psalms 57, 58; 1 Corinthians 1:1-19; Matthew 4:1-11

Tuesday, September 17

1 Corinthians 1:20-31 *For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.* (v.25)

My five-year-old nephew, Luke, loves superheroes. When I go to his house, he always wants to play "good guy-bad guy." Guess who has to be the "bad guy" and who gets to be the "good guy"? When he was just two years old, he loved to play David and Goliath. He would angrily scream at Goliath (played by me) that his God was stronger than any man, and then would pretend throw the stone, after which I would dramatically fall to the ground and he would stand over me proclaiming the strength of God.

Luke is five. He is allowed to be fascinated by superheroes. But the truth is, for most of us, that fascination never goes away. We long to know that there is one out there who is stronger, wiser, and more powerful than

we. Isn't it good to know that even our God's *weakness* is stronger than our strength, and his *foolishness* is wiser than our wisdom?

1 Kings 21:17-29; Psalms 61, 62; Matthew 4:12-17

Wednesday, September 18

1 Kings 22:1-28 *But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there no other prophet of the LORD here of whom we may inquire?" The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is still one other by whom we may inquire of the LORD, Micaiah son of Imlah; but I hate him, for he never prophesies anything favorable about me, but only disaster."* (vv.7-8)

Do you have people who you avoid seeking advice from because they will tell you the truth that you don't really want to hear? In this passage, Ahab, the king of Israel has summoned 400(!) prophets to give him advice about a decision. They have all told him exactly what he wanted to hear. But Jehoshaphat, a man faithful to the Lord, presses him—isn't there anyone else who you should ask? Doesn't Ahab's response reveal how we often feel about those who tell us the truth we don't like?

I have several friends who I have given permission to speak hard words of truth when I need to hear them. And honestly, in those moments, I agree with Ahab—I hate them. But I have to ask myself—am I willing to hear from the Lord, through these friends, when I don't like what He says? With whom do you surround yourself? People who always tell you what you want to hear, or those who will tell you the truth? Will you give them permission to speak truth when they know you won't like it?

Psalms 72; 1 Corinthians 2:1-13; Matthew 4:18-25

Thursday, September 19

Matthew 5:1-10 *When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on the mountain...and taught them, saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* (vv.1a, 2-3).

Jesus *saw* the crowds. As he looked upon them, they were not just a mass of faces. They were individual people, with stories, with joys and sorrows, with pain and triumph, with loss and gain. This week, I have been continually overwhelmed with the knowledge that the great, awesome, and terrifying God of the universe *sees* us, *knows* us, and *loves* us! You are seen, known, and loved! Will you take just a moment to stop reading and ponder that truth?

But, even more amazingly, this same God reaches into our world to engage us! Matthew says that Jesus saw the crowds, and then began to teach them. The words that he spoke to the poor, mourning, and hungry were messages of hope, relief, and satisfaction! God isn't required to offer us

these things, but He chooses to! Bask in that truth today. God doesn't *have* to love you or bless you; He *chooses* to!

1 Kings 22:29-45; Psalms 70, 71; 1 Corinthians 2:14—3:15

Friday, September 20

2 Kings 1:2-17 *“Thus says the LORD: Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?”* (v.6b)

In this passage King Ahaziah of Israel fell and was seriously injured. He sends messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub (a false god) if he will recover from this injury. Instead, the messengers are met on the road by Elijah, who asks this question of them: “Is there no God in Israel?” Ahaziah could have inquired of the Lord for his answer; instead he decided to go elsewhere. And God calls him out.

While I don't send messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub when I am seeking an answer to a question, there are other ways that I certainly turn to idols: I Google it, I phone a friend, I fret and worry. But often I forget to ask the Lord about my situation. What situation are you in today that you have been seeking advice from every one else but the Lord? Will you stop, take a moment, and tell the Lord what you need? Pray with the psalmist that, “at an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of your steadfast love, answer me” (Psalm 69:13).

