

How Big Is Your God?

Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together! Psalm 34:3 ESV

I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed today. I've got a lot I want and need to do but not nearly enough time to do it. This pandemic has been a bit of a shock to the system.

As I was taking my concerns to the Lord, however, I was struck with the thought: Is this trial making me see God as bigger or smaller?

When I'm overwhelmed and distracted, my God gets smaller and weaker. I think that I've got to cover all the bases—and if I'm not going to do it then it won't get done. Sometimes that is true, but then the question comes: if it didn't get done, then did it really *need* to get done?

Instead of shrinking God in my eyes, I should be magnifying Him, making Him bigger. David sings in Psalm 34:3, "Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!" (ESV). In the Christian Standard Bible the Hebrew is translated "Proclaim the Lord's greatness with me; let us exalt his name together."

If my God is big, even huge, then He has the strength to take care of what I don't get to. In fact, He is better at doing it anyway, and I may be just getting in the way. I just have to believe the truth.

Does that excuse me for being lazy? No, it just means that *I serve with the strength that He provides* (1 Peter 4:11 CSB—"if anyone serves, let it be from the strength God provides, so that God may be glorified through Jesus Christ in everything") *and rest* (Ps 62:1 CSB—"I am at rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him.").

So take time to meditate on how big our God is. He expands in our mind as we realize just how powerful He really is. Read Psalm 34, pray through it, and pray that God would help you believe it and live it. Our God is infinite, and He loves us so much

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One-Year Bible Reading

2 Samuel 18:1-19:10
 John 20:1-31
 Psalm 119:153-176
 Proverbs 16:14-15

Personal Evangelism

... and you will be my witnesses. Acts 1:8 NIV

At Faithwalkers East each year Tom Short asks, "Who has read the Bible *every day* the past year?" This year I was teaching on "A Vision for Your World," which is, basically, "Do you see a lost and dying world that needs Jesus when you look around?" During that time, I wanted to ask the question, "Who shared the Gospel *every day* this past year?" But, unfortunately, I don't think anyone could have raised his or her hand. So I made that my New Year's resolution, to share the Gospel every single day in 2020.

If you are like those in my church who were there when I mentioned this resolution, you might be gasping right now, you might be shaking your head at the impossibility of such a task. Aren't **smart** goals supposed to be attainable? While this goal is certainly *Specific, Measurable, Relevant and Time-based*, how can anyone share the Gospel every day?

My answer: easier than you think. You see, the person who needs the Gospel the most in the world is me. I need to be reminded daily that I have sinned and fallen short of God's standard, that because of that sin, I deserve death, eternal separation from God forever. But thank you, Jesus, for dying for me and offering to take the punishment I deserve for my sins! I accept your payment for me, so, Jesus, You are Lord of my life.

My belief is that if I remind myself of those truths each day, I will be more likely to live in the gratitude necessary to be willing to share the Gospel with others more often. And if not, reminding myself daily that Jesus is Lord, I will at least be more likely to obey His departing commands.

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One-Year Bible Reading

2 Samuel 19:11-20:13
 John 21:1-25
 Psalm 120:1-7
 Proverbs 16:16-17

Personal Evangelism – 2

And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:47 NIV

I have read this verse a thousand times at least, but never noticed the sentence right before today's verse. At Faithwalkers East this year, Berk Wilson was teaching on these core church verses; since I was teaching on evangelism the next morning, my interest was piqued. What was happening right before which caused people to be added to their number daily? I certainly want that for my church!!

Of course, we know the early Christians were devoted to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. They were helping each other as they had need, they had glad and sincere hearts—certainly people are attracted to people with a joyful attitude. But it was the second half of that last sentence that caught my eye—"and enjoying the favor of all the people"—that I had never noticed.

I know that those of us who desire to live a godly life will be persecuted. I have been fired for my faith before, and all I was doing was not joining in with the company debauchery—which made them feel uncomfortable. So I get that part of being different from the culture. But why did I believe that all evangelism needed to be offensive?

Two years ago we learned that Gen Z is deathly afraid of offending anyone, so we changed our evangelism tactics to being way more "acts of kindness-based." And we have seen far more people come to Christ as a result. In fact, we have found so much favor in the eyes of the university that they have invited us to train students, faculty and staff on "Building Connections" skills.

Evangelize however God instructs you, but this was an encouraging discovery for me.

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One-Year Bible Reading

2 Samuel 20:14-21:22
 Acts 1:1-26
 Psalm 121:1-8
 Proverbs 16:18

Whatever Happened to That Guy?

Jesus did not let him but told him, "Go home to your own people, and report to them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you." So he went out and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and they were all amazed. Mark 5:19-20 CSB

It's easy to focus on the disciples in the New Testament, see their lifestyle, and feel inferior. They travel around, do miracles, preach, and see amazing results!

But where are the little people? The everyday people who live rather ordinary lives of faith? Those who are not the superstar disciples?

Tom Short recently gave us a snapshot of the life of an everyday person. The man from whom Jesus commanded demons to go into a herd of pigs begs Jesus for permission to follow Him. Jesus answers, "No" (see verses above). The story seems to end there, but Tom followed up with the next time the region is mentioned in Mark: "As they got out of the boat, people immediately recognized him. They hurried throughout that region and began to carry the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. Wherever he went, into villages, towns, or the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and begged him that they might touch just the end of his robe. And everyone who touched it was healed" (Mark 6:54-56 CSB).

