

# "O Come All Ye Faithful"

*10 Quiet Times Before The New Year!*

*The Rogue Valley Church  
December 2020*

## Day 1: “Seeing the Invisible” Overcoming Unbelief

Faith allows us to see beyond the moment. Moses looked beyond the moment while in Egypt to something better down the road. The decision he made to put off "the pleasures of sin for a short time" was made because of his ability to look beyond the moment. He said "no" to sin so he could say "yes" to his future in Christ. Our ability to say "no" to self at the present moment is our greatest tool for saying "Yes" to God's blessings in the future. This takes Faith!

We say "No" to fear, in order to say 'Yes' to love.

We say 'No' to unfaithfulness, to say "Yes" to intimacy in our marriage.

We say 'No' to letting our career consume us, so we can say 'yes' to family.

We say 'No' to impurity to say 'Yes' to purity of heart.

We say 'No' to deceit to say 'Yes' to the freedom that comes from truth.

We say 'No' to that extra purchase to say yes to debt free living

We say 'No' to laziness, to say 'Yes' to strong character.

We say 'No' to sin so we can say 'Yes' to Christ.

### Willingness to Wait

*Titus 2:10-12*

*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It **teaches us** to say **"No" to ungodliness and worldly passions**, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, **while we wait** for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.*

Can I really say 'Yes' to tomorrow & 'No' to today? This same spiritual challenge is what is at the heart of becoming a spiritual person. It's not just the character issue of 'denying self'; it's about whether your heart can see what's right around the corner.

When it comes to taking a stand against the captivating sins in our lives, many of us fall continually because we refuse to say 'Yes' to God's grace. God's grace becomes our great instructor in denial of self, when we are willing to be trained by it. **Saying 'Yes' to God's grace means, we are willing to wait for an eternal glory that far outweighs 'the pleasures of sin for a short time'** (Hebrews 11:25)

### Men Who Saw The Invisible

- Abraham -- Genesis 22:1-19
- Jacob - Genesis 32:22-32
- Moses -- Exodus 3-4

- Ananias -- Acts 9
- Jesus -- Matthew 26:36-46

### **Men Who Saw Only The Visible**

- Ananias & Sapphira - Acts 5
- Rich Young Ruler -- Mark 10
- Lot -- Genesis 19
- Prodigal Son -- Luke 15

### **Other Scriptures**

- Luke 9:23-25
- Hebrews 11:24-27
- Psalm 30:5
- Hebrews 12:2-3
- Matthew 6:24

### **Decisions:**

- Do you handle the word 'No' very well?
- What happens when you hear the word 'no'?
- What areas in your life would you consider out of control if any?
- Talk about one thing you have wanted to change for a while:
  - Possibilities: Weight, debt reduction, savings, better job, fruitfulness, marriage intimacy, relationships, character, addictions
  - Name one thing, if you said 'No' to that would begin to change your life for the better and the it's corresponding 'Yes' that you need to pray about and focus on.

## **Day 2: Overcome Spiritual Mediocrity**

### **Study: Judges 6-7**

Have you ever felt like you're stuck spiritually? You have your quiet times reading your Bible and praying to God, you show up at church, you talk with other disciples, and you may even share your faith. But despite all that, your life doesn't change, and nor do the lives of those around you. You can flash an "everything's great" smile with the best of them, acting the part of a good Christian, yet not experience the richness of the Holy Spirit living within you. What is the reason for this stagnation? You have given in to the gravitational pull of spiritual mediocrity.

Spiritual mediocrity results when you adopt sin and learn to live a life tolerant of a lack of faith, saying, "I'm not going to get any better. So, I'm going to learn how to be happy with no faith. I will conform to a life in which I will be unbelieving yet contented. I will choose to be satisfied with failure." Many Christians are content with compromise in their lives as long as they can convince themselves that they won't go to hell because of it. The lukewarm world has boiled everything down to, "If I'm not going to hell, then it's all right." This paralyzing deception keeps us comfortable in a mediocre world where we do not aspire to do great things and where we are apathetic about it.

In addition to this, mediocrity also loves company. When you settle for mediocrity, you want others around you to do the same. That's when mediocrity becomes a culture, a lifestyle, and a threat to God's kingdom. Even an under-achiever looks good against a backdrop of spiritual mediocrity, but being mediocre isn't anything to celebrate. A life of comparative discipleship in which we constantly justify ourselves by looking at others sets up the kingdom for unfruitful stagnation and certain failure.

***Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Judges 6:1***

The nation of Israel always "did it again." If we are honest, we can all relate to the Israelites, who "again" got into sin. Do you ever feel that way? "Here I go again. I'm committing that same sin again." Have you ever wondered why, even though you try very hard, you still find yourself "committing the same sin again"?

Gideon was part of a nation that was constantly falling back into their sinful patterns. They didn't dare fight the Midianites because they didn't think they could win, so they adapted.

Spiritual mediocrity results when we simply adapt to sin and a lack of faith, saying, "I'm not going to get any better. So I'm going to learn how to be happy with no faith, to be unbelieving and yet contented, to be satisfied with failure."

***Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you? Judges 6:14***

Although you may feel forever entangled by the sin and weaknesses in your life, do you know what God sees when he looks at you right now? A **mighty warrior**. You may find that difficult to believe. But that's a symptom of mediocrity. It loves to get down on itself. Mediocre people like to say, "Yeah, that's another reason why I can't help anybody. I'm a heathen with no relationship with God." But believe it--God sees you very differently, because He sees you through the eyes of His power and His salvation! He sees that you can do something. And all He asks is that you believe it when He says to you, "I will be with you."

A true spiritual breakthrough is one that takes place in our view of and relationship with God. A transformed perspective on God will lead us down the path of breakthrough because we will see ourselves and the world around us very differently. These breakthroughs can only be done one way. "This kind can come out only by prayer" (Mark 9:29)!

#### **Decisions:**

1. What sin have you "accepted" in your life that you don't believe you can change? What would happen if you prayed about this everyday for the next 30 days?
2. Who can you build relationships that will call you higher spiritually? Do your current relationships call you to be more like Jesus, or allow mediocrity to exist in your life?
3. In which area of your life does God want you to overcome the mediocrity in?
  - a. Relationships
  - b. Marriage
  - c. Purpose/evangelism
  - d. Career
  - e. Personal Righteousness

## Day 3: Bearing Fruit To Glorify God

Study: John 15, Acts 2-4

*"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will **bear much fruit**; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and **withers**; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. **This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples**" (John 15:5-8)*

God gets glory when we show others the Truth that sets them free from sin (John 8:31-32) Jesus tells us in John 15, that when we Remain in him, and his words remain in us, that it will lead to us bearing fruit. The fruit of our obedience to the Word will always overflow into the lives of others, saving & changing others.

God has called every disciple out of "darkness into his wonderful light" so that we can tell others about his praises, to help them break free from the grips of darkness and the chains of sin. (Psalm 107:10)

*But you are a **chosen people**, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you **out of darkness** into his **wonderful light**. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)*

Consider and reflect on the following in regards to where you are at in helping others Break Free from their sins, just as God did for us:

### I. Psalm 26:2-3 Ask yourself, "Where am I at?"

1. Ask yourself, "How often do I think about the lost? What is it about evangelism I don't like? Am I so overcome with fear, selfishness, envy, etc. that I simply cannot care about the lost?"
2. First, confess any doubts or fears that you might have. Then, for each doubt/fear, find a scripture that combats it. Memorize those scriptures and have them ready throughout the day--whenever you feel afraid or begin to doubt, recite those scriptures.

### II. Mathew 28:16-20 Remember the Mission

1. Think about what inspired you to respond to the Bible in your own conversion and how your life changed.
2. Make a list of people you know God is calling you to reach out to and think of how their lives would change if they responded to the Bible.

### III. Ephesians 6:18 Pray To Be Wise

1. Prayer is powerful: God's will is for people to be saved; if you ask Him to help you, He will!
2. Pray to be wise: after you meet people, ask God what conversations you should have with them and who should they build relationships with.

#### **IV. James 2:14-17 Just Do It**

1. Faith without deeds is dead, so make a decision to take action today.
2. Bring somebody with you (Mark 6:7)! Help each other by reading scriptures and praying together to boost your faith.
3. Set up a time to share--there's nothing like getting out there and building new friendships!

#### **V. Galatians 6:9 Sow Generously in Relationships**

1. Put it on your schedule every week to build relationships: ask them to lunch, dinner, or have coffee together.
3. Also, set up a time to hang out with them and other disciples (movies, dinner, coffee, BBQ, etc.).
4. People trust you more when they feel you genuinely care for them rather than just an invitation.