Psalm 69; 1 Corinthians 3:16-23; Matthew 5:11-16

Saturday, September 21

2 Kings 2:1-18 *When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.” Elisha said, “Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.”* (v.9)

I wonder if Elisha knew what he was getting into when he asked for this. That spirit of Elijah's had caused quite a few problems for him. Often what he declared as a prophet was rejected. Sure, he called down fire from heaven (1 Kings 18), but he also prophesied a drought, was constantly at odds with people, was hunted to be killed by Jezebel, and wandered in the desert, alone, for months. Why would Elisha want a double portion of that?

Somehow, in spending time with Elijah, Elisha came to know that all the persecution, rejection, and suffering that Elijah endured was worth it, for the sake of the Lord's message and presence. For Elisha, this knowledge was so deep that he *asked* for more! Dear ones, do you know, deep down, that no matter what your faith brings, that it is worth it? As one who has faced rejection from family, slander from outsiders, and sacrifice for the

sake of Jesus, let me be one who says, “It is all worth it, and I wouldn’t live any other way!”

Psalm 75, 76; 1 Corinthians 4:1-7; Matthew 5:17-20

by Kim Koi

Volume XIII

September 22-28, 2013

Number 38

Sunday, September 22

Luke 3:7-18 *“Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.”* (v.9b NLT)

How’s this for a rallying cry to change your life? The crowd John was speaking to was waiting to be baptized, and evidently were treating it as a social event instead of a life-changing commitment. He had already told them that their ancestry wasn’t important—and that must have been shocking. But now he uses the word “judgment” (v.7b), implying confession and repentance and changing their lives and being productive.

Does this apply today? Of course it does! Jesus isn’t interested in bloodlines and how great your family has been. He’s interested in *you*. If you don’t resolve to change your life and “produce good fruit” then you pay the consequences. If you’re satisfied coasting along giving only partial effort practicing your faith and not producing good fruit, you’ll be “chopped down.”

Later in today’s reading we’re reminded to be generous, hard working, honest, and content with what we have. I think this means that the only thing we need is more faith, less stuff; more giving, less getting. I’d better get busy. How about you?

2 Kings 4:8-37; Psalms 93, 96; Acts 9:10-31

Monday, September 23

1 Corinthians 4:8-21 *For the Kingdom of God is not just a lot of talk; it is living by God’s power.* (v.20)

What does my life reflect? Would you agree that frequently it’s a lot easier to talk the talk than to walk the walk? Why do we think that everything will be OK if we say just the right words? When will we learn that it is our actions that speak to others, not our words? And we need to realize that it’s not just our spouse, our children, our neighbors, or our church friends who hear our actions, but strangers, too.

How do I act when I’m cut off in traffic and in a hurry? Am I driving 60 in a 45 MPH zone? How do I react when the crowd I’m with starts gossiping? How do I respond to a wrong number or a telemarketer on

the phone? How do I react to yet another glass of milk overturned at the table, or to any one of the zillions of life's little character builders that occur every day?

Is "living by God's power" punishment and scolding or quiet love and gentleness? The choice of behavior is ours to choose.

Lord, help me to choose Your way, not mine.

2 Kings 5:1-19; Psalm 80; Matthew 5:21-26

Tuesday, September 24

Matthew 5:27-37 "*Just say a simple, 'Yes, I will,' or 'No, I won't.' Anything beyond this is from the evil one.*" (v.37)

Remember hearing, "Your word is your bond?" The majority of the world today appears to disbelieve this. In so many instances, people say one thing and later decide that wasn't what they meant or they changed their minds or it wasn't their fault. I know only too well how tedious it is to have an older person talk about the "good old days" or "when I was your age."

But there was a gentler, more honest, simpler time that was the norm in the world, not the exception. We know the meaning of *Yes* and *No*, but somewhere in the past few decades, some in our society have lost this knowledge. Please don't tell me about getting with the "now" or that nobody pays attention to that anymore. Rather, say, "I give you my word," and then keep that word. It's really not that difficult, but it does require determination to do right and a resolve to keep God's commandments. Yes, there are still ten of them—none have been repealed. Your word is your promise. To be effective, it's not to be given lightly, and certainly not to be taken lightly.

