

DEVOTIONS for the week of 3-8-20 -- The Importance of Truly Believing JOHN 3:16

MONDAY, March 9 -- John 3:1-15

Nicodemus, a religious leader, recognized that Jesus' life and teaching had a different dimension to it --- something distinctive and something that clearly indicated God's divine blessing --- something that was truly SUPERNATURAL Not of this world, but clearly of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Nicodemus was genuinely curious and wanted to know more about the extra dimension of Jesus' life. The religious establishment had shunned Jesus, so Nicodemus did not want to approach Jesus in broad daylight. So, Nicodemus approached Jesus in secret, at night.

Jesus challenged Nicodemus to consider a world that is beyond the senses --- the world of the SPIRIT --- the world of God. Jesus explained that a person (any and all persons qualify – there are NO EXCLUSIONS) --- must simply BELIEVE in the name, person, message and work of JESUS.

Jesus explained that God cares soooo much about the people of planet earth, that God himself, came to earth to do what we as humans could not do ...

- Jesus came to overcome the power of sin (Can you do that?) and
- Jesus came to overcome the power of sin's consequence, which is death (Can you do that?)

Jesus shared with Nicodemus that all Nicodemus needed to do to enter into this divine, supernatural world would be to BELIEVE in JESUS.

IF YOU HAVE NOT ALREADY, I INVITE YOU TO OPEN YOUR LIFE (BODY, MIND, & SOUL) TO THE SUPERNATURAL PRESENCE AND POWER OF JESUS. AND IF YOU ALREADY HAVE, I INVITE YOU TO RENEW A NEW COMMITMENT TO BELIEVE AND PUT INTO PRACTICE THE TEACHINGS AND LIFE POWER OF JESUS.

DO YOU BELIEVE?

Dear God, I want to believe. Like Nicodemus, I do not understand, and I do not 'get it'. BUT I want to commit all that I know of me to all of You, dear God. Please help me to grow and develop the life of the Spirit in my life SO that I may experience you more fully and live for You & Your causes. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 10 -- John 3:16-18

¹⁶For 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. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸**Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.** ¹⁹**This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.**

In many ways these 4 verses are the most PROMISING and ASSURING verses in all of the Bible, YET ALSO, PERHAPS, THE SADDEST and MOST CONDEMNING.

- God loves and cares for all the people of planet earth.
- God took the initiative to come to planet earth in the person of Jesus to offer humanity --- all people -- - an entryway into NEW LIFE --- not physically, but SPIRITUALLY --- a life that gives us entry into the Kingdom of God --- the Kingdom of the Heavens!!!!

- Our only pre-requisite is for us to CHOOSE to DECIDE AND THEN, to BELIEVE in the life and work of Jesus --- DO YOU TRULY BELIEVE?
- YET --- John explains in verse 19 that sadly, tragically, many people do not receive Jesus... they ignore Jesus and CHOOSE to DISREGARD the significance of JESUS' accomplishments here on planet earth. Too many people, choose the life that is familiar and comfortable --- the life that they decide 'how' they will live (i.e. choosing their own cravings and desires instead of the desires of JESUS).

WE MUST DECIDE WHETHER WE CHOOSE TO LIVE ACCORDING TO GOD'S GAME PLAN or OUR OWN GAME PLAN.

When we interviewed our Little League players, they shared with us the importance of PRACTICING their sport. Implied in this, they also CHOSE to be on their specific TEAM and they chose to BELIEVE IN AND FOLLOW THEIR COACHES.

TO WRAP UP TODAY'S DEVOTIONAL:

1. Do you accept Jesus' invitation to be a part of God's team?
2. Do you accept Jesus as your Coach?
3. THEN --- "BELIEVE" and live accordingly.

Dear God, THANK YOU FOR LOVING ME. THANK YOU FOR OPENING THE DOOR OF HEAVEN TO ME – NOT ONLY FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD TO COME BUT FOR THE HELP IN THE WORLD WE LIVE IN. MAY I LEARN TO LIVE IN THE SPIRITUAL WORLD AS I HAVE LEARNED TO LIVE IN THE WAYS OF THIS WORLD. MAY I BE A GOOD MEMBER AND GOOD EXAMPLE OF BEING A MEMBER OF "TEAM JESUS" ... in Jesus' Mighty Name, AMEN.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11 -- 1 Timothy 4:4-10

1 Timothy 4:4-10: For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵ because it is **consecrated by the word of God and prayer**.

