



DAILY DEVOTIONS

Tell Me the Story

by

Linda Swinderman-Cronebaugh

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

You are invited to take a 40-day journey through some of the greatest Scriptures and stories in the Bible. The journey is entitled – “Tell Me the Story.” On that journey, you will travel from the land of Eden in Genesis to the heights of heaven in Revelation. You will visit with Jacob, Isaiah, King David, Jesus, the apostle Paul, and many others. You will read about their greatest victories and their deepest sorrows. Most of all, you will grow in your knowledge of God’s love and His will for your life. Be sure to share your journey with a friend or family members. All journeys are better when they are shared.

Every daily devotional includes a section at the conclusion titled “Life Application.” Spend a few minutes reflecting on each Scripture and devotional, thinking about how they apply to your life. And never forget to allow time to fellowship with God in prayer. It is your relationship with God that will help you make a personal connection with the Scripture.

May God bless your efforts to journey together through the next 40 days in the Word.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Linda Swinderman-Cronebaugh has been in ministry in the Church of the Nazarene since the age of 12, when she became a church organist. She has served in many ministry capacities on Pittsburg, North Central Ohio, Southwest Oklahoma, Dallas, West Virginia North, and Northwest Illinois districts. For many years she felt God calling her to fulfill the ministry begun by her first husband, Rev. Tom Swinderman, who suffered with MS for 25 years. But then God called Linda to her own ministry, and she was ordained in 2009. She was widowed a second time with the loss of Mr. Dave Cronebaugh this past year. Linda has one son in ministry, Rev. Cory Swinderman, two step-children, and two grandchildren.

Send Linda your feedback at lkcrone@yahoo.com as you make your 40-day journey through *Engage the Word 2014*.

DAY 1 – Anger’s Consequences

We don’t have to search very long to find a situation that involves “anger.” We see the consequence of anger in our world, neighborhoods, and sometimes in our homes. As we open the Word today, we are met with the very first situation of “anger with consequences” recorded in the Bible.

Scripture: Genesis 4:1-16

Some believe that the reason God did not accept Cain’s offering was that it was not a blood offering, but neither were meal or grain offerings. No meat was included in those offerings, and God accepted them. It definitely was not that God was partial to Abel and not so to Cain. The real difference was the attitudes that Abel and Cain had when they gave their offerings. Abel’s attitude was one of faith and worship, but Cain’s attitude was one of fulfilling a requirement. There was no gratitude in his heart for God.

God gives Cain a warning in verse 7, “*sin is couching (lying) at your door waiting to come in. You must have dominion over it.*” If only Cain had heeded God’s warning. God was ready and willing to help Cain overcome his feelings of hatred and anger towards his brother, Abel. Instead “*sin had dominion over him*” and Cain killed Abel. The consequences of “uncontrolled anger” can change a life forever.

Life Application: Speak to me, Father. How does this story apply to my life? Is sin – anger – crouching at my door? Is my attitude toward You and Your provisions authentic or false?

DAY 2 – NOAH AND THE FLOOD

In this very familiar story, two words stand out: corrupt and favor. Each of these words describes people in the story. The people were corrupt, and God came to the place that he regretted their existence. They were destroying His world and each other. God's favor is for one man, Noah. As you read, be aware of the descriptions given for the "people" and "Noah."

Scripture: Genesis 6:5-22

The Scripture reveals of the people (man) that *"...every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil (corrupt) all the time"* (v. 5). Their thoughts and actions had spoiled, ruined, destroyed and even perverted God's perfect creation. The Lord was grieved, and his heart was filled with pain.

But when the Scripture speaks of Noah we find a whole different picture. He is described as one who *"found favor in the eyes of the Lord"* (v. 8). He was a *"righteous man, blameless (complete and mature) among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God"* (v. 9). He did everything just as God commanded. In other words, God liked what He saw in Noah.

Life Application:

God, when You look at me, what do You see? How do I make You feel? What words would You use to describe me?

Prayer: Father, I am a part of God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved. Clothe me with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. May it be said of me, "God likes what He sees in me!" In Jesus' name, amen.

DAY 3 – JACOB STEALS BLESSING

Jacob and Esau were twins born to Isaac and Rebekah. Even when they were in the womb, they were battling each other. Esau was born first; but when Jacob was born, he was “*grasping Esau’s heel*” (Genesis 25:26). The two boys were very different. Esau grew up to be a skillful hunter and loved the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man staying among the tents. We read that the father Isaac loved Esau, and the mother, Rebekah, loved Jacob. This is not a healthy family scene.

Esau, being born first and the oldest, was to automatically receive the birthright, which included a double portion of the inheritance. In Genesis 25:29-34, we read the story where Jacob acquires the birthright that belonged to “famished” Esau for a single bowl of lentil stew and bread. As you read the following Scripture, you will see that Jacob’s scheming continues!

Scripture: Genesis 27:1-38

Jacob’s deceptive practices ended up causing him much grief in his life. He was forced to flee home, never to see his mother again. Running away from his brother, Esau, he began living with his Uncle Laban. There he learned what is like to be the target of deception. Jacob learned the hard way the price of deception.

Life Application: Taking a Close Look at Your Family

1. What is your relationship like with each of your family members?
2. Are there family members with whom your relationship has become strained?
3. How can you relieve the strain and restore the relationship?

Prayer - Father, give me the guidance to build “good” family relationships that honor You. Amen.

DAY 4 – JOSEPH INTERPRETS PHARAOH'S DREAM

Joseph, the son of Jacob, faced many seemingly unfair experiences in his life. He was thrown into a pit by his own jealous brothers, his brothers sold him into slavery, and his boss's wife told a lie about him which landed him in prison. While in prison he interpreted dreams for the butler (cupbearer) and the baker. This, he thought, was going to be his ticket to freedom, but that freedom didn't come for another two years. This brings us to today's Scripture.

Scripture: Genesis 41:15-40

When Joseph is finally released from prison, he is brought before the Pharaoh, who has had two troubling dreams that none of his wise men can interpret. Joseph listens to the dreams, and immediately God reveals to him the interpretation. God also reveals a plan that will save the inhabitants of Egypt from starvation. Pharaoh listens to Joseph and promotes him from a prisoner to a position where *only Pharaoh will be greater than Joseph*. Many lives were saved because of Joseph's faithfulness.

Later, Joseph says to his brothers, *"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives"* (Genesis 50:20). God had Joseph in the right place at the right time!

