

DAILY DEVOTIONS

Monday, May 3 – Working Together

If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied.

Exodus 18:23

Joe worked more than twelve hours a day, often without taking breaks. Starting a charitable business demanded so much time and energy that he had little left to offer his wife and children when he got home. After the toll of chronic stress landed Joe in the hospital, a friend offered to organize a team to help him. Though he dreaded giving up control, Joe knew he couldn't keep up his current pace. He agreed to trust his friend—and God—as he delegated responsibilities to the group of people they chose together. A year later, Joe admitted that the charity and his family could never have prospered if he'd refused the help God had sent him.

God didn't design people to thrive without the support of a loving community. In Exodus 18, Moses led the Israelites through the wilderness. He tried serving God's people as a teacher, a counselor, and a judge all on his own. When his father-in-law visited, he offered Moses advice: "You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out," said Jethro. "The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone" (Exodus 18:18). He encouraged Moses to share the workload with faithful people. Moses accepted help and the whole community benefited.

When we trust that God works in and through all His people as we work together, we can find true rest.

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for never asking me to handle life without Your help or the support of others.

Tuesday, May 4 – At Our Worst

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.
Ephesians 4:2

“She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me.” This sentence, pronounced by Mr. Darcy in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, is the reason I will never forget that novel and its impact on me. Because after reading that one sentence, I firmly decided I would never like Mr. Darcy.

But I was wrong. Like Austen’s character Elizabeth Bennet, I had the humbling experience of slowly—and quite reluctantly—changing my mind. Like her, I’d been unwilling to get to know Darcy’s character as a whole; I preferred to hang onto my reaction to one of his worst moments. After finishing the novel, I wondered who I’d made that same mistake with in the real world. What friendships had I missed because I wouldn’t let go of a snap judgment?

At the heart of faith in Jesus is the experience of being seen, loved, and embraced by our Savior—at our worst (Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:19). It’s the wonder of realizing we can surrender our old, false selves for who we truly are in Christ (Ephesians 4:23–24). And it’s the joy of understanding that we are no longer alone but part of a family, a “body” of those learning to walk the “way of love”—real, unconditional love (5:2).

When we remember what Christ has done for us (v. 2), how can we not long to see others the way He sees us?

PRAYER:

*Father, it’s really hard, sometimes, to let go of that impulse to judge and compare, to resist that need to see myself as better than others. Help me to grasp, deep in my heart, the truth that I don’t need to compete and that I am loved.
Amen!*

Wednesday, May 5 – A Tree to Heal

Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?

Genesis 3:13

For \$300,000, you can buy a new McLaren 720S sports car. The vehicle comes with a V8 engine pumping 710 horsepower—considerably more than you’ll need for your morning commute.

Of course, you might be tempted to use all that power. One Virginia driver learned his McLaren was so “fast” it could go from an upscale showroom to the scrap heap in just twenty-four hours! One day after buying the car, he slammed it into a tree. (Thankfully, he survived.)

Just three chapters into the story of the Bible, we learn how a different bad choice and a tree marred God’s good creation. Adam and Eve ate from the one tree they were to leave alone (Genesis 3:11). The story has barely begun, and paradise is cursed (vv. 14–19).

Another tree would play a role in undoing this curse—the cross Jesus endured on our behalf. His death purchased our future with Him (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13).

The story comes full circle in the Bible’s last chapter. There we read of “the tree of life” growing beside the “river of the water of life” (Revelations 22:1–2). As John describes it, this tree will be “for the healing of the nations” (v. 2). John assures us, “No longer will there be any curse” (v. 3). God’s story comes with the happily-ever-after we all long for.

PRAYER:

Father, don’t let me forget the price it cost Your Son to undo the curse we set in motion way back in the garden of Eden. All I can say is thank You. All I can give You is my life.

Amen.

Thursday, May 6 – Milk First

Bur solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Hebrews 5:14

In the seventh century, what is now called the United Kingdom was many kingdoms often at war. When one king, Oswald of Northumbria, became a believer in Jesus, he called for a missionary to bring the gospel to his region. A man named Cormon was sent, but things didn't go well. Finding the English "stubborn," "barbarous," and uninterested in his preaching, he returned home frustrated.