## **Day 4: Overcoming Discontentment - Handling Your Finances**

### **Live Responsibly!**

*"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. So if you have **not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth**, who will **trust you with true riches**? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?" (Luke 16:10-12)*

Jesus teaches us here that responsible living is about trustworthy living before God. Reflect on the following areas to determine whether you are living responsibly or not...

Are you taking responsibility by dealing with your:

- Greed & materialism (Luke 12:15, 1 Tim 6:8-9)
- Impulse buying/spending, undisciplined spending - reflects laziness (Prov 20:4)
- Using properly the resources God has already given you? (Luke 15:11-31)
- Living within a spending plan/budget? (Is 32:8)
- Recognizing debt & dealing with it seriously? (Rom 13:8)
- Getting advice on all types of money matters -- no secrets? (Prov 11:14)
- If you haven't already sat down and mapped out a special holiday budget and spending plan, do it! Without it you will be tempted to overspend and get yourself in debt trouble. Be disciplined! Don't abandon balancing your account, paying

bills on time, and taking the time needed to make sure your life runs well financially.

### **Live with Conviction!**

*"But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of **greed**, because these are **improper** for God's holy people. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or **greedy** person -- such a man is an idolater -- has any inheritance in the kingdom..." (Eph 5:3-5 NIV)*

Consider the last time you recognized or volunteered a personal struggle with greed in your prayers or in a conversation with another disciple. Been awhile?

For older disciples greed can become the new "impurity", displacing the sexual impurity that was stronger as a younger person. Admiring, purchasing, and collecting things can satisfy cravings that come from not being filled up with God. This can represent an especially challenging temptation over the holiday season.

Reflect on and consider the following common "money issues" within our hearts and lives. Facing the truth will be uncomfortable, but remember, the first part of the winning battle to change is recognizing and facing the problem areas...

- Growing debt (Rom 13:8 Let no debt remain except the debt to love!)
- Fantasizing over cars, homes, clothes, or "toys"
- Discontent or embarrassment with what we have
- Lack of hospitality with strangers or the lost
- Frequent marital strife over money
- Irritation when money is requested or taught about at church
- Demand for a standard of living beyond our means/jobs
- Arguing, unfaithfulness over shared bills in a singles household
- Excessive work hours as a rule
- Fascination over latest money-making systems/seminars
- Panic, anger when a possession is damaged or lost
- Discomfort when others discuss about personal finances
- Inconsistent or "token" giving at church

So, if you're relating right now to the above indicators of discontent or greed, start overcoming by getting open and honest -- about financial trouble, undisciplined/impulse spending, greedy decisions or temptations, etc!

### **Study the following scriptures for further conviction:**

- Proverbs 11:24, 28; 23:4-5; 27:20
- Haggai 1:5-11 Give careful thought to your ways.
- Matthew 6:19-23 Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, not on earth.
- Luke 16:9 Use worldly wealth to gain friends -- to serve other over the holidays!
- Luke 16:13-15 You cannot serve both God & money.

### **Live in Contentment!**

*"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. **I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.**" (Phil 4:12-13)*

Paul talks about how he had learned a powerful secret -- the ability to be content in every situation, regardless of circumstances. Content means "desiring no more than what one has; satisfied." (Webster's) The original Greek word means "to be filled up." Can you envision being content in every situation, or being satisfied so much you want nothing else? It's possible.

It truly pleases God when we joyfully give thanks to him. Yet, we often spend too much energy thinking about what we don't have and not nearly enough energy enjoying what we do have. How much energy do you spend enjoying what you already have -- your friends, spouse, family, job, talents, spiritual opportunities, interests, and even possessions? Ultimately, contentment means deciding to enjoy what God has given you and trusting that God knows what you need.

*"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God **rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.** He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of **greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.**" (Heb 11:24-27)*

**Faith allows us to see beyond the moment.** Moses looked beyond the moment while in Egypt to something better down the road. Our ability to say "No" to self at the present moment is our greatest tool for saying "Yes" to God's blessings in the future. This is an incredibly "valuable" and important conviction for us as we talk to our kids about managing their expectations for gifts this holiday season.

- We can say 'No' to that extra holiday purchase to say 'Yes' to debt-free living.
- We can say 'No' to letting work or career consume us, so we can say 'yes' to family.
- We can say 'No' to sin so we can say 'Yes' to Christ.