Jesus had a special mission for that guy. That region was scared of Jesus and asked Him to leave after the pigs incident. But now that this guy has been proclaiming how much Jesus has done for him, they respond very differently—with faith! What an amazing scene!

It's easy to feel a bit off to the side of the track. You missed this or didn't make that. You were too old or too young, too cynical or too ignorant. The possibility was there but you didn't get into the club. *Yet God has a plan for each and every one of us.* Let's get busy doing what He wants and speaking the truth in love to those He puts in our path.

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One-Year Bible Reading

2 Samuel 22:1-23:23
 Acts 2:1-47
 Psalm 122:1-9
 Proverbs 16:19-20

Vision to Go

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. Matthew 9:35-36 NIV

I think about this verse often when I think about the world we live in. Jesus went about teaching, preaching, and healing. The last word, *healing*, humbles and quiets me. It makes me pause and pray for this needy world. While Jesus certainly healed and still heals physically, I am mindful of the overwhelming emotional pain I witness in the world around me in workplaces, families, neighborhoods, and churches. I confess at many times this overwhelms me, and I wonder if I can be much help at all in light of the pervasive pain of those around me. And, of course, *we can't do anything* out of our own strength and resources.

The fruit we need to bear to help this needy, sin-saturated world is not our fruit; it is Jesus' fruit: *"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"* (John 15:5 NIV). We bear His fruit as we surrender to Him daily and moment by moment. When connected with Jesus, we will display the joy of the Spirit of God to all those with whom we communicate. We can be relieved that *it is the Spirit of Jesus living in and through us that will impact the world around us for His glory and their healing*.

"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?" (2 Corinthians 2:14-16 NIV).

What can you do to be working with the Spirit in peoples' lives?

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One-Year Bible Reading

2 Samuel 23:24-24:25
Acts 3:1-26
Psalm 123:1-4
Proverbs 16:21-23

Sunday, June 7

Desperate Times, Desperate Measures

Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." Mark 5:22-23 NIV

It had been several months since I had been to the hair salon. Holidays, a few weeks at my daughter's helping out around the birth of our grandson, and my hairdresser coming down with Influenza B all prevented an appointment. **Then** coronavirus arrived. The salon was soon closed, and my husband Dave and I were self-quarantined at home.

When a gal *needs* her hair cut, desperate measures often follow. In my case, it was "all hands on deck"—the hands belonging to my husband Dave! After watching an online tutorial on basic haircutting, he and I prayed, grabbed my barber scissors, and started in. I did the bangs, he did most of the rest with only one "oops!" (easily fixed!). Desperation turned to relief and joy with the final clips of a well-done first haircut!

In the verse above, something more desperate than overgrown hair was going on. A young girl was dying, and her father's last and only hope was Jesus. Wading through a crowd, he pleaded with Jesus to come and heal her. Jesus agreed, only to be waylaid by another desperate person, a woman whose ongoing health issues of twelve years also drove her to Jesus. In the end, two seemingly impossible situations that no one else seemed able to solve were resolved by Jesus' healing touch.

We have seen desperate times with the Covid-19 virus. People have faced death in very real ways and also faced the desperate fear to avoid it. In desperate times as these, may we be ones who humbly seek Jesus, the one who can truly redeem, resolve, and restore!

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One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 2:1-3:2
Acts 5:1-42
Psalm 125:1-5
Proverbs 16:25

Fragrance or Stench?

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of Christ. And who is equal to such a task? 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 NIV

The smell of fine perfume or cologne—we have all been intoxicated by a delightful smelling fragrance as it permeates the room. We have all as well had the head-jerking experience of encountering a very toxic odor, repulsing our sense of smell. One entices, the other repulses.

This is Paul's very point for the believer in Jesus Christ as we pass through life each day amidst the masses. We are the fragrance of Christ—albeit designed to be a pleasing aroma to all, for some, it is simply a repulsive stench.

Indeed, Christ was the sweetest aroma to the broken-hearted, the down-trodden, and the humble sinner seeking repentance. But to the proud, the arrogant, the boastful, He was a stench: He "stunk to high heaven."

The fragrance of Christ is both pleasing to some and a stench to others. Yet the believer is destined to carry it—to live it—in spite of the hardships of persecution. This is the aroma that blesses and brings the presence and awareness of Christ's victory to a lost world and the broken-hearted sinner.

Saddle up, believers, for no one else is equal to the task, no one else on the face of the earth can carry this message but you and I. Let your light so shine, and your smell be sweet!

Godspeed!

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One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 1:1-53
Acts 4:1-37
Psalm 124:1-8
Proverbs 16:24

Sunday, June 7

Don't Just Distract Yourself

Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things.

Philippians 4:8 CSB

Got some extra downtime? Feel like you're not sure what to do?

Last night my wife and I watched *The Repair Shop* on Netflix. It's a British show about repairing antiques. We heard the stories of three different people and the objects that they have cherished for sometimes generations, how they were broken, and then how the craftsmen at the shop repair them, bringing them back to their former glory. It's a relaxing way to spend a half hour at the end of a loud and frantic day.

I mention this because I believe that entertainment is a good thing. It is enjoyable, relaxing and restful . . . in appropriate quantities.

I also enjoy reading and often have a work of fiction on my nightstand. Furthermore, I engage in various hobbies that help refresh me. These things are also good . . . in appropriate quantities.