Life Application: What is going on or has gone on in your life that is troubling you? Are you willing to follow God through those troubles so that you can be **in the right place at the right time** for the glory of God? Remember, *"God's ways are higher than our ways"* (Isaiah 55:9b).

DAY 5 – MOSES' BIRTH

God's hand of protection is evident in our story today... God being a *shield, hedge, barrier, and buffer*.

Scripture: Exodus 1:8 – 2:10

We find God protecting baby Moses. Since the Egyptian king had made the order that all the boy babies born to the Hebrew women were to be killed, Moses' mother was facing a tough situation. She had a little baby boy and, like any mother, feared for his life. For a while he slept a lot and could be kept quiet. However, as he got older, it was hard to keep him quiet and hidden. She made a basket, placed Moses in it, and set it in the water close to the shore. Hopefully it would not be detected through the day and afterwards she could retrieve the basket and care for him. Did she know that Pharaoh's daughter would find him? No, but she trusted God to be a *shield of protection* for him.

In this story we find two other groups of people God protected. First are the Israelite people. Even though the work they did was made harder, instead of becoming less in number, they increased in number.

Second are the midwives who helped the Hebrew women with their deliveries. They had been told by the king to kill every Hebrew baby boy but let every Hebrew baby girl live. The midwives did not obey that decree and God protected them. They were not punished for disobeying, and God blessed them with families of their own.

Life Application: *"The Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless"* (Ps. 84:11). Can you think of specific times in your life when God has been your "sun and shield," protecting you from harm, hiding you from the evil intended to harm you? Share that event with someone who needs to know that God cares for people in difficult circumstances.

DAY 6 – MOSES AND THE BURNING BUSH

At one time or another in our lives, we have experiences that change our lives forever. Some changes are easy, and some are very difficult. In our story today, Moses has a personal encounter with God...*“and Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God”* (Exodus 3:6).

Scripture: Exodus 3:1-12

In this encounter, we learn four things about God: (1) He is holy...*“take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground”* (v. 5); (2) God does not forget His children...*“I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out...”* (v. 7); (3) God is with us...*“I will be with you”* (v. 12); (4) God sometimes calls and asks us to do things we would never anticipate.

Moses has become a shepherd for his father-in-law, Jethro. He is married to Zipporah, and life is good; but God has other plans for him. God speaks to Moses from the burning bush and says, *“So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt”* (v. 10). Moses responds with a “why me” question, as would many of us: *“Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”* (v. 11). God reminds him, *“I will be with you”* (v. 12).

Moses went from being a shepherd – a leader of sheep – to a deliverer – a leader of the nation of Israel. This was not one of Moses’ dreams!

Life Application: God doesn’t ask everyone to lead a nation to freedom, but He does ask every Christian to lead those around them to new life in Christ. Are you honoring God with your life where you are now? How will you respond if God asks you to do something that is not a part of your plan? Remember, if God asks, He will be with you and will supply all you will need.

DAY 7 – PURSUED BUT PROTECTED

Moses has done what God called him to do. He has been the leader of the Israelite nation to bring them out of Egypt. They have made it as far as the Red Sea when they look behind them and realize they are being pursued by Pharaoh and his men. The Red Sea is in front of them, and Pharaoh and his men are behind them. It appears to be an overwhelmingly impossible circumstance!

Scripture: Exodus 14:9-31

I wonder if Moses was thinking, “I can’t lead these people anymore!” Or maybe, “I don’t see any good way out of this.” Sometimes we feel that way also. I felt that way a few months ago when my second husband passed away. How could this be? How could a second husband die and leave me? I felt like I was in an overwhelmingly impossible circumstance.

But then we read verses 13 and 14, where Moses says, *“Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today...The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.”* Just as the Lord took care of Moses and the Israelites, so I have found my Lord to be there to take care of me. Our paths may not be easy, but we will find our Lord to be “faithful” and “able.”

Life Application:

What are the overwhelming circumstances of your life right now? Acknowledge that God knows where you are – the challenges you are facing – and He loves you. Remember, *“The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still”* (v. 14).

DAY 8 – RAHAB AND THE SPIES

Rahab was not an Israelite. She was a lady that many would not consider moral, but she had faith and was wise. Hebrews 11:1 says, *“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see,”* What basis did Rahab have for her confidence in God’s promises? What did she have faith to believe would happen? What wise actions did she take to secure her and her family’s future?

Scripture: Joshua 2:1-24

Rahab’s faith was based on her confidence in the stories of what God had already done to help the Israelites get out of slavery. God had already helped them cross the Red Sea on dry ground and completely destroy the two hostile kings of the Amorites. Rahab had faith to believe that if she honored God by protecting Israel’s spies from harm, then all of her family would be saved when the Israelites came to Jericho.

The signal for her house was the “scarlet” rope in the window. The day of conflict comes, and Jericho falls. But Joshua spared Rahab and all who belonged to her. Rahab’s faith provided her and her family a new and better reality!

Life Application: Many people would not have given Rahab a second look. While she was not well thought of in the eyes of the people who lived around her, she actually is in the genealogy of Jesus and listed among those of great “faith” in Hebrews 11. We look on the outward appearances of people, but God looks deeper and sees great potential when we may have given up on that person. Father, who have I missed by not giving that second look? Help me to see people through Your eyes.

DAY 9 – ACHAN’S DISOBEDIENCE

We are looking at Achan, another character from the story of the Fall of Jericho who is an Israelite and a member of the family of Joshua, the leader of the Israelite people. Great care had been taken to give God’s guidelines for destroying the city of Jericho; but Achan saw things differently and thought as many do, “No one will ever know if I break God’s rules.”

Scripture: Joshua 7:1-26

I am reminded of the Scripture from Numbers 32:23, *“But if you fail to do this, you will be sinning against the Lord; and you may be sure that your sin will find you out.”* No matter how sneaky we are or how dark the atmosphere of the place is, God sees all, hears all, and knows all. God knew exactly what sin had been committed by Achan. He knew where the stolen items were buried. He knew exactly who had committed the sin. What an awful price Achan paid for thinking that his idea was better than God’s and that “no one would find out.”

Life Application: The items that Achan saw were so beautiful – the robe, the 200 shekels of silver, and the gold. Think about the battle that went on in Achan’s mind as he saw, coveted, and ultimately acted upon his desire to take them for his own. Think of times in your life when you have experienced the same or a similar battle. How have you responded? God is always ready to forgive our sins if we ask.

Prayer: *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”* (Ps. 139: 23-24). Amen.