## **Day 5: Overcoming Anxiety and Worry**

### **Psalm 37:1-7**

1 Don't **worry** about the wicked  
or **envy** those who do wrong.

2 For like grass, they **soon fade away.**  
Like spring flowers, they soon **wither.**

3 Trust in the Lord and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper.

4 **Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires.**

5 Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust him, and he will help you.

6 He will make your innocence **radiate** like the dawn, and the justice of your cause will **shine** like the noonday sun.

7 **Be still in the presence of the Lord, and wait patiently for him to act.**

Don't **worry** about evil people who prosper or fret about their wicked schemes.

### **Mark 4:18-20**

"Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the **worries of this life**, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and **choke the word, making it unfruitful**. Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop--thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown."

Satan works through the worries of life and deception of wealth to ebb away at our trust in God. One of the greatest lies he tells us is that money is the answer to anxiety. Will we be financially secure? Can we be happy doing our job long term? Can we help our kids through college? If there is sickness in our family can we pay our medical bills? What if my car breaks down? Will we run out of money before our next pay check? How long will we stay afloat if we lose our jobs? When will we be able to retire? Will we outlive our retirement? What if our kids need braces? How will we afford Christmas, clothing, birthdays, transportation, entertainment, and childcare? How often do these thoughts go through our minds? God wants us to be financially responsible but when do we cross over to worry or anxiety? God does not want us to be anxious about anything (Phil. 4:6). An anxious heart weighs a man down (Proverbs 12:25). God wants us to cast our anxieties on him (1 Peter 5:7)

- What are your goals and dreams for your life and your family?
- How much do your goals and dreams depend on money?
- How have your goals and dreams changed as a disciple?
- When you feel anxious, does your first thought to come up with a plan to fix what is causing you anxiety or to go to God in prayer. What is your normal response to fear/worry/or anxiety? What does each response say about your relationship with God?
- Can you identify fear, anxiety or worry you have experienced in the past couple of weeks? Write them down and talk through each one with someone or your group of friends.
- Would your spouse/kids/friends say you are easily stressed out?

### *Philippians 4:4-8 NLT*

*"Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again-rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon. **Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything**. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. **Then you will experience God's peace**, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. **Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.***

Look up the following Scriptures and write down what you learn about God and your self. The more intimately we know God, the more secure we become in him, and can break free from worry and anxiety.

**Look up the following Scriptures and write down what you learn about God and your self:**

Proverbs 12:25  
Psalm 9:10  
Psalm 26:1  
Psalm 32:10  
Psalm 33:21-22  
Psalm 34:22  
Psalm 36:7  
Psalm 56:11  
Proverbs 16:20  
Isaiah 12:2  
Isaiah 26:1-4  
Isaiah 57:13  
2 Corinthians 1:10  
Philippians 4:15-18  
1 Timothy 6:17  
Hebrews 10:32-39 (NLT)  
Hebrews 13:6  
Hebrews 13:15-16]  
1 Peter 2:22-25  
1 Peter 5:7  
1 John 2:2  
1 John 4:9-10

## **Day 6: Prayer: Knowing Your Heart**

*Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: '**Hear**, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you **must love** the Lord your God with all your **heart**, all your **soul**, all your **mind**, and all your **strength**.'*

*Mark 12:29-30 (NLT)*

The greatest and most important command found in Scripture is to love God. Oftentimes, in building our relationship with God, we find ourselves more frustrated than faithful, dutiful than devoted, or more distant than intimate. This debilitating spiritual condition results from attempting to love God with only our mind and strength without engaging our heart and our soul. When we insist on measuring our love for God based on doctrine, performance, effort, or achievement, then building a relationship with God becomes a frustrating experience.

Jesus said in Mark 12:29-30 that loving God involves engaging our heart and our soul as well as our mind and our strength. Engaging the heart and the soul as we pour our hearts thoughts/feelings/sins out to God in prayer, helps us overcome the spiritual dryness. David wrote:

***Psalm 62:8, "Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him for God is our refuge."***

Pouring our hearts out involves emptying ourselves of the thoughts, troubles, and sins that hinder or harden our hearts, such as bitterness, disappointment, greed, lust, doubt, fear, anxiety, or unfaithfulness. This is done through prayer. The Scriptures are filled with powerful examples of prayerful men and women, such as Hannah (1Samuel 1:10, 15-16), Jeremiah (Lamentations 3:19-20), Job (Job 7:11), David (Psalm 40), Mary (Luke 1:46-47), and Jesus (Matthew 26:38) who poured out their hearts and souls to God. As they poured out their hearts to God, they were able to connect with God, find strength, surrender their will, and draw close to him.