Why the explanation of my time?

Because in our entertainment-focused society, and **especially** in our time of social distancing, we can give ourselves too much to entertainment. *At best* we just end up distracting ourselves instead of truly resting, and *at worst* we defile ourselves with bad content, consuming filth.

Now, as I've just explained: I entertain myself. But I strive to be careful and would encourage you to do so as well.

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One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 3:3-4:34
Acts 6:1-15
Psalm 126:1-6
Proverbs 16:26-27

Monday, June 8

Don't Just Distract Yourselves – 2

*I have asked one thing from the Lord;
it is what I desire:
to dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
gazing on the beauty of the Lord
and seeking him in his temple. Psalm 27:4 CSB*

Yesterday I encouraged you to be careful with your entertainment. Now let's get practical. What are some applications of my advice?

First, please be aware of how much entertainment you are pursuing. Don't give yourself too much to entertainment. How much is too much? That's a tough line to draw, but if you're asking that question you may have the wrong spirit about this issue. Ask God how you can best be spending your time. Look to Scripture for guidance.

Secondly, consider the content of your entertainment. We can easily slide into allowing more and more filth to pass in front of our eyes. We become numb to language, violence, sex and even just a sin-based frame of mind, so much so that we don't even notice it anymore.

Finally, when considering alternative activities to straight entertainment, choose options that interact with people in positive ways, look to serve others, and look to engage them at more than just a surface level. Or consider serving someone (even a family member!) in some way. Another option would be to strive to learn something new—this could be pursued through books, videos, other people, or online courses.

Obviously, pursuing God is a very worthy use of your time. There are many, many possibilities to deepen your walk with Him during this period of time. Read additional Scripture, listen to podcasts, download Bible studies or e-books, and take the time to really think and meditate on God and what you're reading.

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One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 5:1-6:38
Acts 7:1-29
Psalm 127:1-5
Proverbs 16:28-30

Thursday, June 11

Troubles and Calamities

So even to old age and gray hairs . . . You who have made me see many troubles and calamities will revive me again; from the depths of the earth you will bring me up again. Psalm 71:18,20 ESV

Troubles and calamities? Jesus promised, "In this world you will have tribulation" (John 16:33). I went through the struggles of adolescence, then at 26 was so sick I thought I was dying. Huge debt and financial problems followed. Later Becky and I were on the hot spot for home schooling; we suffered the disapproval of our parents. Along came a mid-life crisis, and in more recent years health issues: back pain with various treatments, and Parkinson disease with 14 years of symptoms. But these things are not all that unusual. As the old saying goes, "Could be worse." In 1979 when my step-grandfather was 68 (my age now), facing the strong possibility of dying soon, he said, "Better men have died younger." Max's premonition came true: A couple weeks later he had an aortic aneurism and was gone. Two weeks later my younger brother died at age 26. Later that year my mother succumbed to leukemia.

"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day . . . For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling" (2 Corinthians 4:16; 5:2 ESV). "And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8:23 ESV). As He finished His Creation, God said, "It is very good." And God's redemptive process will *more than* restore all things: "Behold, I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5).

For the follower of Christ it has been said that when we pass from this life with its heartaches and pains, we actually "leave the land of the dying to enter the land of the living."

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One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 8:1-66
Acts 7:51-8:13
Psalm 129:1-8
Proverbs 17:1

What are Your Expectations?

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world. John 16:33 ESV

We have a godly friend who has been battling cancer for the last few months and now has contracted the coronavirus. Another friend who was only 37, who greatly influenced my sons for Christ, just suddenly fell over dead, leaving behind his godly wife and two young children. I have watched my dad's body that once was strong and vibrant deteriorate to where it is very difficult for him to even walk. My mom, who is the one who introduced me to Jesus Christ, has Alzheimer's and no longer can make sense in what she says.

All of this has led me to think about expectations. What should our expectations for life in this world be? Just prior to Jesus' arrest and crucifixion in John 16:31-33, He spells out the expectations which all believers in Christ can have with utter assurance they will be fulfilled!

In John 16 Jesus tells His disciples that they will leave Him alone after He is arrested, but He states, "Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me" (16:32). He explains further that they must expect tribulation in this life. However, He adds that they should expect total and final deliverance from tribulation when He brings them to Himself, whether through death or His return.

While Jesus predicts tribulation in this life, He comforts His disciples with the promise of peace. They can expect peace in the midst of their trials as they trust Him and walk in relationship with Him. So believers in Christ are to expect trouble, but that the Lord will be with us to strengthen, help, and give us peace in it, and that He will ultimately deliver us from all tribulation. This is a realistic, hope-producing, joy-producing expectation for all who believe in Christ as Savior and King!

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One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 7:1-50
Acts 7:30-50
Psalm 128:1-6
Proverbs 16:31-33

Friday, June 12

This Is the Way of the Christian Life!

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. Galatians 2:20 NAS

It starts with and ends with Christ. C.S. Lewis said, "The person who is most Christ-like is not the one who is most gloriously fulfilled in every moment of life but the one whose life has in it unbelievable elements of crucifixion" (paraphrased).

The apostle Paul lays out five very important truths about living the Christian life. First he says, "*I have been crucified with Christ.*" It starts with crucifixion. The person I was when I was "in Adam" is now dead. God no longer sees me in the sea of sinful humanity.