DAY 10 – ELI, HIS SONS, AND SAMUEL

In our story today, we find two families represented – the family of the priest Eli and his sons, and the family of Samuel and his parents. All of the children were being raised within the confines of temple life. All had been taught the guidelines set down by God, but not all of the children listened and obeyed.

Scripture: I Samuel 2:12-26

A description of Eli's sons is very sad: *"Eli's sons were scoundrels; they had no regard for the Lord"* (v. 12). They did not follow the instructions God had given for the sacrifices. In fact, verse 17 says Eli's sons treated the Lord's offering with "contempt." They even *"...slept with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting (door of the tabernacle)"* (v. 22).

In contrast to Eli's sons, we find Samuel. Hannah, his mother, had prayed diligently for a child. She had promised God that if He gave her a son, she would give him back to the Lord to serve in the temple. Each year Hannah would go to the temple to offer sacrifices, and she would bring a little robe for Samuel. Samuel also wore a simple linen ephod (a garment worn by the high priest on his upper body). We also read of Samuel in words similar to those used to describe Jesus as a child, *"And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and with men"* (v. 26).

Life Application: Positions of privilege can lead to corruption and sin, as in the case of Eli's sons. Every person, especially those with authority and power, will be judged by how they honor God with their choices and actions and by how they treat others. What authority and power do you have? Are you honoring God with how you use that authority and power? Pray today for the children and teens under your influence!

DAY 11 – DEBT OF KINDNESS

Today's story reminds me of two New Testament Scriptures in Galatians 5. "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness...*" (v. 22). And the other verse says, "*For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'*" (v. 14).

Scripture: II Samuel 9:1-13

David has every reason to resent anyone from Saul's family. Saul had pursued David, trying to kill him. Although Jonathan, Saul's son, had become David's best friend and had even helped David escape from Saul, the things Saul had done to David were evil and brutal. Saul had even thrown a javelin at David, trying to kill him while they all eating at the dinner table. Saul and Jonathan are now dead, and David is king. How will he respond to those who could be a threat to his leadership?

David asks, "*Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?*" (v. 3a). Ziba, the servant from Saul's house, replies, "*There is still a son of Jonathan; he is lame in both feet*" (v. 3b). David then sends for Jonathan's son Mephibosheth and restores to him all the land that belonged to his grandfather, Saul. He also promises Mephibosheth, "*...you will always eat at my table*" (v. 7).

Life Application: It was customary in David's time for the king of a new dynasty to eliminate anyone connected with the prior dynasty because they were a threat. Instead, David chose to show kindness for his "enemy" because of his relationship and covenant with Jonathan (1 Samuel 20:14-15). How can you choose kindness today in regard to those who could do you harm? In Matthew 5:44, Jesus asks us to love and pray for our enemies. Can you do that today?

DAY 12 – BAD ADVICE

In this story we find two characters whose names sound like they were twins, but they were not. Jeroboam has been placed in charge of the whole labor force by King Solomon. Rehoboam, Solomon's son, was made king of the Israelites at the death of King Solomon. Jeroboam, along with the whole assembly of Israel, has come to King Rehoboam with a request...

Scripture: I Kings 12:1-16

“Your father (King Solomon) put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you” (v. 4). Just as we would do, Rehoboam seeks advice from others. He first sought advice from those who had served under his father and then those who were serving under him. We can see this as the old versus the young. However, I would like to take this a step further; for even the older, more mature can give bad advice, and the younger, in spite of having less experience, can give good advice.

King Rehoboam is caught up in his own importance, seeking more power for himself and less for the people he is supposed to serve. As a result of his pride and arrogance, in combination with his father's sin mentioned in I Kings 11:29-40, Rehoboam loses control of all but one tribe, and Jeroboam becomes king over ten tribes. Decisions have consequences, even for kings.

Life Application: What decisions are you facing right now that need good council? When you need to make a decision, who do you go to for advice? Are God and His Word always a key part of your decision making?

DAY 13 – NAAMAN’S HEALING

My brother, as a young child, called this story “Seven Ducks and Muddy Water” instead of “Seven Dunks in Muddy Water.”

Scripture: II Kings 5:1-27

This story addresses the topic of obedience. Naaman, a very prideful man, has much going for him; but he also has leprosy. When he feels disrespected by Elisha’s instructions to wash himself seven times in the Jordan, Naaman goes away angry. Naaman’s healing comes only when he decides to overcome his pride and be obedient to Elisha’s instructions. Naaman’s pride almost cost him the miracle of his healing!

In contrast to the humble spirit of Elisha and the grateful spirit of Naaman, we encounter Gehazi, Elisha’s servant. Where Naaman was rewarded for his obedience to Elisha’s instructions, Gehazi is severely punished when he chooses to disrespect (and thereby disobey) Elisha’s wish to receive no compensation for Naaman’s healing. Gehazi’s act costs him his health and most likely his honor and his service to Elisha.

Life Application: Right in the middle of 1 Samuel 15:22, we read, “...to obey is better than sacrifice...” Why is that still true today? How can you apply that to your current relationship with God?

DAY 14 – CROWDS, TREES AND CHAFF

The story today comes from the Psalms. It is actually one that many of us can probably quote from memory, but do we truly understand the content?

Scripture: Psalm 1

This Psalm shows comparisons of “Good versus Bad” and “Blessed versus Wicked.” In verses 1 and 2, we see that “blessed” people will not “...walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers...” Instead, they are those who “...delight in the law of the Lord and who meditate on his law day and night.”

In verses 3-5, we learn the consequences of those who are “blessed” and those who are “wicked.” The blessed will be “...like a strong tree planted right by the streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither...” In contrast, the “wicked” are “like chaff (husks of corn or other seed separated by threshing) that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.”

The final verse (6) predicts the outcome for each group in the end: “For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous (the Blessed), but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.”

Life Application:

Prayer: Father, may You shine through me that others may see You and repent from the way of the wicked, which leads to death, and choose the way of righteousness (the Blessed) through the precious blood of Jesus. Amen.

DAY 15 – LIVING RIGHT

This story comes from a Davidic Psalm. In this Psalm we find the recurring theme that we see through the Psalms: *How do I get on God's guest list, or how do I get invited to God's dwelling place...His house...His Holy Hill...His sanctuary?*

Scripture: Psalm 15:1-5

David lists for us nine "Living Right" actions that will lead to being included on God's guest list:

1. Live with integrity.
2. Do what is righteous.
3. Speak honestly.
4. Don't speak evil or slander anyone.
5. Keep your promises no matter the cost.
6. Despise the despicable.
7. Honor those who fear God.
8. Do not lend money with interest (usury) in mind.
9. Do not harm an innocent name.