Lord, help me to be mindful that my word is my promise.

2 Kings 5:19-27; Psalm 78:1-39; 1 Corinthians 5:1-8

Wednesday, September 25

Matthew 5:38-48 "*But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!*" (v.44)

There are few concepts in Scripture that are as difficult to practice as loving everyone—particularly one's enemies. Our worldly self tells us that the natural thing to do in reaction to our enemies is to get mad and get even, and never forget or forgive. The world tells us to keep score of those real or imagined persecutions and give back as we have received. There is a very descriptive word for this mindset: *vendetta*.

But we're Christians: God gives us strength to do the supernatural. We're in the world but not of it. Here it is, in Jesus' own words: "love your enemies!" Then, as part of the same message, he tells us to pray for them.

Little wonder that, when first uttered, these words seemed to be revolutionary. Even today, they seem an impossible task!

But, Jesus never asks us to do the impossible. He may ask us to do what our worldly perception tells us is highly improbable, even impossible. But Jesus knows us—you and me and the rest of the world—so much better than we know ourselves.

If Jesus Christ asks us to “love your enemies,” we can do it!

2 Kings 6:1-23; Psalm 119:97-120; 1 Corinthians 5:9—6:8

Thursday, September 26

Psalm 116 *I love the LORD because he hears my voice and my prayer for mercy. Because he bends down to listen, I will pray as long as I have breath!* (vv.1-2)

The author of this psalm gives us a reminder of God’s constancy. Other places in Scripture tell us that God knew us when we were still in the womb, that He knows the number of hairs on our heads. The words “he bends down and listens” gives us another picture of a caring, understanding, and loving God who always takes time to hear our requests.

The psalmist has been near death and knows the value of prayer. Throughout the psalm, delivered in plain ordinary words, he reminds us of all the things he knows about the Lord. To me, it’s all summed up in that first verse: “because he hears my voice and my prayer.”

Loving the Lord is not complicated. You just do it! Isn’t it comforting to know that no matter the circumstances, no matter the frequency, or how trivial the request, He always bends down to be close to us and patiently listens, and answers our prayers?

And all this intimacy, this patience, this availability, is ours—for free.

2 Kings 9:1-16; Psalms 83, 146, 147;
1 Corinthians 6:12-20; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Friday, September 27

Matthew 6:7-15 *“If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.”* (vv.14-15)

Sound familiar? It’s the two verses after Jesus’ teaching on prayer. Sometimes we forget, in our rote recitation of the Lord’s Prayer, that it’s not just a request that we make, but an acknowledgment that we have an important role to play: God’s forgiveness for our sin is in direct ratio to our forgiveness of others.

Jesus has this expectation of our right action and, if we refuse, he's already told us what the result will be. If we don't forgive, we won't be forgiven. If we don't forgive, we're hurting Jesus as much as if we were participating in his Crucifixion. How can we honestly say we love Jesus, and then not be forgiving? It's hypocrisy as well as disobedience. Forgiving is loving, and we're commanded to love. Yes, commanded; it's not a suggestion.

As Paul tells us in his letter to the Ephesians, to be Christian is to "Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, slander...evil behavior" and "be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:31-32). If I want Christ to forgive me, I need to forgive others with a loving heart.

Give me such a loving heart for forgiveness, Lord.

2 Kings 9:17-37; Psalm 88; 1 Corinthians 7:1-9

Saturday, September 28

1 Corinthians 7:10-24 *The important thing is to keep God's commandments.* (v.19b)

Paul's first letter to the folks at Corinth is called by some, "the woodshed epistle." Evidently Paul had received reports from various sources about problems there that were causing disorder and divisiveness. There were arguments about exactly who was being followed and heresy that treated Christ's message as not really being from God. Paul reminds us in early chapters of the difference between wisdom and cleverness, of boasting, of pride, of sexual sin.

