

DEVOTIONS 2-23-20:

MONDAY 2-24-20: ALL SCRIPTURE IS IMPORTANT AND USEFUL

Jim Loeffler did an excellent job on Sunday ... Jim, thank you for covering for me as Linda and I are in Washington, DC (2/22 to 2/26).

Jim began his sermon firmly affirming the significance, importance and role of the Holy Scriptures (the Bible) in his life and the lives of ALL CHRISTIANS ... imagine... the BIBLE ... the written, God inspired LIVING WORD ... as relevant and applicable to us today as it was when it was written.

The BIBLE is one very important way that God speaks to us and guides us today. It is sooooo cool to think that the Bible has spanned the years of history ... God inspired its many human writers with DIVINE thoughts and direction so that we may be blessed and helped today ... AND it continues to be the LIVING WORD OF GOD in that the HOLY SPIRIT, God's own Spirit helps us to understand, interpret, and apply the Bible to our lives ... as Jim opened his sermon, "I LOVE THIS BOOK!"

I appreciate Jim's affirmation that he takes the written Word of God seriously and that he tries to live according to its direction and application to his life ... even when it is difficult to do so ... AND I, like Jim (and many of you), ponder and think about the relevance and application of the Scriptures to our lives...and it is hard to 'figure out' ... that is one of many reasons why it is good to be a part of a Bible discussion group --- it is a time to consider and discuss the Bible with others ... DO YOU HAVE SOMEONE OR A SMALL GROUP THAT YOU CAN DISCUSS AND PONDER THE RELEVANCE & APPLICATION OF THE BIBLE?

As I listened to Jim's opening God put 2 Timothy 3:16 on my mind.

"All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for TEACHING, REBUKING, CORRECTING, and TRAINING in RIGHTEOUSNESS SO THAT the servant of God (i.e. Christian believer) may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16

Friends, God's inspiration guided and directed the writers of the Bible to make written expressions to share SO THAT WE MIGHT BETTER KNOW AND UNDERSTAND GOD AND LIFE. I believe that every paragraph ... even every written word has meaning and significance ... and CAN BE USED FOR GOOD in the formation & development of our lives as Jesus Followers ... as modern-day Christians.

As we close today's reflection, I'd like to ask you to REFLECT UPON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BIBLE in YOUR LIFE ... DO YOU CONSIDER IT "GOD'S WORD"? Do you take it seriously? Do consider ALL OF GOD'S written Word or only those parts that you find agreeable?

Jim CHALLENGED US to read and reflect upon God's Word, the Bible SO THAT IT MIGHT BE WORKED INTO THE VERY FABRIC OF OUR LIVES AND OUR CHARACTER.

Dear God, please help me to find new meaning and relevance in the Bible for me... for my family ... and for my life. Help me to incorporate the Bible's teaching, stories, and vitality into my life. Please give me one or two others that I can share and visit about the Bible And PLEASE HELP ME TO BETTER UNDERSTAND YOUR INTENTION and DIRECTION FOR MY LIFE ...AND...please help me to MAKE IT AN INTEGRAL PART OF MY LIFE. IN JESUS' NAME, AMEN.

TUESDAY, 2-25-20: THE IMPORTANCE OF 'HUMILITY' BEFORE GOD

2 Chronicles 7:14 Primary text for the week: ***"IF MY PEOPLE, WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME, WILL HUMBLE THEMSELVES AND PRAY AND SEEK MY FACE AND TURN FROM THEIR WICKED (i.e. sinful ways), THEN I, their God, will HEAR their prayers and I will FORGIVE their sins and will HEAL their land & their lives."***

WOW!!!!

IF MY PEOPLE ...

- 1) WILL HUMBLE THEMSELVES
- 2) PRAY
- 3) SEEK GOD'S PRESENCE &
- 4) TURN FROM THEIR DESTRUCTIVE LIVES

THEN, I (their God) WILL:

- 1) HEAR THEM
- 2) FORGIVE THEM (reconcile & restore) &
- 3) HEAL THEIR LIVES

As you read this verse ... what thoughts has God put on your mind? What thoughts come to mind? Which points jump out at you?

Jim keyed his focus upon the idea of HUMILITY --- Jim gives us a good example ... often it is a good idea for a devotional or reflection to focus on just one part of a bigger passage or a passage with multiple ideas.

C.S.Lewis described HUMILITY as ***"Not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself – LESS."***

Hmmmmmm I like that And Jim continued to share about HOW WE NEED TO RETHINK AND THEN REALIGN our thoughts and actions to be consistent with God's Word for us.

That's important ... rather than trying to ALIGN God with our hopes and plans ... we need to be always thinking about ALIGNING ourselves with God's standard --- kind of the way that I ALIGN our checkbook balance with the bank's balance ... always looking for where we might be out of align and then making changes to help me LINE-UP with GOD.