It is in prayer that we pour our hearts out to God. However, if you cannot identify the condition of your heart, it is difficult to come to God with honest emotions and pour out your heart. Can you identify the condition of your heart? Here are several common heart conditions.

### **1. The Distressed Heart - Psalm 77:1-12 (NIV)**

You may have a distressed heart if:

1. You lack motivation and urgency to pray and engage with God
2. You find yourself living in the past, fixated on the "good old days" rather than the opportunity-filled days God has in store for you. (Psalm 77:5)
3. You find yourselves at a loss for words, confused or too troubled to speak when someone asks how you are doing (Psalm 77:4).
4. You believe that God has failed to keep his promises and that he has left you (Psalms 77:7-10).

God wants to relieve your distress, but you must first express your need for Him and pour out to Him whatever is causing you distress.

### **2. The Congested Heart - III John 2 (NLT)**

No one enjoys being sick. When our head or chest is congested, the accompanying chest pain or sinus pressure hinders our ability to concentrate, think, rest, breathe, or communicate clearly. Similarly, when our hearts are spiritually congested by sinful thoughts, motives, attitudes, or behavior, the internal pressure arising from the guilt of these sins makes our hearts and our souls sick. Healing and forgiveness come when we pour out our hearts and souls to God (Psalm 32:3-6). Our souls will not be healthy unless our hearts are purified and healed through embracing open confession before God (James 5:16). It is only when we come clean before God, admitting our inabilities, weaknesses, unfaithfulness, and failures that we can appreciate and respond to God's

continual faithfulness to us and enjoy being close to Him. (1 John 1:5-7). Examples of this are:

- Solomon (2 Chronicles 6:36-39)
- The Israelites (Ezra 10:1-4)
- Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:4-7)

### **3. The Destitute Heart - Psalm 102:17-24**

Do you find yourself having reached rock bottom in life and in relationships? Have you lost your sense of purpose and feel that you are spiritually and emotionally bankrupt? Do you think you are experiencing a "midlife crisis" prematurely or have run out of solutions for your life or relationship problems? Does the condition of your relationships fill your heart with despair rather than joy, bitterness rather than gratitude? If this is the case, then you have a destitute heart. When we feel completely alone, at a loss for relationships, and at our wit's end where we see no way out, it is at this point that our greatest need is God.

Psalm 102:17 tells us that God hears the prayers of the destitute. It is because of this conviction that Hannah was compelled to pray and pour out her soul to God in asking Him to bless her with a child in 1 Samuel 1. Throughout Jesus' life, and especially when he was crucified, Jesus believed that God would hear His cries, and He trusted that God would take up his cause (Psalm 22, Luke 22:41-44; 23:34, 46, Hebrews 5:7). God was able to transform Jesus' destitution into a victorious resurrection! Likewise, it is at our most dire moments that we come to grips with who we really are before God, and through expressing our desperate need for Him and for relationships, we find ourselves richly filled up by God!

### **4. The Destined Heart - Genesis 32:22-28**

Perhaps the greatest challenge we face in our relationship with God is maintaining our vision and awareness of God's destiny for us. Like Jacob in Genesis 25 - 32, true understanding of God's will and the destiny he has chosen for our lives will not come without wrestling in prayer (Genesis 32:24). It took Jacob having to pour out to God his intense longing and desire for God's blessing, wrestling with God, to receive his blessing -- his destiny.

Until we wrestle with God, pouring out our deepest desires, fears, regrets, and loves on a regular basis; we will fall short of understanding and embracing His plan for our lives. This was true in Jesus' life (Matthew 26:39-42). He wrestled at Gethsemane to drink the cup of suffering and ultimately fulfill God's destiny for his life.

When was the last time you wrestled with God, pouring out your deepest desires and struggles and praying until you surrendered your will to Him?

As we pour out all of our feelings, pains, fears, and joys to God everyday, He is then able to fill our hearts back up with His love, which gives us strength and encouragement!