Then in this last part of the letter, he answers some of the questions they had sent him about Christian marriage and freedom, about public worship, about the Resurrection. And Paul's answers appear to hinge on this one thing: keep God's commandments.

What a great definition of faith! We hear so much about differences in our various denominations and about our worship services, and so little about the great Gospel being free to everyone! Why are we frequently so hesitant to evangelize? Jesus Christ is what we need to talk about, not whether to stand, sit, or kneel; to raise or fold arms.

The important thing is to keep God's commandments with a loving heart and a steady faith in His goodness, mercy, and faithfulness.

2 Kings 11:1-20a; Psalms 87, 90; Matthew 6:19-24

by Jeanne Curran

Sunday, September 29

2 Kings 17:1-18 *They imitated the nations around them although the Lord had ordered them, “Do not do as they do.”* (v.15b NIV)

As Christians, do we quietly blend in within the world’s culture and values or do we truly stand out as different? It is a delicate balance as we desire to “fit in” to our culture and the social groups around us yet show a clear difference as a Christian whose life is guided by God’s ways and His commands. What types of things would God say to us today in regards to “Do not do as they do”? When Jesus was on this earth, he showed us how to stay close to the Father and live a life of complete integrity and obedience to God—although we also know that his lack of following the popular opinion cost him his very life.

There is comfort to know that this struggle has always been a part of mankind’s journey. Just as in the days of the Israelites in our Scripture today, it has never been easy to follow God’s narrow path because, in so doing, the world may reject us or, at very least, label us as narrow-minded. Take a moment of self-reflection to consider the ways we are compromising and imitating the world and the ways we are living a life that differentiates us a true follower of Christ.

Psalms 66, 67; Acts 9:36-43; Luke 5:1-11

Monday, September 30

Matthew 6:25-34 *“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life. Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.”* (vv.25a, 34a)

In my Bible, this familiar reading from Matthew is entitled “Do Not Worry.” From Jesus’ Sermon of the Mount, these words are still be very current, relevant, and powerful today, beseeching us not to worry about food or drink or clothes. Jesus reminds us, “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” (v.27). He reminds us again that God takes care of all—including the birds of the air and the lilies of the field.

I believe our level of worry comes down to our trust in God. Do I really trust Him to take care of all my needs? Do I trust Him with my future or do I have silent doubts that He will be there when I need Him? Can I be totally dependent on Him like the birds and the lilies? Can I trust His promises?

In verse 33, Jesus promises, “But seek first his kingdom and all these things will be given to you as well.” Today, may we truly seek first

God's kingdom and embrace Jesus' words to not spend time worrying. What worries can you place at His feet today and trust Him more deeply?

2 Kings 17:24-41; Psalm 89:1-18; 1 Corinthians 7:25-31

Tuesday, October 1

Psalm 100 *Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.* (v.4)

The power of a thankful heart. We know that we should be thankful, but it is often hard when things are not going our way or when people hurt us. It is amazing to me that on the evening of his own death Jesus showed us an example of thankfulness. "The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks" (1 Corinthians 2:23a). In the midst of betrayal by a trusted friend and an impending painful death, Jesus offered thanksgiving. Is it possible for us to do the same?

I just finished (and highly recommend) the book *1,000 Gifts* by Anne Vancamp. She poetically shares her life and focus on thankfulness. She was challenged to journal 1,000 thanks. Some of her notations of thankfulness are as simple as jam piled high on toast, clean sheets, and laughter. I have begun a similar journal and encourage you to consider this practice. It's amazing writing down all the things we can be thankful for in this life. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 reminds us that we should be giving thanks in all circumstances "for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." What can you thank God for today?

2 Chronicles 29:1-3; 30:1-27; Psalms 97, 99; 1 Corinthians 7:32-40; Matthew 7:1-12

Wednesday, October 2

1 Corinthians 8:1-13 *Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God.* (vv.1b-3)

The convicting and personal question is that, in my desire to know and obey God, am I more focused on simply building up my knowledge of God or am I using that knowledge to show sincere love toward others. 1 Corinthians 13:2 states that if I have all knowledge but have not love, I am nothing. Do I truly believe that I am nothing without love? When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment, he replied, "Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30-31)—interesting that the greatest commandment didn't mention building up knowledge about God.