"I am of the opinion," a monk named Aidan told Cormon, "that you were more severe to your unlearned hearers than you ought to have been." Instead of giving the Northumbrians "the milk of more easy doctrine," Cormon had given them teaching they couldn't yet grasp. Aidan went to Northumbria, adapted his preaching to the people's understanding, and thousands became believers in Jesus.

Aidan got this sensitive approach to mission from Scripture. "*I gave you milk, not solid food,*" Paul told the Corinthians, "*for you were not yet ready for it*" (1 Corinthians 3:2). Before right living can be expected from people, Hebrews says, basic teaching about Jesus, repentance, and baptism must be grasped (Hebrews 5:13–6:2). While maturity should follow (5:14), let's not miss the order. Milk comes before meat. People can't obey teaching they don't understand.

The faith of the Northumbrians ultimately spread to the rest of the country and beyond. Like Aidan, when sharing the gospel with others, we meet people where they are.

PRAYER:

Jesus, thank You for reaching me in ways I could understand. Amen!!

Friday, May 7 – Living Love

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

Ephesians 3:17-19

Samuel Francis wrote these lyrics to an old beloved hymn:

“O the deep, deep love of Jesus! 'Tis a heav'n of heav'ns to me;
And it lifts me up to glory, With You evermore to be.”

Do you truly believe that God loves you unconditionally? When everything around us crumbles, we will always have the love of God. No matter how bad we mess up, no matter how unloved - or unlovable - we've been, His love endures forever.

Sometimes the lack of love we give and receive makes it hard for us to accept and understand that God truly loves us. But He does, and His grace can help us understand and live out the loving affection our Father has for us.

The way we live God's love out is by loving others. While this may seem broad, look around you. Who can you show love to today? Your family? Your friends? Church members? The barista at your coffee shop? Maybe even a stranger at the store? There are millions of people in this world and it might seem overwhelming to love them all, but start with one and work your way up from there.

PRAYER:

Father, Your love is truly amazing! It is something that I cannot even begin to understand. Help me however to live out what I do understand by sharing your love with the people You've placed in my life, whomever they might be. In Jesus Name, I pray, Amen.

Saturday, May 8 – God’s Resources in Trials

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is the Father who is full of mercy and all comfort. He comforts us every time we have trouble, so when others have trouble, we can comfort them with the same comfort God gives us.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

When you are going through tough times, you may wonder why God allows it. Only God knows the reasons. What you can be sure of is that He will be there for you, no matter what circumstance you encounter. His love and comfort are resources that will see you through your trial.

And don't forget that others are watching as you lean on God's comforting arm in the face of heartache and disappointment. Your example may show them where to turn when they encounter difficulties in their own lives. Your sorrow will not be in vain if you are able to lead one other person to the comforting arms of the Good Shepherd.

“Christ made no promise that those who followed Him in His plan of re-establishing life on its proper basic principles would enjoy a special immunity from pain and sorrow - nor did He Himself experience such immunity. He did, however; promise enough joy and courage, enough love and confidence in God to enable those who went His way to do far more than survive.” J. B. Phillips

PRAYER:

Father, sometimes other people can't comfort me the way I need to be comforted. Only You can, Father. Thank You for Your strong arms that wrap tightly around me. Thank You for being the God of all comfort, a safe and secure haven I can run to. In Jesus' Name, I pray, Amen.

Sunday, May 9 – God’s Word is Encouraging

Through Him you believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and glorified Him, and so your faith and hope are in God. 1 Peter 1:21

It's amazing what we can do when we know we have the support of others—
Finish a degree program while working full-time. Support a friend through a
long and difficult illness. Fulfill a lifelong dream.

Just knowing someone stands beside us gives us courage and faith to face the
challenges before us.

With this in mind, who needs your support and encouragement today?
Emil Brunner said, “What oxygen is to the lungs, such is hope to the meaning of
life.”

PRAYER:

*Father, I know that encouragement is so important. Thank You for the
encouragement You give me through Your Word. Help me to share it with
someone else so that they might gain the courage to encourage yet another
person. In Jesus Name, I pray, Amen.*