## Day 7: Refreshing Relationships!

Relationships determine the quality of our lives. "Burnout" is not always a result of being overworked or having too many responsibilities, it is a consequence of the choices we make with regard to the quality of our relationships. Nothing satisfies us like the experience of being close to people. Possessing an intimate relationship with God is the most fulfilling relationship we can have. Someone who pursues an intimate walk with God and close friends will rarely experience burnout,

### I. Refreshed By Intimate Walk With God

#### Matthew 11:28-30 (The Message)

*"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? **Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me--watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.**"*

- What does Jesus say you should do in order to find rest?
- Are you learning from Jesus or from the world your relational skills and expectations?

### II. Mark 8:36

- A. Prioritizing our relationship with God and others is difficult.
- B. How have your desires for financial security, spiritual success, and personal comfort stolen your heart from relationships?
- C. What key relationships have you neglected the most?
- D. Have been guilty of forfeiting your soul? Does it motivate you to change your life?

### III. Ecclesiastes 4:7-12

- A. When we are burdened by failed relationships, we are plagued by loneliness, misery, and discontentment.
- B. What are the benefits of relationships, according to this scripture?
- C. What insures strong relationships?
- D. What decision must you make today to make your relationships God centered?

#### Scriptures for Further Study

1. 1 Samuel 23:16
2. Proverbs 27:5-6
3. John 3:22
4. 1 Thessalonians 5:11

## Day 8: Overcoming Loneliness And Isolation

*Psalms 43:4-5 (MSG) Why are you **down in the dumps**, dear soul? Why are you **crying the blues**? Fix my eyes on God---soon I'll be praising again. He puts a **smile** on my face. He's my God.*

Sometimes we can feel discouraged and lonely as the world tempts us to be consumed with ourselves by looking at all of the things that we don't have. The plan of Satan is to get our eyes off of God and others. He knows that focus on self will damage our faith and will lead us into worldliness, greed, envy, debauchery, and laziness.

*Romans 8:6-8 (MSG) **Obsessions with self** in these matters is a **dead end**; **attention to God leads us out into the open**, into a spacious, **free life**. **Focusing on the self** is the opposite of **focusing on God**. Anyone completely **absorbed in self** ignores God, ends up thinking more about self than God. That person ignores who God is and what he is doing. And God isn't pleased at being ignored.*

We don't often have the right perspective in our lives.....we try not to be too discouraged or too lonely, but maybe God wants us to use this time to understand Him better, get closer to Him and share His love with others. If we took God's view of the Holidays, we could experience the comfort and joy that are part of a daily walk with Him. Think of the refreshment that would come if we focused on God rather than ourselves -- we would no longer be "singing the blues".

*Psalms 40:3 He has given me a **new song to sing**, a **hymn of praise** to our God. Many will see what he has done and be amazed. They will put their trust in the Lord.*

You may recognize these words to a famous Christmas song...

### **I. Do you see what I see?**

*I Chronicles 28:8-10 "And Solomon, my son, learn to know the God of your ancestors **intimately**. Worship and serve him with your **whole heart** and a **willing mind**. For the Lord sees every heart and knows every plan and thought. If you **seek him**, you will find him. But if you forsake him, he will reject you forever.*

#### **• God sees our hearts, our thoughts, and our plans.**

*Genesis 16:13 Thereafter, Hagar used another name to refer to the Lord, who had spoken to her. She said, "You are the God who sees me." She also said, "Have I truly seen the One who sees me?"*

#### **• God looks to care for us when we are discouraged.**

Do you evaluate your heart condition in your daily time with God?

Are you aware when self has become the focus of your thoughts and heart?

Do you see the signs that communicate you are lonely, envious or discouraged?

#### **Decide to see things God's way:**

1. Before reading your Bible, pray that God will give you insights into His heart and yours.
2. Set a goal for your daily Bible study to read more than you have read throughout the year.
3. Write a gratitude list of the ways God has cared for you throughout the year.

## II. Do you hear what I hear?

*Acts 10:30-33* Cornelius replied, "Four days ago I was praying in my house about this same time, three o'clock in the afternoon. Suddenly, a man in dazzling clothes was standing in front of me. 31 He told me, 'Cornelius, **your prayer has been heard, and your gifts to the poor have been noticed by God!** 32 Now send messengers to Joppa, and summon a man named Simon Peter. He is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner who lives near the seashore.' 33 So I sent for you at once, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here, waiting before God to hear the message the Lord has given you."