Life Application:

Prayer: Father, speak to me as I read through this list again. In which of these areas do You desire change in my life? Forgive me for my shortcomings! I open myself up to You for You to change me and make me more like You. Amen.

DAY 16 – JOB’S TESTING

Job, a man described by God as unlike any other person on the whole earth: *“...he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.”* Wow! What a description! And to be thought of in that way by Almighty God! Job has had great struggles, but his struggles go further...

Scripture: Job 2:1-10

Not only has Job lost all of his prosperity, but now his own body has been affected with *“painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head”* (v. 7). Job is sitting in the ash heap with a piece of broken pottery scraping himself. Even his wife, the only family he has left, says to him, *“Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!”* (v. 9). Job responds to his wife, *“You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?”* (v. 10a).

You say, *“But it is not fair!”* Why would God allow Satan to do this to Job? Job did not know the answer to that question. Here is what Job did know: God is God in the good times and in the bad times! *“In all this, Job remained a man of integrity and did not sin in what he said”* (10b).

Life Application: How do you approach God with unfair trials in your life? When facing such trials, do you respond to God as Job did, or is your response more like his wife’s response? What needs to change so that your response is more like Job’s response?

Prayer: Dear Father God, reveal Yourself to the people who are facing “unfair” circumstances today. Amen.

DAY 17 – ISAIAH’S CALLING

We are all called to be holy. No one is exempt for that call. While we may not experience the call in same way, we are all called to be holy because our God is holy (Leviticus 11:44). Let’s look at Isaiah’s experience.

Scripture: Isaiah 6:1-8

What an amazing story, and what a “life changing” experience for Isaiah! Let’s enter the temple with Isaiah. “[We see] the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe [is filling] the temple” (v. 1). Isaiah is seeing the Lord Almighty right there in front of him.

Along with the Lord are the seraphs (angels) above Him. They each have six wings: “With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying” (v. 2). Can you see this picture in your mind? “And [the angels] were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory!’” (v. 3). Their voices are so loud the temple shakes and fills with smoke! God was all around Isaiah!

I believe that each of us would have responded as Isaiah did, “Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips...” (v. 5). Isaiah was standing in the presence of a holy God and fully knew how unholy he was. But God does not leave Isaiah in that condition. One of the angels takes a coal from the altar and touches Isaiah’s lips and says, “...your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for” (v. 7b). Isaiah is now fit for service for the Lord!

Life Application: That is not the end of the story. God continues by asking a very important question that He is still asking us today: “Whom shall I send?” (v. 8b). Isaiah’s response was, “Here am I. Send me!” (v. 8c). What is your response to God’s today?

DAY 18 – THE FIERY FURNACE

In this story we find Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego being asked to bow down to an image of gold – an idol. It was in moment of ultimate truth because their faith in God would be proved by their answer.

Scripture: Daniel 3:1-30

King Nebuchadnezzar has built a huge image of gold which is ninety feet high and nine feet wide. The king makes the following decree to everyone (no exceptions!): *“As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must bow down and worship the image of gold...[or] immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace”* (v. 5).

Three young Hebrew men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, believe in the one true God and will not bow down to any other image or idol. When the music begins, everyone bows except for these three young men. The information reaches the king. The king gives them another chance to bow, but again they stay true to the one true God and do not bow. The king becomes furious. He orders that the furnace be heated seven times hotter and the young men be bound and thrown into it. The soldiers who throw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the furnace die immediately from the force of the heat; but the three young men do not. In fact, Scripture tells us that as soon as they were thrown into the furnace the king *“...leaped to his feet in amazement...”* (v. 24 a). They had thrown three men in, but there was a fourth walking around with them in the furnace!

Life Application: What do you think it felt like to be these three men at the time of their sentencing? Where do you think they got their strength to stand up to the king’s demands? Have you ever had a time in your life where you were called upon to stand up for your faith in God? What was your decision?

Prayer: Father, give me the courage of these men to be faithful to You. Amen.

DAY 19 – NINEVEH REPENTS

After Jonah runs from God, is swallowed by a great fish, spends three days and nights in the fish's belly, prays to God and repents, and is vomited up on the shore, God again gives him the assignment to go to Nineveh. This time Jonah goes.

Scripture: Jonah 3:1-10

The city of Nineveh is not a small city. It would take about three days to walk around the whole city and give the news of doom from God. *“Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city proclaiming, ‘Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown’”* (v. 4).

But it does not take three days before the Ninevites go to their knees in repentance. When the king of Nineveh hears Jonah's warning, he takes off his royal robes, covers himself with sackcloth, and sits in dust. Then the king gives a proclamation that everyone, human and animal, will fast and be covered with sackcloth. They were to urgently call on God and give up their evil ways and violence. The king said, *“God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish”* (v. 9). God did relent and had compassion on them, and Nineveh was not destroyed.

Life Application: We live in a world much like Nineveh. What is God calling us to do? Is the solution for Nineveh good for us today -repentance, fasting, urgent prayer, giving up our evil ways? What will you do today to honor God and bring repentance?

DAY 20 – THE WAY BACK

When the Israelites failed to give their tithe, it was a demonstration of their disobedience. But when they reinstated the tithe, it was a sign of reform – the way back!

Scripture: Malachi 3:6-12

The Israelites again have turned away from God. They have turned away from God's decrees and have not kept them. God pleads with them to return to Him, and He will return to them. In verse 6 they ask, *"How are we to return?"* God tells them, *"Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me"* (v. 8).

The people don't understand, so God explains that they are robbing Him in tithes and offerings. Can you hear the Israelites take a big gulp?

God continues but not in a reprimanding way. He continues by giving them a promise: *"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse...Test me in this and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe. Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land"* (vs. 10-12). What an amazing promise, not only for the Israelites, but also for us today!

Life Application: What do you hear God saying to you about tithing? Test God and see if His Words *of pouring out blessings* are true!

DAY 21 – CENTURION’S FAITH

Today we are introduced to a Roman military officer. Jesus finds this Gentile’s faith greater than any He has seen.