Jim shared two texts that make particular emphasis upon the importance of a HUMBLE spirit and heart.

I'd suggest that you look up both verses and reflect upon the question: WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO GOD that we ***"WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD"*** AND then that we, ***'HUMBLE OURSELVES UNDER GOD'S MIGHTY HAND SO THAT HE MAY LIFT YOU UP ..."*** As you read & reflect upon **Micah 6:8** and **1 Peter 5:6-7**

Are these important COMMANDMENTS for us to OBEY?

What does it mean to 'walk humbly' & to be "humble under God"?

Friends, God is WILD about you ... he loves you ... he does NOT NEED OUR HUMILITY --- BUT WE DO --- as long as we ASSERT OUR SELF-CENTERED and SELF-CONSUMED perspectives before God we are blocked or PRECLUDED from receiving God's blessing ... WE MUST 'HUMBLE OURSELVES' before God – not in a self-depreciating way ... BUT IN RESPECTFUL & LOVING REGARD (and even amazement) of GOD'S being and GOD'S ways as being BEYOND and ABOVE us.

I remember having met some remarkably talented professional athletes in my life --- and, indeed, I marveled at their ability above mine ... DO YOU --- **DO WE MARVEL AT GOD'S BEING ABOVE OURS?**

Dear God, please help me to see you clearly & truly ... AND please help me to see myself clearly & truly. God, with your help ... I will be able to see rightly and then, I pray, to be in proper AWE of you ... AND WORSHIP YOU more, as I ought. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

WEDNESDAY, February 26 A GREAT METAPHOR!

Several weeks ago, we considered and reflected upon the 23rd Psalm --- and we came to see God as our GREAT SHEPHERD. We asked the question, **“If you were to use a metaphor to describe some of the attributes of God and your relationship with God --- WHICH METAPHOR WOULD YOU PICK?”**

Well, Jim Loeffler in his presentation on Sunday shared his metaphor of God --- he painted the picture of God as the GREAT CHIROPRACTOR --- I like that!!!

- The great straightener
- The great physician
- The great aligner

While Jim developed the idea more completely, he basically asserted the following:

1. You're 'out of sorts' --- either not feeling well or things just aren't right. YOU HURT & THINGS AREN'T RIGHT.
2. SO, you call the doctor or chiropractor ... for help
3. You receive a healing touch --- AND you receive counsel, advice and instructions as to 'how' you may avoid getting into the same situation AND 'how' you may avoid re-injury.
4. AND THEN Jim shares, "here's the rub" ---- YOU ARE GIVEN A PART IN YOUR HEALING & RECUPERATION --- IT IS NOT ALL UP TO THE DOCTOR --- YOU (we) HAVE A VITAL PART TO PLAY.

Jim explains that we are expected and even required to be an ACTIVE participant ---

- EXERCISES
- DIET
- LIFE CHANGES

WHOOAAAA!!! The GREAT CHIROPRACTOR HELPS TO STRAIGHTEN THINGS OUT IN OUR LIVES – BUT --- WE THEN HAVE A PART TO PLAY ... a VITAL PART, ESPECIALLY IF WE HOPE AND EXPECT TO AVOID FUTURE PROBLEMS!!!

Jim referenced 23 things that Billy Graham has suggested as PRACTICAL THINGS WE CAN DO EVERYDAY TO HELP STRENGTHEN OUR BONES AND LIVE A HEALTHIER SPIRITUAL LIFE ... and then Jim listed 5 things we can do to CULTIVATE A HUMBLE ATTITUDE TOWARDS GOD --- WHICH OPENS US --- AND REMOVES WITHIN US ALL THOSE THINGS THAT FRUSTRATE, PREVENT, BLOCK THE FLOW OF GOD'S SPIRIT IN OUR LIVES.

1. CONTEMPLATE THE GREATNESS OF GOD --- WORSHIP
2. CULTIVATE A GRATEFUL & THANKFUL HEART
3. BE SLOW TO JUDGE
4. MAKE AN INTENTIONAL DECISION TO SERVE OTHERS
5. ALWAYS STRIVE TO DO AS JESUS DID --- TO FOLLOW JESUS' EXAMPLE

Jim --- Good job!

Friends, in reflection of today's devotional ... pray & ask God to put an inkling of an idea in your heart and mind that may HELP YOU to COOPERATE WITH GOD (THE GREAT CHIROPRACTOR) AS GOD WORKS TO STRAIGHTEN OUT YOUR LIFE.