- **God hears.**

*Psalms 69:33* For **the Lord hears the cries** of the needy...

- **God hears people in need.**

Do you pray to hear the needs around you? We can be distracted by the many things we have to do this time of year.

Do you listen more to Satan's self focused arrows or to God's spirit providing you opportunity to help someone in need?

## III. Do you know what I know?

*II Corinthians 4:6-8 (MSG)* **If you only look at us, you might well miss the brightness.** We carry this precious Message around in the unadorned clay pots of our ordinary lives. That's to prevent anyone from confusing **God's incomparable power with us.** As it is, there's not much chance of that. You know for yourselves that we're not much to look at. We've been surrounded and battered by troubles, but we're not demoralized; we're not sure what to do, but **we know that God knows what to do;** we've been spiritually terrorized, but God hasn't left our side; we've been thrown down, but we haven't broken. What they did to Jesus, they do to us--trial and torture, mockery and murder; what Jesus did among them, he does in us--he lives!

*Psalms 103:14* For **he knows how weak we are;** he remembers we are only dust.

- **God knows that we are weak, yet strengthens us through relationships!**

*Romans 12:3* Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: **Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest** in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. 4 Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, 5 so it is with Christ's body. **We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.**

- **God knows we need relationships, and provides for them!**

*Psalms 68:6* God places the **lonely in families;** he sets the prisoners free and **gives them joy.** But he makes the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.

*I Corinthians 10:13* The only temptation that has come to you is that which everyone has. But you can trust God, who will not permit you to be tempted more than you can stand. But when you are tempted, **he will also give you a way to escape so that you**

***will be able to stand it.***

Do you know your weaknesses? Is it difficult to admit them to others or to God in your prayers?

Do you see relationships as relief from the impact of weakness, trials or temptations?

**Decide to add to your knowledge of God and to his value of relationships:**

1. Pray with one another -- in person, on the phone, as a Bible talk, or with your date.
2. Express your need and your appreciation of your relationships through cards for the Holidays.
3. Set up times with other disciples to have fun, shop, cook, eat, celebrate, play games, play sports and date.

## **Day 9: The Place Of Prayer In Our Lives**

### **The Precedence of Prayer:**

***Acts 16:13-15***

*On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a **place of prayer**. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. **The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message**. When she and the members of her household were **baptized**, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house."*

**Precedence:** The condition of being considered more important than someone or something else; priority in importance, order, or rank.

synonyms: take priority over, be considered more important/urgent than, outweigh, supersede, prevail over, come before.

Background:

- Churches were growing
- Paul has a vision to go into Europe
- This is the first step into changing the history and destiny of a continent. What was his plan? There wasn't one.
- They first look for a place of prayer.
- What happens? The first people in Europe become Christians.

**Why? Prayer has precedence over all things.**

**John 15:5** *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you **remain** in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; **apart from me you can do nothing.**”*

Does prayer have **precedence** in your life?

- Is it **first** on the list or simple a good intention.
- No wonder, you don't see amazing things happening. Pray first thing!
- You can't do anything without prayer.

**Challenge:** Pray first thing every day, before you check your phone, check email, check social media.....**check in with God first!**

## **The Place of Prayer:**

**Acts 16:16-24**

*13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find **a place of prayer**...*

*16 Once when we were going to **the place of prayer**, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future.....*

**What started as “a” place of prayer, became “the” place of prayer. Why?**

- They had witnessed the power of God there!
- Open and spiritual people gathered there
- It reminded them of God and brought them into a spiritual mindset
- These disciples had their place of prayer.

Everyone knew about it: **“Let's meet at the place of prayer.”**

**Do you have a place of prayer? A quiet, solitary place to go meet God? No distractions.....**

- A closet
- A mountain or hill
- A quiet street, an empty road
- An unused bedroom

**Jesus did:**

**Luke 5:16** *“But Jesus often withdrew to **lonely places** and **prayed.**”*

**Mark 1:35** ***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.***

Sometimes we don't go to a place because we think, I don't have time or I'm too busy. That's exactly why Jesus went to a lonely place for prayer.