"*It is no longer I who live*": the "old man"—who I was in Adam as a member of the old humanity—is now forever done away with and gone through crucifixion.

"*The life which I now live in the flesh*" is the new me in Christ! It is the same "me" but with a new standing before Almighty God. I stand before Him in Christ, *justified* (declared by God as righteous and as a result a member of His covenant family).

"*I live by faith in the Son of God*": this is the new principle on how we live out our justification—by faith or trust in the Son of God. He is the centerpiece, the core, the source and the resource of my life! God made me to live in deep, intimate union with Him! Why?

"*Who loved me and gave Himself up for me*"—The reason I live by trusting Christ from the beginning to the ending and throughout all of my life is because He has loved me with an everlasting, sacrificial, radical love. He has loved me like no one ever has or ever can for the rest of eternity. He willingly gave Himself up *for me!*

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One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 9:1-10:29
Acts 8:14-40
Psalm 130:1-8
Proverbs 17:2-3

“But Wait! There’s More!”

Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh and strength to your bones. Proverbs 3:7-8 NKJV

Trusting in Jesus for salvation guarantees eternal life, something that begins the moment we receive Him. But in addition, as we follow the precepts of Scripture, temporal benefits accrue.

To wit: People who are calm and trusting—godly attributes—are five times less likely to die before age 50 as those who are angry, hostile, cynical, or distrustful. People freed from depression by adhering to Biblical guidelines are less likely to be overweight and less likely to experience a heart attack. Compared to others who exclude God, folks who make the Bible their life’s compass experience increased happiness; increased longevity; decreased mental illness; decreased lung problems; less arteriosclerosis; less liver disease; fewer heart ailments; decreased blood pressure; and decreased psychological stress. They are less likely to die following heart surgery, have fewer incidences of stroke, and are better able to emotionally adjust to the death of a family member. They also (Pay attention!) experience increased marital contentment, including sexual satisfaction.

In general, more involvement in church correlates to better health. Just going to church once a month (!) decreases your chances of divorce. You are less likely to be hospitalized and, if you are, you will tend to spend less time there. You are more likely to have a stronger heart and better mental and emotional health.

So many perquisites in this life belong to those who live by God’s principles that, logically speaking, unbelievers would be wise to at least try to follow them in order to reap similar benefits. Trusting in Jesus, living a life pleasing to Him, certainly has its rewards. What a God we serve!

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One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 11:1-12:19
Acts 9:1-25
Psalm 131:1-3
Proverbs 17:4-5

Monday, June 15

Hearing God

She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord’s feet, listening to His word. Luke 10:38 NAS

It is so wonderful to listen to the Lord’s word. Mary knew this. She took the time to sit at Jesus’ feet to hear His word.

I recall a unique moment in January 2013 when the Lord’s word had a special impact on my life. I was at a prayer meeting with some pastors when Robbie McAlister quoted a Scripture passage that caught my attention. I wrote it down because I did not want to forget it. The next morning in my quiet time I was surprised to discover the same passage in my next reading. I thought, “The Lord really wants me to dwell on this passage!” Later that morning Herschel Martindale, who had missed the meeting the day before because of a snowstorm, shared a devotional. I was shocked when Herschel selected the same passage!

Three times in 24 hours the Lord impressed the same verses upon me. I have never had this happen before or since. Here it is:

*Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen;
My Beloved in whom My soul is well-pleased;
I will put My Spirit upon Him,
And He shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles.
He will not quarrel, nor cry out;
Nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets.
A battered reed He will not break off,
And a smoldering wick He will not put out,
Until He leads justice to victory.*

And in His name the Gentiles will hope. (Matthew 12:18-21 NAS)

Over the next few days, I would like to share how the Lord has used this passage in my life . . . so stay tuned!

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One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 14:1-15:24
Acts 10:1-23
Psalm 133:1-3
Proverbs 17:7-8

Tails! Home It Is!

At sundown he died. 2 Chronicles 18:34 GW

Recently, my son made a decision to come home from college during the coronavirus social distancing time. His job at college was still providing him with income, but based on counsel and wisdom, coming home seemed to be the best choice. We even “cast lots” (flipped a coin) for confirmation. Tails! Home it is!

“What if that’s not what God wants me to do, though? What if that’s the wrong decision?” These questions plagued his thoughts.

One question put him at ease: “Is God sovereign, or isn’t He?”

In Chronicles 18 we see a powerful glimpse of God’s sovereignty. Jehoshaphat, good king of Judah, and Ahab, evil king of Israel, joined forces to fight the king of Aram. The Lord warned Ahab that he would die. So Jehoshaphat wore his kingly robes into battle, but Ahab disguised himself: “When the chariot commanders saw Jehoshaphat, they said, ‘He must be the king of Israel.’ . . . But when Jehoshaphat cried out, the LORD helped him. God drew them away from him . . . One man aimed his bow at random and hit the king of Israel between his scale armor and his breastplate At sundown he died” (2 Chronicles 18:31-34 GW).

One king did not hide and was safe. The other king disguised himself but perished. A random, no-name soldier shot a random arrow in a random direction and hit the disguised king of Israel in the very small space between his pieces of armor—which happened to be fatal.

God. Is. Sovereign. We are never excused from wisdom or obedience, but we must always be convinced of God’s sovereignty. My son learned that God is absolutely able to direct him and his circumstances—even the result of the flipped coin. God’s sovereignty became my son’s peace.