⁶If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the **truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed**. ⁷Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, TRAIN yourself to be godly. ⁸For physical TRAINING is of some value, but GODLINESS has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. ⁹This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. ¹⁰That is why we labor and strive, because **we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe**.

Today's text builds upon the text from John 3:1-21. Paul, like the Apostle John is calling us to live according to the ways of God. John uses the term "in the Spirit" to express these ways of God and Paul uses the term, "godly" or "godliness".

So, IF WE DECIDE TO BELIEVE --- THEN WHAT?

Paul writes that we must think about the WORD OF GOD and PRAY.

We've talked quite a bit about the importance of reading a few verses from the Bible every day and then spending even a few moments asking, "How those verses may apply to my life."

We've also talked quite a bit about the importance of praying or spending time with God every day. The extra insert in this week's bulletin is titled, "THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER." You'll read in this insert several key understandings of prayer and see a list of ideas on how you may try to develop your capacity and ability to pray.

I encourage you to go back to your bulletin and look at this PRAYER insert and decide whether God may want you to PRACTICE some of these 'ways of prayer'. The inserts are also available on the church website www.southharborcreekumc.org under Daily Devotions.

The main point for today's devotional is to pray and consider the following idea:

We spend lots of time and money making ourselves look good and to be healthy --- PHYSICAL HEALTH --- HOW MUCH TIME, EFFORT, AND CONCERN DO WE PUT INTO DEVELOPING THE SPIRITUAL PART OF OUR LIVES SO THAT WE WILL DEVELOP IN THE AREA OF GODLINESS? (i.e. LEARNING AND DEVELOPING THE WAYS OF GOD IN OUR LIVES?)

Dear God, please help me to read and reflect upon the Bible a little bit every day AND please help me to develop a better ability to spending time with you in prayer. Help me to review the prayer insert and lead me (give me an inkling) to what I should focus my spiritual attentions on this week, particularly in the area of prayer. THANK YOU GOD, IN JESUS' NAME, AMEN.

THURSDAY, March 12 -- 1 Timothy 4:7-10

1 Timothy 4:7-10: ⁷Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, TRAIN yourself to be godly. ⁸For physical **TRAINING is of some value, but GODLINESS has value for all things**, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. ⁹This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. ¹⁰That is why we labor and strive, because **we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.**

As we continue to ponder and reflect upon 1 Timothy 4:7-10, I'd like to turn our attention to the critical importance of TRAINING our spirits to develop spiritual capacities and abilities to live more and more godly lives.

We were reminded by the Little League players that shared with our church the end of January --- PRACTICE is critical to developing individual and team skills that may compete at the highest levels.

We, too ... who have chosen to BELIEVE in JESUS must then develop the spiritual capacities and capabilities to live successful and full Christian lives. Without practice we commit ourselves to never developing and never acquiring the capability to OVERCOME the natural things of this world including anxieties, worry, fear, anger, and on and on and on

In the course of this 8-week series, we've included in every bulletin and extra insert with a specific SPIRITUAL PRACTICE that we may learn and being to develop. These SPIRITUAL PRACTICES include:

1. **The Spiritual Practice of Memory & Thinking of God** in ways that help us to think rightly about God--- We used the metaphor of a Good Shepherd and worked together to learn the 23rd Psalm.

2. **The Spiritual Practice of EXAMEN** --- the importance of replaying the game films of each day and identifying those parts of our day and our behavior that were honoring to God and those parts that we need to focus on so that we may continue to develop the spiritual part of our lives.
3. **The Spiritual Practice of FASTING** --- the importance of giving up some of the habits and routines of our lives for a short while to remind us that many things distract us in our spiritual development and that we need to renew and recommit our lives to REFOCUS upon JESUS and HIS TEACHINGS.
4. **The Spiritual Practice of TAKING CARE OF OURSELVES** --- we must remember to 'take care of ourselves' or else we'll run out of emotional energy, become self-absorbed, and retreat from life. God cares for us, wants us to be healthy, and calls us to remember that we are not alone.
5. **The Spiritual Practice of WORSHIP** --- taking time to reflect upon who God is and all that God has blessed and enabled, we begin to take on a bigger perspective of the world we live in and our lives within that world. We become less consumed with ourselves and we begin to be inspired and encouraged by the greatness of God.
6. **The Spiritual Practice of Confession** --- as we need to 'confess' to one another when we have hurt or harmed one another --- we also need to 'confess' to God those times that we have deviated from His ways and disregarded Him. Confession helps to clear the slate and clear our conscience so that we may be open and able to receive and renew the Spirit of God in us. Confession is a bit like Spiritual Breathing --- we breathe out the bad and we breathe in the love and grace and strength of God.
7. **The Spiritual Practice of Prayer** --- a key piece – a critical piece to developing a spiritual dimension to our lives is to spend time with God --- we call that time "PRAYER." There are times that we share with God our needs and wants --- there are times that we listen to God and are inspired and guided by God -- there are other times that God uses prayer to form us and help us to do and to be the people that God would have us be. Prayer is essential to spiritual training and growth.
8. **The Spiritual Practice of Reading & Thinking About the Bible** --- spending time, even 5-10 minutes each day reading the Bible opens our lives to the inspiration of God's Word, the BIBLE. It helps us to RESET our lives upon the written Word of God --- God's playbook, the Bible. As a team must know the coach's playbook; we, too, need to know God's playbook, which is the Word of God, the Bible.