**Challenge: Find your place of prayer, talk to God about the commitment to be there!**

## **The Power of Prayer:**

### **Acts 16:25-34**

*25 About midnight Paul and Silas were **praying** and **singing hymns to God**, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a **violent earthquake** that the foundations of the **prison** were **shaken**. At once all the prison **doors flew open**, and **everyone's chains came loose**. 27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped....*

**Sometimes prayer leads to situations you don't expect or wish for yourself.**

- Paul ended up trying to help a woman possessed and then was thrown in jail.
- He was beaten and humiliated in front of people.
- Troubles and suffering come in this life.....sometimes physical and emotional pain too much to bear!
- **What did he do? He prayed and sang hymns 16:25**

**What happened? God unleashed power!**

- Foundations shaken
- Doors flew open
- Chains broken
- Hearts opened and lives changed!
- **When we make prayer a priority and make every situation a place of prayer, we will expect to see the power of God to change lives.**
- **We will have tough times, pain, suffering, but we will see God's power change lives and help others.**

**Q: What needs to be "shaken up" in your life? Are you stuck and stagnant spiritually?**

**Q: What "doors" need to be opened in your life?**

**Q: What "chains of sin" need to come off so you can experience real freedom from the slavery of sin?**

## Day 10: The Joy Of Changing!

### Jesus Expected The Good News To Change People

Matthew 3:2 John said, “**Change your hearts and lives** because the Kingdom of heaven is near.”

Mark 1:15 He said, “The right time has come. The Kingdom of God is near. **Change your hearts and lives and believe** the Good News!”

Luke 13:3 “No I tell you, but **unless you change your hearts and lives** you will all be destroyed as they were!”

Matthew 18:3 Then he said, “Truly I tell you the truth, **you must change, and become like little children**. Otherwise, you will **never** enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 11:20-21 Then Jesus criticized the cities where he did most of his miracles, **because the people did not change their lives and stop sinning**. He said, “How terrible for you, Korazin! How terrible for you, Bethsaida! If the same miracles I did in you had happened in Tyre and Sidon, those people would have **changed their lives a long time ago**.”

- Q: Why did these cities not change their heart and lives from the miracles?
- The religious are always around to observe, but never changing yet always giving Jesus questions, opinions and criticisms.
- Q: Why did Jesus expect so much change? “You **MUST** change” Matthew 18:3
- Q: Do you **expect** yourself to **change** like Jesus does?
- Q: What one thing can you change by end of the month? By the end of the year?

### Why We Do Not Change

Matthew 21:32 “John came to show you the right way to live. You did not believe him, but the tax collectors and prostitutes believed him. Even after seeing this, **you still refused to change** your ways and believe him.”

Luke 14:18-20 “But they all alike began to **make excuses**. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’ “Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’ “Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’”

Mark 4:16-19 TPT

The seed sown on gravel represents those who hear the Word and receive it joyfully, [17] but because **their hearts fail to sink a deep root into the Word**, they don’t endure for long. For when trouble or persecution comes on account of the Word, they **immediately wilt and fall away**. And the seed sown among thorns represents those who hear the Word, but they **allow**

**the cares of this life** and the **seduction of wealth** and the **desires for other things** to crowd out and **choke the Word** so that it produces **nothing**.

Romans 2:4-5 Or do you show **contempt** for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that **God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?** But because of your **stubbornness** and your **unrepentant heart**, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

### Finding The Joy Of Repenting

Mark 4:20 TPT

"But the seed sown on good soil represents those who **open their hearts to receive the Word** and their lives bear good fruit-some yield a harvest of thirty, sixty, even one **hundred times more than was sown!**"

Acts 3:19-21 (GWT)

"So **change the way you think and act**, and **turn to God** to have your sins removed. Then times will come when **the Lord will refresh you**. He will send you Jesus, whom he has appointed to be the Christ."

Acts 3:19 (AMP) "So repent (**change your mind and purpose**); turn around *and* return [to God], that your sins may be erased (blotted out, wiped clean), that **times of refreshing** (reviving with fresh air) may come from the presence of the Lord."

Luke 19:8-10 But **Zacchaeus** stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and **now I give half of my possessions to the poor**, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, **I will pay back four times the amount.**" Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

- Q: Do you find joy in repenting? (change your heart and lives)
- Q: When was the last time you felt refreshed when you changed?
- Q: What is so amazing about when Zacchaeus repented in Luke 19:8-10?
- Q: If you spent the day with Jesus, what would you be motivated to change?