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One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 12:20-13:34
Acts 9:26-43
Psalm 132:1-18
Proverbs 17:6

Tuesday, June 16

Servanthood

*Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen;
My Beloved in whom My soul is well-pleased. Matthew 12:18 NAS*

This passage that God impressed on me in January of 2013 begins with a description of Jesus. Though Jesus is a King, and though the book of Matthew emphasizes His kingship, this passage describes Jesus Christ as God’s servant. Matthew, quoting from Isaiah 42, goes on to state that Jesus was God’s beloved and that Jesus pleased the soul of His Father.

It is very significant that God’s chosen One is characterized as a servant. A servant is one who excels in humility and selflessness. A servant seeks not his own benefit but the benefit of others. In the context of this passage, Matthew highlighted Jesus’ rejection of glory and fame, as He healed the sick (13:15-16). Jesus was not about seeking glory for Himself. He was all about seeking God’s glory and the benefit of others.

I heard a story about the actor Gregory Peck who was with his friends in a restaurant. They were waiting in line a long time when one of his friends said, “Don’t they realize who you are? I am going to get them to seat you immediately.” Peck stopped his friend with these words: “Don’t do that. If you have to tell someone who you are . . . you aren’t!”

It is such a temptation to seek our own glory—to tell others, “Don’t you realize who I am?” When I am tempted to think this way, God reminds me of the example of His Son Jesus Christ. If anyone had a right to boast about Himself, it was Jesus Christ. Yet He humbled Himself as God’s servant. He sought not His own glory but the glory of the One who sent Him. And He gave His life in service to others.

So, in this unique passage in Matthew 12, God started by impressing on me the importance of following Jesus Christ’s example of servanthood. (More lessons to follow . . .)

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One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 15:25-17:24
Acts 10:24-48
Psalm 134:1-3
Proverbs 17:9-11

Proclaiming Judgment

*I will put My Spirit upon Him,
And He shall proclaim justice [judgment] to the Gentiles. Matthew 12:18-19 NAS*

In January 2013, God impressed on me the same passage (Matthew 12:18-21) three times in the span of 24 hours. This passage begins with proclaiming Jesus as God's servant. It then goes on to describe Jesus as one who, filled with the Spirit, proclaimed God's justice and judgment to the Gentiles. Proclaiming justice (or judgment). What is this about?

Jesus Christ came as the Messiah to bring justice to the world. Adam sinned. Jesus came to restore what Adam lost. In that restoration process, Jesus came like an Old Testament prophet to proclaim God's justice and judgment to unbelievers.

What impressed me from this passage was the word "judgment." In the summer of 2014, I took an extended time to study the topic of judgment. There are scores of verses in the Old and New Testament about the truth that God will judge the world someday. Every person—Jew, Gentile, Christian, non-Christian—will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. This is a reality that no one can escape. All mankind will have to give an account to God.

However, there is good news. The good news is that Jesus Christ paid for our sins. The good news is that we are justified, not on the basis of what we have done but on the basis of what He has done.

But here is the point: *We must teach the message of judgment before we teach the message of justification by faith in God's grace.* As an example, Paul taught about judgment in Romans 2 before he taught justification by faith in Romans 3. So the second lesson God taught me from this passage is the importance of proclaiming the truth that God will judge the world someday. There are two more lessons to follow.

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One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 18:1-46
Acts 11:1-30
Psalm 135:1-21
Proverbs 17:12-13

Friday, June 19

Judgment to Victory

*And a smoldering wick He will not put out,
Until He leads justice [judgment] to victory.
And in His name the Gentiles will hope. Matthew 12:20-21*

In January 2013 the Lord impressed on me Matthew 12:18-21 three separate times. This passage exalts Jesus the Servant, proclaiming judgment to Israel, a smoldering wick about to die. However, this passage has an encouraging ending: Judgment turns to victory.

In my study of the word "judgment" I learned that God's judgments are part of His victorious purpose, to deliver men from sin and to bring all men to Christ. Look at these verses:

"Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments'" (Ex. 6:6 NAS).

"When the earth experiences Your judgments the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness" (Isaiah 26:9 NAS).

"For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me and every tongue shall give praise to God'" (Romans 14:10-11 NAS).

God's judgment against Israel in 70 AD unleashed the gospel to the world, which, as Paul describes in Romans 11, will lead to the ultimate salvation of Israel. In Matthew 12:21 the word "victory" is the same word used in 1 Corinthians 15:54-57 where victory is connected to our resurrection and Christ's defeat of death.

The application is this: God's judgments are all part of His glorious plan to bring about His victory to the world. And what is that victory? Matthew gives the answer: *"In His name the Gentiles will hope."* What a great God we serve! What a great Savior we have in Jesus Christ!

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One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 20:1-21:29
Acts 12:24-13:15
Psalm 137:1-9
Proverbs 17:16

A Smoldering Wick

*He will not quarrel, nor cry out;
Nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets.
A battered reed He will not break off,
And a smoldering wick He will not put out,
Until . . . Matthew 12: 19-20 NAS*

In the span of 24 hours God impressed on me the same passage from Matthew 12:18-21. This passage exalts Jesus as the Servant who proclaimed God's judgment to the world. The two verses above bring out another facet of Jesus' ministry—putting out a smoldering wick.

