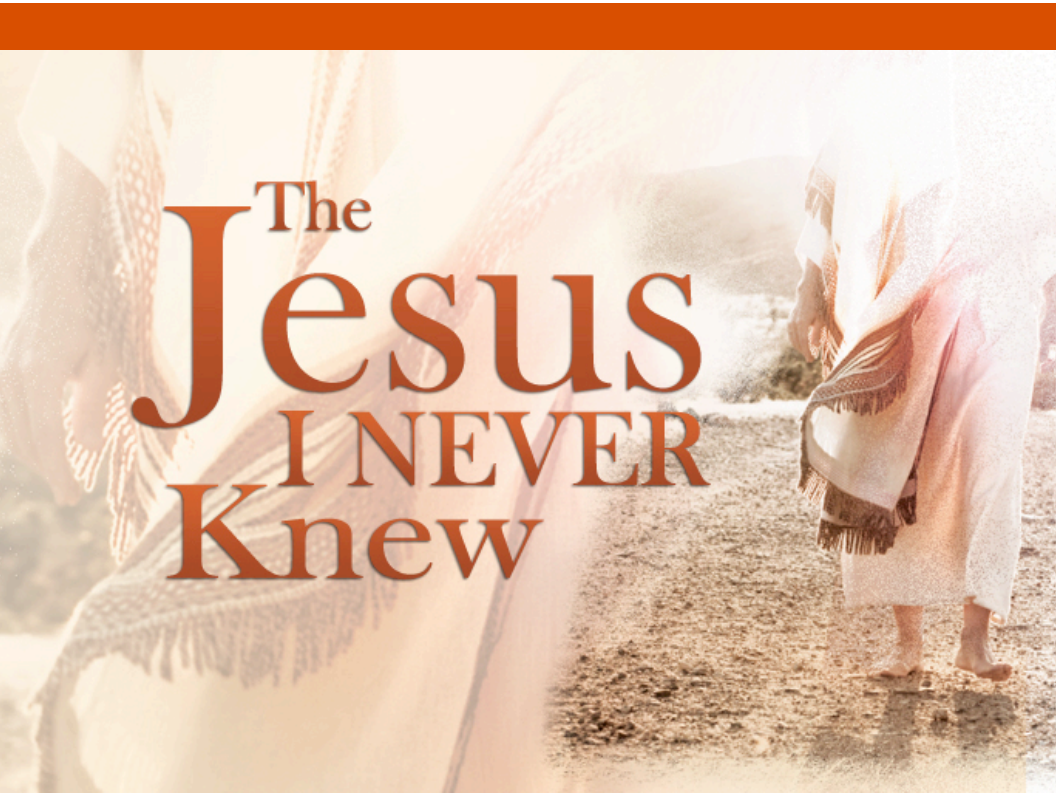


Weekly Devotional



The Jesus I NEVER Knew

October 31 - November 4, 2011

Monday

Matthew 6:11



Many of us know The Lord's Prayer and say it without a second thought. "Our Father, who art in heaven..." But each phrase in The Lord's Prayer is rich with meaning, each worth meditating on very deeply.

Today, let's focus on one of those phrases: "Give us this day our daily bread." Have you thought about what Jesus is teaching us here? Jesus' words are full of meaning, but here are a few thoughts worth remembering when these words come across your lips.

First, Jesus is encouraging us to ask God to supply our needs. Sometimes it feels selfish to ask God for material concerns: money, housing, jobs, etc. But Jesus is affirming that we do have real, physical needs, and that we should bring those before God. There is no shame in sharing your material concerns with God.

Second, Jesus chooses the word "give," which reminds us that all that we have comes from God and ultimately belongs to Him. Jesus doesn't say, "Help us earn our bread." That would indicate that we ultimately provide for ourselves. Instead, "give us" indicates that God is our ultimate provider. It also indicates that what we have ultimately belongs to God, not to ourselves. If God gives it to us, surely He is the true owner.

Third, Jesus leads us in asking for "our daily bread." This flies in the face of the American dream, a dream that encourages us to have enough stored up for many, many years. Unlike the American dream, God's dream for us is dependence on Him, finding our security in Him, not in our bankroll. Just as He provided manna to the Israelites in the wilderness on a daily basis, God wants us to depend on Him continually. Perhaps God blesses us beyond a daily subsistence, but this prayer shapes our hearts so that we can be grateful even if we only have enough for today.

Pray The Lord's Prayer now and ask God to help you mean the words as you pray them. May our hearts be formed by His example.

Tuesday

Luke 23:39-43



Many of us wonder why Jesus told the criminal dying beside Him that he would go to heaven. The criminal did not pray the sinner's prayer, take a confirmation class, or even say, "Jesus, I recognize you as the Messiah." None of those things happened. But what did happen? The criminal recognized that he was guilty, getting what he deserved.

We are constantly hearing that we deserve happiness, deserve time off, deserve to find someone who loves us and treats us well, deserve the biggest car/house/bank account possible. But to be frank, most sentences including the word *deserve* are all lies. They're not lies because we don't work hard, or because we should have low standards for ourselves. They are lies because these things are pure gifts, and you can't earn gifts.

So what do we deserve? To be blunt, we deserve complete separation from God and His blessings. We deserve to be left to our own devices, enslaved to ourselves. We deserve loneliness because we are selfish; we deserve weariness because we are never satisfied; we deserve war because we feed it with our words of hate. We deserve a life without God because our sin put Him to death. John Stott said, "Before we can begin to see the cross as something done for us, we have to see it as something done by us."

We as Christians are called to put our faith in God's Kingdom, which is both beyond this world and also constantly at work within this world. And God's Kingdom is a Kingdom of grace, not of karma. God's grace is given freely; we will never be able to earn it. Sometimes we want to earn our spot in Heaven, but that's not possible.