When my heart is teachable, I find that my times seeking knowledge of God make me love Him more, and my "neighbors" in Christ, too—co-workers, family, friends, even strangers. I heard a speaker say that for all our

meetings planned, we should focus first on loving the person we are with and secondarily focusing on the topic at hand. It is a sober reminder that we will be accountable to God based on the greatest commandment—how we love Him and how we love others. Who can I show Christ’s love today?

2 Kings 18:9-25; Psalms 101, 109; Matthew 7:13-21

Thursday, October 3

Psalm 105:1-22 *Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always. Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced.* (vv.4-5)

“Look to the Lord and his strength”—what a wonderful reminder that He is the source of strength as I am painfully aware of the limitations of my own strength—mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. As tough as I try to be, I am reminded of the song by Amy Grant: “Deep inside this armor, the warrior is a child.” I am thankful for God’s powerful strength.

“Seek his face always”—Sadly, and far too often, my mind and heart churns to solve life problems by looking within myself or to others for the answers, and then I wonder why it is hard and often fruitless. I am thankful that He gently restores us when we seek His face.

“Remember the wonders he has done”—Whenever I take the time to remember what He has already done in my life and the trials He has already brought me through, I am deeply humbled to be reminded that He has always been with me. I am thankful to know that He will be there for all the future trials and challenges.

Lord, may we take a few quiet moments right now to seek Your face, remember the wonders You have done, and look to You for the strength we need today. Amen.

2 Kings 18:28-37; 1 Corinthians 9:1-15; Matthew 7:22-29

Friday, October 4

Psalm 102 *“The LORD looked down from his sanctuary on high, from heaven he viewed the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners and release those condemned to death.”* (vv.19-20)

In my Bible, the description of Psalm 102 is “A prayer of the afflicted man, when he is faint, and pours out his lament before the Lord.” There are so many things that I pray for God’s intervention—healings, work for my business, relationships, family needs, wisdom for leaders, and the list goes on. Prayer is a reaching out to my heavenly Father to hear me, and to help me and those I love. In today’s 2 Kings reading, “Hezekiah went up to the temple of the LORD...and prayed to the LORD” (19:14-15). 1 Peter 3:12a

says, “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to the prayers.”

I am encouraged once again about the importance of our daily prayers and conversations with God—He hears our cries, praises, requests and even groans, and is at work in our lives. I keep a prayer journal for each request and return and circle all the prayers He has answered—it a visual faith builder to see all the circled prayers! I thank You Lord that you hear us when we pray.

2 Kings 19:1-20; 1 Corinthians 9:16-27; Matthew 8:1-17

Saturday, October 5

Matthew 8:18-27 *Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!” He replied, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” Then he got up and rebuked the wind and the waves, and it was completely calm. (vv.24-26)*

“Without warning, a furious storm came.” How many times in our lives can we identify with this statement? Furious storms are the unexpected and sometimes devastating events that happen in an instant and can change everything. A serious health diagnosis, a job layoff, the death of a friend or family member—and suddenly the crashing waves of grief, fear, and uncertainty overwhelm our lifeboats.

Like the disciples, we may cry out to God (thinking He must be asleep) saying, “Lord, save us!” And if we truly listen and can quiet our hearts, He probably gently responds to us in the same way: “You of little faith, why are you so afraid.” Can I stop and remember how He has brought me through past storms which I thought were impossible? Can I trust Him to bring me through my frightening circumstances? Do I know that He, as my faithful Father, can bring calmness to my situation and my own personal storm? I love the saying, “Don’t tell God how big your storm is; tell your storm how big God is.” Lord, increase our faith.

2 Kings 19:21-36; Psalms 107:33-43,108; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

by Mary Tomlinson

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