What is this talking about? I think the smoldering wick represents those things in our lives that are dying. In Jesus' day, it was Old Covenant Israel. The Jewish nation was a battered reed, under Roman rule. The Jewish leaders had hard hearts towards God and towards His Messiah. In 70 AD Jerusalem would be destroyed in fulfillment of the Lord's prophesy in Matthew 24. So the smoldering wick was about to be put out . . . but not yet. Jesus, whose ministry occurred 40 years before the destruction of Jerusalem, didn't come as a judge to destroy. He came as a servant who "did not quarrel or cry out."

How is this to be applied to us today? I think God's church is oftentimes like a "smoldering wick." Movements and churches that begin with great enthusiasm and power typically over time lose their zeal and strength. The leaders get older . . . and sometimes experience a fall. The church or movement plateaus. Numbers decrease. Optimism turns into apathy. The church becomes a "smoldering wick," ready to die.

This is a natural cycle—of glory to dishonor, of strength to weakness.

So what are we to do? Follow Jesus' example. Jesus was the Servant to Israel, the smoldering wick that was about to die. Like Jesus, we are called to continue to serve—and to continue to hope for a better future.

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One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 19:1-21
Acts 12:1-23
Psalm 136:1-26
Proverbs 17:14-15

Saturday, June 20

Did You Forget Your Child?

Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me. Isaiah 49:15 NAS

Our fifth son was one week old, and I was going stir-crazy in my house. Our sons ranged from age six to one week, and they were as ready to get out of the house as I was. Since I was feeling pretty good, I loaded all the boys in our minivan and headed down the road to Sam's Club. The plan was to have our six-year-old push his baby brother in the stroller while I kept the other three boys with me in the shopping cart. We went through the entire store, slowly looking at things and packing the cart with the few things we needed. When I got to the check out, I felt quite successful as our adventure had gone very smoothly—that is, until I felt a tap on my shoulder. That's when I turned around to see a kind stranger with an odd look on his face.

He said to me, "Excuse me, ma'am. Do you have a baby?"

"Well, yes," I said.

"Um, you left him back in the boys' clothing."

Oh my goodness!!! How could I forget one of my children? I was so shocked and quickly ran with all my sons to retrieve him.

When I first read the opening verse, I instantly laughed. Yes, a mother **can** forget her nursing child! But, thankfully, our wonderful Heavenly Father will never forget us! Everything about us is inscribed on His hands. Even if we sometimes feel others forget us, God never will. What a kind, tender Father we have!

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

1 Kings 22:1-53
Acts 13:16-41
Psalm 138:1-8
Proverbs 17:17-18

Happy Father's Day

For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus... Galatians 3:26 NLT

Sixty-seven years ago I was born into my family. My dad was thrilled to add a daughter to his growing brood. It was post-World War II, and I was one of those "baby boomers" born to an army veteran who had survived the terror of battle.

Dad taught me a lot. I knew the names of most of the birds around and witnessed the miracle of birth with him as our farm pigs were born. He taught me how to swing a baseball bat and modeled the art of telling a good story and of showing interest in others.

Dad was also notorious for leaving for events at the last minute (horrors for me to walk in late to church . . . repeatedly!). He also felt a strong impatience with "stupid people" (Watch out, kids!), and could "fly off the handle" unexpectedly (PTSD related?), leaving me feeling unsafe around him.

Good dad, bad dad . . . He wasn't perfect, as I grew up to admit over the years. And perhaps, partly because of that, I yearned for and sought someone who could truly meet my needs.

Fifty years ago I was born into another family—the family of God! My Dad, God Almighty, was thrilled to add a daughter to His growing family. In fact, the moment that He placed His Spirit within me, my soul was flooded with His love and joy—just a "little nod" that I was now His girl!

The descriptive of this Father is unending! Loving, patient, wise, kind, humble, joyful, forgiving, not easily angered . . . *This Heavenly Father is perfect in every way, making up for any lacks in parenting I may have suffered! Happy Father's Day to my perfect Heavenly Dad!*

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One-Year Bible Reading

2 Kings 1:1-2:25
 Acts 13:42-14:7
 Psalm 139:1-24
 Proverbs 17:19-21

Tuesday, June 23

"Left Ready. Right Ready."

*But now, thus says the Lord, your Creator, O Jacob,
 And He who formed you, O Israel,
 "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
 I have called you by name; you are Mine!
 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
 And through the rivers, they will not overflow you.
 When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched,
 Nor will the flame burn you. . . .
 Since you are precious in My sight,
 Since you are honored and I love you,
 I will give other men in your place and other peoples in exchange for your life.
 Isaiah 43:1-4 NAS*

*Even to your old age I will be the same,
 And even to your graying years I will bear you!
 I have done it, and I will carry you;
 And I will bear you and I will deliver you. Isaiah 46:4 NAS*

Obviously, this will be a short devotional, as I have filled up the space with Scripture! This is intentional. The verses above are some of my favorites, for they make clear what I call "the affirming voice of the Father." I'm sure I read that somewhere, but it really resonates with me. To always know that God is for me, loves me, considers me precious, is like sitting in His lap every day. This understanding gives peace and comfort.

Every day when I put in my new hearing aids, I wait to snap the batteries completely into place until I insert the little microphone in each ear. First I hear a woman's calm voice in my left ear say, "Left ready." Then I put in the right aid, snap the battery in place, and I hear, "Right ready." This always makes me happy. It affirms that I did it right! (Do you find getting things right a challenge?) I am ready to meet the day. May our Father's affirming voice also be in our minds every morning!