Scripture: Matthew 8:5-13

The centurion has a two-fold response to Jesus’ willingness to come to his home to heal his servant, who lies paralyzed and in terrible pain. First, he feels unworthy as a Gentile to have Jesus, a Jew, enter his house. Second, the centurion has great faith in Jesus’s power. The officer believes that if he gives an order to one of the hundred men under him it will be carried out completely and promptly. Likewise, he believes that Jesus’ authority is not restricted by distance. If Jesus orders the healing of his servant, the servant will be healed.

Jesus is *“amazed”* (v. 10) at this Gentile’s faith and trust. He turns to those following him and says, *“I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven”* (v. 11). The next words Jesus speaks are convicting. He says, *“But the subjects of the kingdom [the unrepentant Jews] will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”* (v. 12).

Jesus then turns to the centurion and says, *“Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would’ And his servant was healed at that moment”* (v. 13).

Life Application: How would you compare your faith to that of the Centurion? Have you put limits on Jesus’ power to transform your life or the lives of those you care about? Do you think you will sit with Jesus at the heavenly feast? If so, why?

DAY 22 – JESUS HEALS A PARALYTIC

Jesus' fame is growing. The crowds are beginning to follow Jesus. When He enters the town of Capernaum again, the house in which Jesus is residing is soon filled and surrounded by many people. They have come to hear the Word preached to them.

Scripture: Mark 2:1-12

There are two things that happen in this story. First, a paralyzed man is brought to Jesus for healing. Because there are so many people, the man's four friends carry him on a stretcher to the roof, strip off the roof over the place where Jesus is, and lower him down in front of Jesus. When Jesus sees the faith of the four friends, He looks at the paralyzed man and says, *"Son, your sins are forgiven"* (v. 5).

The second thing that happens is that the teachers of the law begin thinking, *"Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"* (v. 7). Jesus, knowing what they are thinking, takes this time to prove to them that *"...the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"* (v. 10).

He turns to the teachers and asks, *"Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take up your mat and walk?'"* (vs. 8-9). For Jesus, neither is difficult. So He looks at the man on the stretcher and says, *"I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home"* (v. 11). The man got up, took his mat, and walked out for everyone to see!

Life Application: Who do you most relate to in this story: the man on the stretcher, the men who are helping to bring him to Jesus, or the questioning teachers? Which character would you like to be? What is holding you back from experiencing God's forgiveness or healing?

DAY 23 – JESUS CALMS THE STORM

Our story today brings us back to the strength of our faith. Leaving the crowd behind, Jesus calls His disciples to join Him in a boat to go over to the other side...

Scripture: Mark 4:35-41

Jesus, being tired from a long day of teaching, finds a spot to rest during their travels. During their journey a storm comes up. The storm is described as a furious squall or storm that threatened to sink the boat. This storm was so severe that the experienced sailors onboard believed they were going to sink! Where was Jesus during this time? He was in the back of the boat—the stern—resting on a cushion. More than that, HE WAS ASLEEP!

The experienced sailors, some of whom were Jesus' disciples, awakened Jesus in a panic, *“Teacher, don't you care if we drown?”* (v. 38). Jesus awakened, quieted the storm—the wind ran out of breath and the sea became as smooth as glass—and then He said, *“Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”* (v. 40). Hours before, they had been listening and watching as Jesus ministered to others; what would make them think He wouldn't care for them? I wonder if they heard Jesus' questions as they were still wondering, *“Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”* (v. 41).

Life Application: While few of us are experienced fishermen, all of us have experienced storms that have threatened to destroy our lives. What storms are you facing right now? What storm do you need Jesus to quiet for you today?

DAY 24 – BLIND BARTIMAEUS

In today's Scripture passage, we see how persistence and faith in Jesus result in a healing.

Scripture: Mark 10:46-52

Jesus and His disciples, along with a large crowd, are leaving the city of Jericho. A blind man by the name of Bartimaeus hears the commotion and asks what is going on. When he realizes that it is Jesus of Nazareth coming by, he decides he is not going to be left out. He sees HOPE in the midst of his situation. He persistently begins to cry out, *“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”* (v. 47). When people try to hush him up he cries even louder, *“Son of David, have mercy on me!”* (v. 48). Jesus hears Bartimaeus and has the people tell him to come to Him. They say, *“Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you!”* (v. 49).

I love Bartimaeus' immediate response. He throws off his beggar's cloak (the piece of clothing that has identified who he is for a long time), jumps to his feet, and makes his way to Jesus. He is expecting something to happen! He is expecting to see again! Can you sense his expectation?

Jesus asks, *“What do you want me to do for you?”* (v. 51a). Bartimaeus does not have to think about his response. He knows what he wants! *“Rabbi, I want to see”* (v. 51b). *“Go,” said Jesus, ‘your faith has healed you’* (v. 52). The healing was immediate, and Bartimaeus joyfully joined the crowd following Jesus.

Life Application: Bartimaeus lived day to day on the leftovers provided by others. While he survived, life was always a challenge, and there was no hope of things getting better. Each day he woke up blind. Then Jesus came by, and he had hope that the future might be very different than the past. All of us live in conditions we would like changed. What are those conditions? Are you calling out to Jesus for help and healing?

DAY 25 – RIGHT FOUNDATIONS

In our story today, Jesus has been teaching some important truths, and He challenges His listeners as to whether they are just listening or actually taking His words to heart and changing their lives.

Scripture: Luke 6:47-49

In the first analogy, we have those who come to Jesus, hear His words, and act on them. These people have made Jesus' words a part of their lives. Just as if they were building a house, they dig deep to lay the foundation. In fact, they dig until they come to solid rock. Once reaching solid rock, they then begin building the foundation on that rock. When the house is finished, the rain comes in such torrents that the house is flooded; but the house remains standing because it was built to last.

The second analogy is of those who hear Jesus' words but don't act on them. They are like those who use Jesus' words in Bible studies or even Bible quizzing, but they don't make Jesus' words a part of their lives. They build their house on the ground without a foundation. The house may look good on the outside, but the foundation has been built on things that change with the weather. When the rains come and the floods rise, this house collapses into a horrendous wreck. The house is a total loss.

Life Application: What would you say is the foundation of your life? What are you trusting to take you through the difficult times in life, the "bad weather?" If Jesus were to inspect your life's foundation, what would He see? What would you have to rebuild?

DAY 26 – THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR

In today's parable, Jesus compares two men when He speaks to *"some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else"* (v. 9).

Scripture: Luke 18:9-14

Two men went up to the temple to pray. The first man is a Pharisee who considers himself more holy than the common people. He even wears special garments to distinguish himself from others. He stands alone and prays, *"God, I thank you I am not like other men...or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get"* (vs. 11-12). He was in essence saying, "Look how great I am. You can see my greatness in what I do and what I wear!"