THURSDAY, February 27 --- THE PRACTICE OF WORSHIP

“Worship is more than simply a one-hour experience on a Sunday morning -- WORSHIP IS A LIFESTYLE” (Junius Dotson, SOUL RESET)

- + **WORSHIP ACKNOWLEDGES THAT GOD IS GOD AND WE ARE NOT!**
- + **WORSHIP ACKNOWLEDGES THAT GOD IS HOLY – SACRED --- PURE --- yet remarkably extending & close.**
- + **WORSHIP ACKNOWLEDGES THAT GOD IS FAITHFUL ---- AND CAUSES US TO CONSIDER HOW WE RESPOND TO GOD’S DEPENDABILITY AND FAITHFULNESS IN OUR LIVES....AND FOR US TO RESPOND – EITHER TO EMBRACE GOD OR IGNORE GOD.**
- + **WORSHIP ACKNOWLEDGES THAT WE LIKE SPENDING TIME WITH GOD & that IN SPENDING TIME WITH GOD, WE ARE STRENGTHENED, STRAIGHTENED, AND INVIGORATED.**

There was an insert in this week’s bulletin that encourages us to become better Christ Followers through the PRACTICE OF WORSHIP. I’d encourage you to review this insert and to ask God whether there is a particular practice that you may focus and ‘practice’ this week.

1. Consider sharing your ‘laments’, sorrows, regrets and hurts with God.
2. Practice trusting God to help you --- and to turn your laments over to his healing grace.
3. Choose a worship song or upbeat Christian song that will be your theme for the day or for the week.
4. Consider ways that you may affirm that GOD IS GOD of your life.
5. Practice corporate worship in the context of Sunday morning church --- or others times with your Christian friends & family.
6. What do you ‘love to do’? ... Cook, work with wood, crochet, play sports, etc. Practice doing it before God.

Worship --- reminds us that it is important that we be HUMBLE before God --- True HUMILITY requires us to SEE GOD RIGHTLY and TO SEE OURSELVES RIGHTLY.

Dear God, please help us to see ourselves truly --- we have needs and we need help beyond ourselves And GOD loves us and is willing to take our burdens and to lift us up as eagles. AMEN

FRIDAY, 2-28-20 Devotional John 3:17 and John 21: 15-17

I am writing this reflection on Tuesday, February 24 from a hotel room in Washington, DC.

I'll share on Sunday, regarding a walk that I took to the Lincoln Memorial and how MY PERSPECTIVE upon our country and its prospects were encouraged.

Without meaning to, I have embraced a skewed perspective upon many things "political."

As my PERSPECTIVE regarding our country and its future has been REFRESHED and REST ... it occurred to me that our SOULS ... our SPIRITS Also, become tainted and skewed but the circumstances of life ... by the 'rat race' of life ... and how we, at times, need to stop and CHOOSE to allow ourselves to RESET and REFRESH our SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE ... especially, WHO WE ARE AS CHILDREN OF GOD ...

As I have been praying for the church, our church, SHUMC ... the thoughts came to me regarding how many of us are susceptible to embracing the feelings of SELF-CONDEMNATION, GUILT and SHAME ... and my thoughts turn towards PETER ... in spite of Peter's bold proclamation that he would stand with Jesus through any and all circumstances ... Peter withered when asked whether he was one of Jesus' disciples ... Peter took on the guilt and shame of his denying Jesus.

I believe that Peter was on the verge of taking on the identity that he was no longer worthy of being a disciple of Jesus and that his prospect of ever being used by God was perhaps forever lost.

Yet, we read in John 21 that Jesus extended himself to Peter ... and upon Peter's CONFESSION of his love for Jesus ... Jesus RECOMMISSIONED PETER for Kingdom work that was yet to be done ... to FEED CHRIST'S SHEEP ... TO CARE FOR CHRIST'S CHURCH ... JESUS' FLOCK ...

With our CONFESSION OF LOVE and SEEKING RESTORATION ... Jesus LIFTS the GUILT and SHAME OF THIS WORLD FROM US and OFFERS US a RENEWED & REFRESHED PERSPECTIVE ... and sets us back on track to live for Him ... and to help the Kingdom of God on this earth ... to be the church that God wants us to be ...

Not crippled by self-embraced shame and guilt ... BUT RELEASED BY GOD'S LOVE ... as Jesus extended his love and embrace to PETER ... so to, Jesus extends to you and me --- NOT CONDEMNATION BUT EMBRACE ... and WORK TO DO ... A MISSION TO BE ACCOMPLISHED!

DEAR GOD, Please accept my CONFESSION that YOU ARE GOD (and I am not) ... as Jesus extended forgiveness and restoration to Peter ... may you extend to me YOUR LOVE & EMBRACE ... HELP ME TO ACCEPT YOUR LOVE AND YOUR COMMISSION TO GO AND TO MAKE DISCIPLES ... BUILDING UP ONE ANOTHER SO THAT WE, THE CHURCH, SHUMC ... MAY BE A HEAVENLY OUTPOST ... A LIGHT ON A HILL ... POINTING PEOPLE TO YOUR DIVINE EMBRACE ... AND A REFRESHED PERSPECTIVE OF WHO WE ARE IN JESUS' LOVE AND EMBRACE. IN JESUS' NAME, AMEN.