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

2 Kings 4:18-5:27
 Acts 15:1-35
 Psalm 141:1-10
 Proverbs 17:23

Know Your Father

I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. Ephesians 1:16-17 NLT

My friend works at the local YMCA teaching and playing with children in their after-school program. One day a six-year-old girl (we'll call her Susie) came up to my friend, having found a ring that someone had dropped on the ground. This honest girl was turning it back in for the owner to claim. However, after asking around and finding no takers, my friend told Susie she could keep the ring. It was hers! Although this girl was delighted, she told my friend that when her father came to pick her up, he would ask her two questions: "Where did you get the ring? Whose ring is it?"

A short time later, Susie's father arrived. As my friend was helping her get in the car, Susie showed her dad the new treasure she had found. Her father immediately responded. "Where did you get the ring? Whose ring is it?" After Susie and her dad drove away, my friend was struck with the confidence this sweet girl had in what her father would say.

After hearing this story, I had to ask myself, "Am I this confident in what my heavenly Father would say? Have I spent so much time with Him that I would know in any situation the words of my Father?"

How about you? Paul prayed constantly that God would give spiritual wisdom and insight to the believers in Ephesus so they might know God more. What a wonderful prayer! God wants us to know Him more and more. He wants us to know His heart so that in any situation we know exactly what He will say. May we all have the heart of a child like Susie's.

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One-Year Bible Reading

2 Kings 3:1-4:17
 Acts 14:8-28
 Psalm 140:1-13
 Proverbs 17:22

Wednesday, June 24

Be a Crown

A worthy wife is a crown for her husband, but a disgraceful woman is like cancer in his bones. Proverbs 12:4 NAS

If you study English history, you will find in the late 19th and early 20th centuries there were young, wealthy American women who came to London looking to marry into royalty. These women had fathers who had made millions with their inventions, so they had much money to contribute to their daughters' dowries. The British royalty needed money as their centuries-old castles demanded repair. So both British men and American women got what they wanted in these marriages. The men got essential cash and the women got the royal title, the crown, they were seeking. The phrase used for these marriages was "cash for class."

However, as noble as the British title was, many of these men were anything but noble. They were immoral, selfish, and arrogant. Some of the American women weren't much better. They, too, married for their own selfish gain and did more harm than good to their husbands and marriages.

Proverbs 12:4 also talks about a wife and a crown. This crown, however, is one that we become, not one we wear. As I respect and honor my husband as leader of our home and family and come alongside him as his courageous fellow warrior, I adorn him with a royal crown. This crown isn't literally on his head but is seen as we work to put God first in our lives and trust God through our husbands. Our prayer life for him and our family is vital for the crown to be seen. And as God molds us wives to be more like Him, that crown shines brighter and brighter.

May we be wives who choose not to seek a crown for ourselves but seek to become one for our husbands.

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One-Year Bible Reading

2 Kings 6:1-7:20
 Acts 15:36-16:15
 Psalm 142:1-7
 Proverbs 17:24-25

A Saint or a Sinner?

Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

1 Corinthians 6:11 NAS

First, some working definitions are in order. A saint is a “holy one,” literally someone set apart for God. A sinner is someone living in rebellion against God and His law. Do these definitions affect how you would answer this question: Do you think of yourself as a sinner or a saint?

Personally, I think of myself as a saint. If I know you and you are a believer in Jesus, I think of you as a saint as well.

Why do I do this? Primarily, because God calls us *saints*, and He doesn't call us *sinners*. I want to think of myself the way God thinks of me. He sees me as righteous in Christ and not as a wretched sinner.

“Wait!” you say. “Doesn't the Bible say, 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God'? And 'If we say we have not sinned, we make God a liar'?”

Yes, it does. But we're not talking about whether or not we've sinned. We're talking about how we think of ourselves—what we understand as being our basic identity. And when it comes to our identity, God calls us “saints”! Notice these verses: “To all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints” (Romans 1:7); “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling” (1 Corinthians 1:2); “To the saints who are at Ephesus” (Ephesians 1:1); “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi” (Philippians 1:1).

I could go on, but you get the point. The Scriptures refer to believers as saints. Paul called people *saints*; even in churches where he was about to rebuke people for serious error, he still saw their basic identity as being “saints.” Do you think of yourself in this way?

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One-Year Bible Reading

2 Kings 8:1-9:13
 Acts 16:16-40
 Psalm 143:1-12
 Proverbs 17:26

Saturday, June 27

Vision from the Past

Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me. Isaiah 46:9 NAS

Looking at the past year of 2019, and even the years before that, helps me line up my vision and course for the future with the direction God has established for me. I have stopped trying to set my own course and my own vision by my guess of a future that is not mine. I now make His vision my vision by seeing what He has been doing with me in the past. That is how I can best go where He wants me.

What did God do with me this year?

Where has He been pointing me? "Remember the days of old, consider the years of all generations. Ask your father, and he will inform you, your elders, and they will tell you" (Deuteronomy 32:7 NASB).

When I was young I had little past experience to draw from and see Him at work in my life. I had to rely on people who were older and more experienced to speak into my life objectively. I have noticed one thing that older people have shown me: relax and let go. Now that I am older, I see what they were talking about.

I used to worry so much about the future and what it holds. He holds it. I used to worry about the present. He owns it. I used to worry about the past and what I missed, did wrong, could have done better. He was there too. He is God of all my times

What am I worried about in my past?