The second man is a tax collector – a collector of customs or public dues – and is the object of bitter hatred and scorn by the Jews. He is associated with the most depraved class of society. Feeling so unworthy, he prays, *"God, have mercy on me, a sinner"* (v. 13b). This man does not even look up to heaven. He is standing off a distance beating his breast. He is slumped in the shadows unnoticed by others.

The Pharisee exalted himself; but the tax collector was humble, having a low estimate of his importance before God. Jesus summed this parable up in this way, *"I tell you that this man [the tax collector] went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted"* (v. 14).

Life Application: In your opinion who are today's tax collectors, today's Pharisees? As you worship, does your attitude more reflect the tax collector's or the Pharisee's? Now pray, "Father, reveal to me which of these men I am most like. Show me where I need to change to become more like Jesus. Amen."

DAY 27 – ZACCHAEUS

This story again includes a tax collector, but this man is the chief officer of the tax collectors. He is very rich and powerful.

Scripture: Luke 19:1-10

Zacchaeus is a Jew, a resident of Jericho, and a man very short in stature. He heard Jesus was coming through town, but the crowds were great and towered over him; Zacchaeus couldn't see Jesus. He must have desperately wanted to see Jesus, because he was willing to humble himself and climb a sycamore tree, a tree that would help him see over the crowd.

Did Jesus see Zacchaeus out of the corner of his eye as he passed under the tree, or did he sense someone was in need? Whatever it was, Jesus stopped, He looked up in the tree and said, *“Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today”* (v. 5). Jesus called him by name, and Zacchaeus came down gladly and welcomed Jesus to his home.

Those following Jesus began to mumble, *“He has gone to be the guest of a sinner”* (v. 7). But Scripture reveals that something miraculous happened to Zacchaeus that day. He promised to give half of what he owned to the poor; and if he had cheated anyone, he would pay back four times what he took. Zacchaeus was making restitution for his past sins. Jesus said, *“Today salvation has come to this house”* (v. 9).

Life Application: God not only sees us as we are, He sees us for what we can become by His grace. Is there someone you know who is a “Zacchaeus,” someone who is looked down by others but who is hungry for the gospel? *“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save (liberate) the lost”* (Luke 19:10).

DAY 28 – NICODEMUS

Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, comes to see Jesus at night. He believes Jesus is a teacher...a teacher come from God.

Scripture: John 3:1-21

Jesus jumps to the main point with these words, *“Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again”* (v. 3). Nicodemus cannot comprehend this at all. He thinks of the impossibility of becoming a little baby again in his mother’s womb. Jesus explains that Nicodemus is speaking of a natural birth; Jesus is speaking of a Spiritual birth. Jesus uses the analogy of wind (wind and spirit are often used interchangeably in Scripture). *“The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit”* (v. 8). The Spirit comes and brings the new birth of the Spirit!

Jesus goes on to remind Nicodemus of the story from the Old Testament where God told Moses to put a bronze snake up on a pole. Anyone who had been bitten by the poisonous snakes could look up at the bronze snake and live. Jesus then begins sharing the good news of the Son of Man being lifted up. This is in reference to Jesus’ death on a cross; anyone who believes in the crucified Savior would be given eternal life. Why? *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him”* (vs. 16-17). Jesus came to bring light into the darkness!

Life Application: Why do you think Jesus used the process of birth to describe becoming a Christian? What similarities do you see between physical birth and spiritual birth? Have you been born again? Has God’s light replaced your darkness?

DAY 29 – WOMAN AT THE WELL

It is noon time...the hottest part of the day. Jesus is weary and stays by Jacob's well while His disciples go into town for food. They are in the country of Samaria. To put the relationship in simple terms, Samaritans and Jews don't like each other.

Scripture: John 4:6-42

Jesus sees a Samaritan woman coming to the well to draw water. He breaks all social customs by speaking to this Samaritan woman. He kindly asks her for a drink of water. Under the circumstances of who she is and who he is, she asks, *"How can you ask me for a drink?"* (v. 9).

Their conversation that afternoon was...

- About the living water that can gush fountains of endless life in her
- The revelation by Jesus of her many husbands and her life
- The fact that true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth
- That Jesus is the Messiah, the Anointed One

Leaving her water jar, the very reason she had gone to the well, the woman went back to town and told everyone, *"Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?"* (v. 29).

Revival came to this town in Samaria! As Jesus said to his disciples, *"...open your eyes and look at the fields! [Samaria is] ripe for harvest"* (v. 35). Even now this Samaritan woman is reaping a harvest among her neighbors. *"Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony"* (v. 39). Jesus stayed for two days, and many more became believers, saying, *"...we know that this man really is the Savior of the world"* (v. 42).

Life Application: Every society has prejudices and customs that guide relationships and social interactions. Are there any prejudices or customs unique to your area? Do any of these get in the way of your sharing your faith with others? When was the last time you shared God's love and testimony with someone that took you outside your confront zone?

DAY 30 – MARY ANOINTS JESUS

Jesus is back at the home of his friends—Mary (the one who was sitting at Jesus’ feet), Martha (the one who was busy), and Lazarus (the one Jesus raised from the dead). It is six days before the Passover Feast, and they are hosting a dinner in Jesus’ honor.

Scripture: John 12:1-11

At this dinner Martha is serving the meal, Lazarus is reclining at the table with the guests, and Mary is sitting at Jesus’ feet. Mary is not there just to listen to him teach but to honor him in a special way. She takes an expensive perfume (worth a year’s wages), opens the bottle, and pours all of it over Jesus’ feet. She is sitting in a servant’s place, the one who washes the guest’s feet. She rubs the oil of the perfume into Jesus’ feet and wipes them with her hair. The whole house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume! What a beautiful scene!

But then we hear the words of a grumbler, complainer, and also treasurer of the group, Judas Iscariot. *“Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor?”* (v. 4).

Oh, Judas, you are so self-centered! All you can think about is what will be better for Judas – controlling the money. Mary, however, has done a wonderful thing! Jesus replies, *“Leave her alone. It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me”* (vs. 7-8).

Life Application: True love is not practical; it is extravagant. Mary’s gift was viewed as an impractical waste by Judas, but to Jesus it was a sign of her love. What sacrifice have you made for Jesus that reveals your love for Him?