Friday, March 13 -- Isaiah 41:10 "FEAR NOT"

Isaiah 41:10: So **do not fear**, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Coronavirus Financial losses, travel bans, quarantines, closures and cancellations ...

It's been quite the few weeks!

Yet, "DO NOT FEAR" and "FEAR NOT" are two of the most repeated commands in the Bible.

My 'natural' tendency is to be "fearful", "anxious" and "cautious" ... What about you?

For lots of reasons, I was much worse in my 'younger days'. I remember coming home evenings and needing to decompress before I could go to bed. I remember during some of these times that I would lean against the wall and rock my head against the wall --- I'd be so tightly wrapped, that I would put my arms around myself and rock

Almost every night for a season, I'd play one of my favorite albums and listen to music that would help to calm me and shift my emotions from fear & worry to visions of possibility, hope, rest and of being loved by Linda and by God... I'd be soothed and eventually be able to go to sleep.

I still have a natural tendency to "worry" towards "anxiety" ... but it is nothing like it was back in those early years. AND I want you to know that as the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD continues to grow in me, the extreme moments are virtually non-existent.

I am neither CONTROLLED nor CONSUMED by these crippling attacks of emotion.

Rather than ALLOW these natural emotions to overcome me, I now take a deep breath. I realize that God's indwelling Spirit is so present in my life that I do not need to allow anxiety and fear to debilitate me.

The people of the Bible also had these fears and worries ... therefore, inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit, the writers of the Bible frequently reminded their readers that GOD IS WITH US ... and in the things that matter GOD HAS US COVERED & PROVIDED ... God enables us to deal with the things of this world so that we can do the best we can --- GOD HAS GIVEN US ALL THAT WE NEED TO DO ALL THAT IS REQUIRED --- AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, we are reminded that the things of the spirit, the soul, our inner being are ESSENTIALLY MORE LONG-LASTING than some of the more temporal things of this world.

1. **GOD IS WITH YOU.**
2. With God's help, **WE CAN (and MUST) REFUSE TO LET WORRY & FEAR TO DRIVE OUR ACTIONS AND CONTROL OUR THOUGHTS.** With God's help our perspective changes from a self-centered focus to a bigger perspective that helps us to see the bigger picture --- THANK YOU GOD.
3. **THINKING more calmly and rationally,** with our emotions a bit more checked and calmed, **we can make better decisions and go forward in a more controlled and effective way... we become less compulsive and more determined.**
4. **We can prepare and work to be the people that God would have us be,** which includes the commission, call and capacity to "love" ... to "help others through acts of encouragement and service"
5. **Remind yourself of God's provisions for you (recite the 23rd Psalm) and then recite the Lord's Prayer.**

I suspect that we'll be visiting some more along these lines on Sunday. In the meantime, I share with you one of my all-time favorite verses: *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in EVERY situation, by PRAYER and PETITION, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the PEACE of GOD, which transcends all understanding, WILL guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* Philippians 4:6-7

Dear God, You are a Mighty Warrior who saves (Zephaniah 3:17) and You promise throughout the Bible that You LOVE us; that You are with us; and that You will not forget us ... THANK YOU GOD. I lift up to you my worries and anxieties, some of which are _____ . God, please take these from me so that I may find REST and that I may be the person you want me to be. Please help me to think less about myself and more about those around me that I may encourage and help ... in ways that I may be the hands and feet of Jesus to them. In JESUS' NAME, AMEN.