Who can I talk to who can help me look at it objectively?

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One-Year Bible Reading

2 Kings 10:32-12:21
 Acts 18:1-22
 Psalm 145:1-21
 Proverbs 18:1

A Saint or a Sinner? – 2

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi . . . Philippians 1:1 NAS

Why is it important to view myself the way God sees me—to view myself as a saint? We tend to act in accordance with the way we think of ourselves. If we think of ourselves as sinners, we are far more likely to sin when temptation comes our way. “After all,” we tell ourselves, “I’m a sinner and I can’t help it.” If, on the other hand, I agree with God in my heart of hearts that I am now a saint and no longer a sinner, sin somehow loses its grip on me. When tempted, I find myself saying, “I’m a saint. I don’t have to sin, and I won’t because that’s not who I am.”

But doesn't believing I'm a saint make me self-righteous with a holier-than-thou attitude? It's certainly possible, but I hope it doesn't. Walking in victory over temptation should never cause us to forget that our salvation is still God's gift to forgiven and unworthy sinners. I don't need to sin today to remember God has forgiven me for sins I committed in times past. Add to that, that the victory I experience now is not due to my own efforts, but springs from embracing as true what God has said to be true about me. It's wrong to be self-righteous, but don't mistake that with thinking it's wrong to be righteous through Christ living in me. Whether righteousness is good or bad depends on whether it springs from trusting in Christ or from my own pride and self-effort.

And so wake up tomorrow, look in the mirror, and say out loud, “I am a saint—a holy one of God!” Remind yourself of this throughout the day any time you are tempted to sin, get discouraged, or get down on yourself. Refuse to call yourself a sinner; it's not who God says you are and, therefore, it's *not* your new identity. You are a new creature, a saint, a holy one of God! Believe it to be true, and it will change your life from the inside out!

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One-Year Bible Reading

2 Kings 9:14-10:31
 Acts 17:1-34
 Psalm 144:1-15
 Proverbs 17:27-28

Sunday, June 28

Vision for Today

Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained. Proverbs 29:18 NAS

The opposite of this verse could be that where there is a vision, people will be focused on their goal.

Sometimes on vacations I would have very few goals or plans, wake up late, and do what seemed fun. I would succeed in resting but didn't really get anything done. I have since found that my most memorable trips were ones where this verse was happening: “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them*” (Ephesians 2:10 NAS).

When I wake up now and become alert to God's vision for me, I become ready for some exciting opportunities created by God. I look for His prepared works; I find myself sharing the Gospel more, doing marriage counseling, discussing God—while on vacation! So even when at a conference or on a trip, I want to be able to hear from God's prepared message for me, but I also want to lift up my head to watch and see how I can serve others.

His vision for my day is to prepare good works to walk in.

My vision for His day is to be ready to walk in those good works.

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

2 Kings 13:1-14:29
 Acts 18:23-19:12
 Psalm 146:1-10
 Proverbs 18:2-3

Vision for the Future

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. Hebrews 11:8-10

Are you able to “see” into the future?

The great heroes in God’s Faith Hall of Fame found in Hebrews 11 had that capacity to see the unseen. Abraham went forth, not knowing where he was going, for he was looking for a city whose architect and builder is God (verse 10). Moses rejected the treasures of Egypt and endured hardship with the people of God because he was looking to a future reward (verse 26). And of course, we run the race set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith “who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

People of great faith have the capacity to see the future, visualizing in their mind’s eye what could be, instead of fixating on their current circumstances. Setting your mind, your thoughts, and your expectations on the here and now can lead you into a rut where you make no progress in who you are or what you can accomplish. On the other hand, seeing the future potential can get us unstuck, moving forward, with hope of a better tomorrow.

The more precisely you can see and articulate your future vision, the more likely you are to see it realized. It becomes the target at which you aim. Imagine shooting at a target. You don’t just point in the general direction of the target. Rather, you fix your sites on the bull’s-eye, and if you hit it, it was no accident. It was right where you were aiming.

Do you have a future aim for your life?

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One-Year Bible Reading

2 Kings 15:1-16:20
 Acts 19:13-41
 Psalm 147:1-20
 Proverbs 18:4-5

Vision for the Future – 2

For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. Hebrews 11:10 NAS

Yesterday I asked, do you have a future aim for your life? Now I’ll add: How about for your children? For your spiritual development? Your ministry? Your career? Your family? Have you ever articulated what your future, as a follower of Christ, might look like? Are you leaving it up to chance? Are you allowing others to determine your future? Are you living your life by intentional design headed in the direction God wants you to go, or are you just living by default as you follow the crowd?

It’s been said, “Aim at nothing and you’ll hit it every time.” That’s not how men and women of faith should lead their lives. We aren’t to be passive, tossed back and forth by the ideas of others.

Sometimes attending conferences can help you define the target and articulate where you should be heading. I hope you will consider attending a conference at your church or one affiliated with your church in the coming year. In the meantime, I hope that each one of you, whether you are just getting started in your Christian journey, or are a seasoned veteran far down the path, will discover a vision for your future that will inspire you to give all you’ve got in building God’s kingdom and bringing Him glory.

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One-Year Bible Reading

2 Kings 17:1-18:12
 Acts 20:1-38
 Psalm 148:1-14
 Proverbs 18:6-7