DAY 31 – SERVANT LEADERSHIP

It is just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knows that He will leave this world soon and return to His Father. He wants to show His disciples the full extent of His love for them, so Jesus takes the role of the servant.

Scripture: John 13:1-17

Jesus has no problem taking the role of a servant. It is recorded elsewhere in Scripture: *“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”* (Mark 10:45). Jesus knows who He is in God. The role of a servant to Him is not lowering Himself. To Jesus the servant’s role is the greatest role.

Jesus got up from the evening meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around His waist. He poured water in a basin and began to wash His disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel wrapped around His waist. Jesus went from disciple to disciple, showing His love for them. Through this humbling experience, Peter becomes so overwhelmed that he insists Jesus will not wash his feet. After he realizes that what Jesus is doing is important, he wants Jesus to wash his hands and head. He is all in!

When Jesus has completed the task, He puts on His outer garments again and rejoins them at the table. He tells them, *“You call me “Teacher” and “Lord,” and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet...no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him”* (vs. 13-16). Lead as a servant! Set the example by doing!

Life Application: The absence of good leadership is lifted up as a major problem in the world. How does Jesus’ servant leadership look different from the many forms of leadership exercised today? How do you exercise servant leadership in your relationship with others?

DAY 32 – DEATH SENTENCE

Jesus had been whipped, a crown had been twisted together of thorny branches and placed on His head, and a purple robe had been draped over His shoulders. The soldiers then said, “Hail, King of the Jews!” Then they slapped Him in the face!

Scripture: John 19:1-16

Jesus is standing before Pilate, an officer of the Roman Empire serving in Judea. Jesus is dressed in the clothing the soldiers had placed on him. Time after time Pilate takes Jesus out in front of the crowd. He tells them he finds no basis for a charge against Jesus. But the chief priests and their officials (the people from the temple) shout, “*Crucify! Crucify!*” But Pilate answered, *‘You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him’*” (v. 6).

Pilate questions Jesus. He asks, “*Where do you come from?*” Jesus doesn’t respond. *‘Do you refuse to speak to me? Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?’* Jesus answered, *‘You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above’*” (vs. 9-11). Pilate continues to try to let Jesus go free, but the Jews would not agree.

Pilate then takes his place on the judge’s seat, also known as the Stone Pavement. Pilate presents Jesus to the Jews, and they again shout, “*Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him... We have no king but Caesar’*” (v. 15). Finally, Pilate hands Jesus over to be crucified!

Life Application: People can be so cruel. The crowds that welcomed Jesus a few hours before are now demanding His execution. Even Pilate’s compassion for Jesus could not change the crowd’s cries. Jesus could have escaped the cruel death of the cross, but He did not. Jesus’ eyes were not on the crowds; they were on His Father. He was on earth to do His Father’s will and to show His Father’s love for us. Think about what Jesus did for your salvation, and be thankful!

DAY 33 – JESUS ALIVE!

The excitement of finding the stone rolled away, the tomb empty, running to tell the disciples, Peter and John running with her back to the tomb...it's all over. Everyone has left, and Mary Magdalene is crying outside the empty tomb.

Scripture: John 20:11-18

Mary is first approached by two angels seated where Jesus' body had been. "They asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying?' 'They have taken my Lord away,' she said, 'and I don't know where they have put him'" (v. 13).

The second person to approach Mary is Jesus, but she does not recognize Him. Jesus asked, "'Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?' Thinking He was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him'" (v. 15).

The scene then changes as Jesus looks at Mary and says her name, *Mary!* That voice! That voice! Her tears change from tears of sadness to tears of joy. Her shoulders are no longer slumped; she is standing tall. She is no longer looking downward, but she is looking into the face of her Savior, Jesus. As she reaches out for him, He instructs her not to touch Him because He has not yet ascended to the Father. He then asks her to go to His disciples and let them know that He is ascending to His Father, His God – who is also their Father, their God. Mary ran to the disciples with the news, "*I have seen the Lord!*" (v. 18). He was alive!

Life Application: Losing a loved one is a devastating experience that many of us have shared. Losing a loved one that you've placed all your hope in is all the more devastating. To see that Hope resurrected is a joy beyond compare. What a difference it makes when you hear Jesus say your name!

DAY 34 – JESUS ASCENDS TO HEAVEN

In his first book, Luke wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach. In this passage, we are at the beginning of the second book Luke wrote to Theophilus.

Scripture: Acts 1:1-11

After Jesus' suffering, he showed Himself to His disciples (apostles) and gave them many convincing proofs that He was alive during a forty-day period. He also taught them about the Kingdom of God through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

During one meal with them, Jesus gave this command: *“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised...in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit”* (vs. 4-5).

His apostles asked Jesus if this was the time that He was going to restore the kingdom to Israel. Jesus said, *“It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”* (vs. 7-8).

Just as Jesus had finished speaking these words, He began to rise from the ground before their very eyes until a cloud had hidden Him from their sight. They continued to look intently into the sky even after Jesus was gone. Suddenly two men dressed in white stood among them. *“Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven”* (v. 11).

Life Application: As Christians we have a faith grounded in reality and history. Jesus is not a historical figure that died never to return. His resurrection verifies his identity and purpose. He will return to receive all who believe. Lift up your heads! Look to the sky! Could this be the day?

DAY 35 – THE HOLY SPIRIT COMES!

They (a group of about 120) are all together in the Upper Room praying continually. They have been praying there since Jesus ascended into Heaven. And now it is the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after the Passover.

Scripture: Acts 2:1-8 & 14-21

Unusual things begin to happen. There is a sound like a violent wind that came from Heaven. The sound reverberates through the whole house. A flame appears dividing into smaller flames and moving from one person to another. Each of the Galileans is filled with the Holy Spirit and begins to speak other languages...languages they have never spoken before as the Spirit empowered them. Many God-fearing Jews from every nation were in Jerusalem that day. They all heard descriptions of God's mighty works in their own language.

Peter, wanting to stop any rumors as to what was happening, stood and addressed the crowd. No, he assures them, these people are not drunk. It is only 9:00 in the morning! Peter then uses the prophecy in Joel 2:28-32 as his explanation: *"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters...your young men...your old men...your servants, both men and women..."* (vs. 17-18). Peter was saying to them, "This is what is happening. The Holy Spirit has been poured out on these people, and they are speaking as the Spirit empowers them." The truth is, *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved"* (v. 21).

Life Application: The gift of salvation is more than the forgiveness of sin; it includes empowerment for service. The men and women in the upper room, enabled by the Holy Spirit turned the world right side up. God wants the same for you. Have you experienced your personal Pentecost?