There is a criminal in heaven with Jesus today. We don't know much about his religious background, his understanding of theology, or his way of life. But we do know that he saw himself rightly as a man deserving death and shame. And moreover, he saw Jesus as guiltless, dying an undeserved death. Like that criminal, may we see clearly who we are and be grateful for who Jesus is and what He has done on our behalf.



Wednesday

Genesis 3:7-10, 21

What would you say is the only prerequisite to becoming a Christian? I once heard someone say that you can be unsure of a lot of the details of faith, but the one thing you must be sure of is that you have messed up at some point in your life. If you think you're perfect, faith in Christ is not for you. Adam and Eve, unlike us, knew what it was to live in a perfect world untainted by sin and brokenness. They experienced marital unity, harmony with nature, and communion with God. But after the peace and wholeness of Eden was broken, Adam and Eve experienced, for the first time, feelings of guilt and shame. And how did they respond? They covered themselves and they hid.

I think hiding imperfections is something we can all relate to. Physically, many of us wear outfits, make-up, and colors that hide our flaws. Socially, we avoid people who bring out the worst in us. Spiritually, we are no different: We try to ignore certain sins, being slow to repent to God or others. We hide our flaws just like Adam and Eve. In Genesis 3:21, God made Adam and Eve clothing from animal skin. The text doesn't give this detail, but an animal had to die for Adam and Eve to have adequate clothing. That animal was the first sacrifice for sin.

Now, because of Jesus, all of our sins, faults, and brokenness have been paid for in full, and we are eternally covered. He died naked, completely exposed to the jeering crowd, because He knew we needed eternal coverings for our sin. He subjected Himself to that misery and humiliation so that He could spend eternity with you. Unbelievably, that was not the end. Jesus defeated guilt and shame by rising from the grave. And because He did that, we have hope—hope that our guilt and shame can be used by God to accomplish great and selfless things. He can turn the things that make us run and hide into things that display His glory, if only we'd let Him. Let us not hide from God; let us come to Him humbly confessing our sins.

Thursday

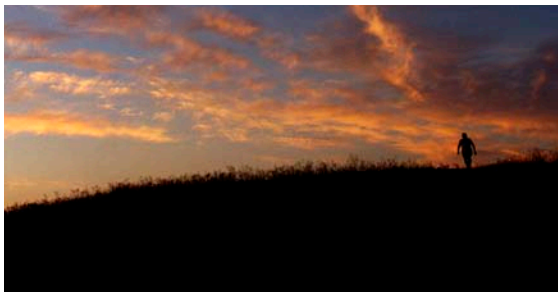
Hebrews 11 and 12:1

Hebrews 11 is the “Faith Chapter” of the Bible. Some even call it the “Faith Hall of Fame.” Once you know the stories behind the men and women in Hebrews 11 (more than Sunday School deep), you’ll begin to see how amazing it is that they are considered faithful. Most of them, like us, doubted. Most of them even disobeyed God in big ways. Think about some of the people mentioned in Hebrews 11: Noah, Sarah, Jacob, Rahab. None of these people had picture-perfect lives.

If you read the stories of the men and women in Hebrews 11, you’ll probably relate to some of them and be really disgusted by others. But like them or not, they are the family into which we are adopted when we become Christians. And though they are not perfect, these men and women have been immortalized within the Word of God, given to us as people of faith.

After the writer of Hebrews recounts these men and women of faith, Hebrews 12:1 says, “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us [Abraham, Sarah, Rahab, David, etc.]...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” How is our daily walk of faith related to theirs? They messed up, but they kept turning back to God. They lost hope, but they repented and placed their hope in God. They weren’t perfect, and neither are we. But if we are in a relationship with the God of the universe, we can still keep putting one foot in front of the other, knowing that we are part of a movement that is bigger than what we can see.

Learning more about the story of God, including the stories of people in the Bible other than Jesus—the broken, confused, impulsive, sinful people just like you and me—can be surprisingly encouraging. Read their stories, see the Gospel play out in their lives, and run your race with endurance, knowing that our Daddy loves His crazy, imperfect, ragamuffin family.



Friday

John 19:28-30



You and I are living in a world that is not as it should be. We are broken, hurting, and hurtful people. I often wonder why God doesn't just snap His fingers and fix our problems. But then I remember: He came into our mess and subjected Himself to it. He chose to experience desire and pain with us. Our feelings of unmet desire are not unique.

We can see on the cross that Jesus was thirsty. But we can guess that Jesus also experienced unmet longing and heartbreaking pain in other ways. Having left the perfect community of the trinity, He came to Earth. If you've ever left a loving family or community, you have a glimpse of the pain Jesus experienced when leaving Heaven. In addition, since Jesus was fully man, we can assume that He felt sexual desire like a normal person. And yet, He remained single and celibate. Perhaps Jesus even longed to have a family.

I don't know everything that Jesus wanted, but I know that the depth of his longings far surpass my own; He knew perfection and left it. I have never known perfection, but the occasional scents I pick up of it only leave me further unsatisfied with life here. Even when we get what we want—children, a well-paying job, a happier marriage, close friends, a youthful body, respect—our desire for something more will always remain. These specific desires we have are merely the way our soul cries out for more.

But you know what's most amazing to me? In the midst of everything else He could want, Jesus wants me. Yes, Jesus longs for peace and joy and love. But to think that He only longs for such impersonal ideas is false. He longs for me, too. So today, instead of focusing on our own unmet desires or your pains, meditate on the reality that Jesus wants all of you and be grateful for the lengths He went just to know you. If you find yourself in a season of longing or pain, Jesus does not ask you to ignore it, but He sets you free by His work on the cross so that you are not defined by it. You are defined by faith in Him.



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