DAY 36 – ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

The early church in Acts took care of each other. Those who had more shared what they had so that no one was in need. One of those men was known by the name of Barnabas, which means Son of Encouragement. He sold a field and put the money at the apostles' feet. Barnabas had a generous and sincere heart to help others.

Scripture: Acts 4:32-5:10

But there is another couple in today's story, Ananias and Sapphira, who aren't so sharing minded. They also sell a piece of property; but before bringing the money to the apostles, they decide to keep some of the money back for themselves. There's nothing wrong with that; it's their money after all. The problem is that they decided they would tell the apostles they were giving the full amount they had received for the property. They decided to lie. They not only lied to men, they lied to God!

There was also a difference in why they sold their property. Barnabas had done it out of love for others – a generous and sincere heart. I am sure Barnabas was praised by the apostles for giving. Ananias and Sapphira desired the praise for giving, not out of love for others but out of a desire to be honored by the apostles. Their decision did not bring them praise and honor; it brought them judgment and death. In fact, it even brought them dishonorable burials.

Life Application: Deceit is destructive. Deceit builds walls of hypocrisy and distrust that eventually fall upon the perpetrator. When we commit deceit against God, then the consequences are certain, for "*God cannot be mocked*" (Gal. 6:7). The answer to deceit is confession and forgiveness. Is your conscience clear with God? God is always willing to forgive and restore.

DAY 37 – PETER’S ESCAPE FROM PRISON

King Herod began to bring persecution on the church. First, he had James put to death with the sword. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he had Peter seized and put into prison, where he was guarded by sixteen guards. While Peter was in prison, *the church was earnestly praying to God for Peter’s safety.*

Scripture: Acts 12:1-19

It was the night before Peter’s trial. Peter was sleeping between two soldiers and had chains tied to his wrists. A light entered the cell...an angel from God. The angel struck Peter on the side and woke him. *“Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists. Then the angel said to him, ‘Put on your clothes and sandals...Wrap your cloak around you and follow me...’* (vs. 7-8).

How did Peter respond? He obeyed, of course! *“Peter followed him [the angel] out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate...It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him”* (vs. 9-10). That is when Peter realized it was not a dream. He had been rescued from Herod’s clutches!

Peter went to the house where the church had been praying for his release. He knocked on the door. A little girl by the name of Rhoda went to answer; but when she recognized Peter’s voice, she ran back to the others without opening the door. She told the others that Peter was at the door. *“You’re out of your mind,’ they told her...‘It must be his angel’”* (v. 15). But Peter kept knocking until finally they answered!

Life Application: What did you learn from this passage about Peter and his faith in God? What did you learn about those praying for Peter’s release? When you pray, do you expect God to answer your prayer?

DAY 38 – SALVATION BY FAITH

In our story today, we have a difference of opinion among the Jewish leaders about what is necessary to be a Christ follower. As Christianity began to impact the Gentile world, the question arose as to what Jewish laws needed to be obeyed by all believers, Jews and Gentiles alike.

Scripture: Acts 15:1-9

From the time of Abraham, the act of circumcision was a sign of the covenant God had with His people. It signified a relationship bonded by loyalty and love. If a male was not circumcised, by law he and his family would be excluded from God's precious promises. This act of circumcision was immensely important to some of the Jewish leaders. However, other Jewish leaders did not believe that obedience to all the Jewish law was essential to salvation. According to them, all that was needed was repentance and belief in Jesus as Savior. This controversy came to a head in this meeting in Jerusalem.

As the apostles and elders met to consider the issue, God inspired Peter to speak. Peter boldly stood up and addressed the council: *"...God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them [the Gentiles] by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith"* (vs. 7-9).

The Jerusalem Council, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, accepted Gentiles into the fellowship of the church by faith! From that day to this, the Church has affirmed that it is our walk of faith and not our outward compliance to the Jewish law that determines our acceptance by God. What a relief!

Life Application: The Jewish law's purpose was to honor and worship God. However, it became too easy to focus on compliance to the Law instead of focusing on the God who gave the Law. In your opinion, does that ever happen in the church today? What, according to this passage, is the remedy?

DAY 39 – ONE BODY, MANY PARTS

Our story today is an example of unity among the believers in the body of Christ. Paul explains this by using an analogy of the parts of the human body.

Scripture: I Corinthians 12:12-31

God has meticulously put this body together; He placed each part in the exact place to perform the exact function He wanted...the eye, the ear, the hand. If we were all an eye, we would be so limited. If we were all an ear or hand, the outcome would be the same. But it is not that way. “But in fact *God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be*” (v. 18). This is true not only in the human body, but also in the church body. This can be applied to a small church body – the local church – as well as a large church body – the international church.

We were all baptized by one Holy Spirit. We are connected. When one part of the body of Christ suffers, we all suffer. When one part is honored, we are all honored. We should have equal concern for each other, and there should be no division in the body. All the parts depend on and care for one another.

In the body, God has appointed “...*first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues*” (v. 28). Not everyone can do all these things. But when the body of Christ works together, the miracle of UNITY happens!

Life Application: What do you believe is your function in the body of Christ? Do others in the body confirm that function? In your church body, are you fulfilling your appointed task?

DAY 40 – THE NEW BEGINNING

We have come to our final day together and our final story. This story is from the last book of the Bible. The book of Revelation is a book of challenge and comfort to God's people. John, having been exiled for his belief in Jesus, is placed on the island of Patmos. There he was given a revelation through an angel to show God's servants what will take place in the days and years ahead.

Scripture: Revelation 21:1-7

If we had been with John during this vision, we would have said, "I can hardly believe my eyes. Everything above me is new. Everything below me is new. Everything around me is new. Everything old is gone completely."

What does Scripture tell us this "new beginning" is really like? It is called the "New Jerusalem" and described as being like a bride on her wedding day, adorned for her husband and for His eyes only. It is a home where God will dwell with His people. God will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more mourning, no more crying, and no more pain. All of these hurtful struggles have vanished away! God said, "Look, John, it is already done!" He told John, "*Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true*" (v. 5b).

Then God said, "*To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children*" (vs. 6b-7). What a wonderful vision and promise for everyone who follows Christ to the end.

Life Application: What are the greatest fears people have about the world political situation, the economy, and their community? How does John's vision change your perspective about what is important in this world? How are you going to live today differently because you are a Christ follower? Are you ready to experience this wonderful "new beginning?"