



Weekly Devotional

A large, solid red heart graphic that serves as a background for the ampersand in the title.

YOU & ME

Relationships in
a Modern World

A photograph of two hands, one from the left and one from the right, positioned to form a heart shape. The hands are light-skinned and the background is a bright blue sky with white clouds.

February 6 - 10, 2012

Questions & Prayers

Monday: Pray for mission organizations that you know. For example, the International Justice Mission that goes into countries undercover, gathering evidence so that local governments can arrest people who traffic in human slaves for sex. Or you might pray for World Vision and Compassion International. Pray for the safety of those who work overseas.

Tuesday: Pray for the local ministries that we support, such as Homework House, Harambee Center, Shepherd's Pantry, and the East San Gabriel Homeless Coalition. Pray for the full-time staff members of these groups and for the people they serve.

Wednesday: Pray for our youth programs, and for those attending our New Members Class.

Thursday: Pray for those struggling with relationships and lack of relationships.

Friday: Pray for this weekend's services.

Read Philippians 2

1. What commands does Paul give the Philippians in this chapter?
2. What four qualities mark unity in Christ?
3. Consider verses 6-11 of Paul's picture of what Jesus did when He came to earth. How do the following verses deepen your understanding of this miracle of love? John 1:1, 1:10-14; 2 Corinthians 8:9, 1 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 2:14-17, and 1 John 1:1-3?
4. Try restating the description of Jesus in verses 6-11 in completely different language, without using any words from the original text.
5. From what you see in this chapter alone, what would you say are the most important moral standards for Christians?
6. James 1:22 tells us that when we merely listen to the Word without putting it into practice, we deceive ourselves. What kind of self-deceiving excuses or rationalizations do you think could most easily keep Christians from actually doing what this chapter challenges us to do?
7. How does Paul's intro make it possible to follow through on the commands of this chapter?
8. In a typical day, how often would the commands in verse 3 offer useful and timely guidelines for your immediate situation?



Monday

Philippians 2:1-11



Jim's sermon this past weekend dealt with conflict. Next Sunday he will be looking at marriage (Ephesians 5). Last week's devo, which is online, would be a great preparation for the coming sermon. This week we will be looking a little further into the whole issue of conflict and what the Bible has to say about it.

Recently when reading the January 31st reading of Oswald Chambers' devotional book, *My Utmost for His Highest*, I came across the following: *"Workers (those seeking to do the work of God) break down because their desire is for their own whiteness, and not for God. 'Don't ask me to come into contact with the rugged reality of Redemption on behalf of the filth of human life as it is; what I want is anything God can do for me to make me more desirable in my own eyes.' To talk in that way is a sign that the reality of the Gospel of God has not begun to touch me; there is no reckless abandon to God. God cannot deliver me while my interest is merely in my own character. Paul is unconscious of himself; he is recklessly abandoned, separated by God for one purpose—to proclaim the Gospel of God (cf. Rom. 9:3)."*

Is not Oswald getting at the same truths that Jim expounded on in his sermon? If I am looking to God to make "my space" better, I am going to continue to have conflict. If I can abandon "my space" for the sake of another person, trusting in God, I can actually let go of my need to "win" the conflict. A study done at Willow Creek Church during the last ten years found that as people first come to Jesus, they are concerned with what Jesus will do for them; but as they grow, they become more concerned with what they can do for God. The more I am concerned with God and less with me, the easier it is to navigate conflict.

Where are you on the continuum? Remember Romans 8:32. God exalted Jesus and He will take care of us if we, like Jesus, put our momentary needs aside to be obedient no matter what the cost. Where might God be calling you to be obedient today (not just in the area of humility)?

Tuesday

John 13:1-17



In the Philippians passage we read yesterday it says that Jesus, “being in the very nature of God, emptied Himself and became a servant.” In preaching on this passage, John Ortberg focused on the line: “nature of God.” Ortberg said that because Jesus had the nature of God, He became a servant and that God’s nature is one of service to others.

We see that lived out in this passage in John. Rather than taking His rightful place at the head of the table, Jesus gets up, takes off His robe (the sign of His position as a Rabbi or teacher), and wraps a towel around His waist. He took on the vestments of a servant and did the lowest job imaginable; He washed the disciples’ feet. In Jesus’ day, people wore sandals and walked through fields on dirt roads filled with mud and animal waste. When one entered a home, the first order of business was to wash your feet. The lowest servant often did this. Jesus ends the object lesson by challenging the disciples to do what He did, to become servants of others.

Many conflicts would cease if we were more concerned with “serving” the other person than making sure we were served. The Philippians passage and this one begin in a similar way. Paul writes in Philippians that because of what we have experienced in Jesus, we should serve. John begins his passage by saying that because Jesus knew it was time to go to the Father, He served. Because heaven was assured, He loved to the end, to the cross. We are not called to serve in our own power or to obtain God’s riches; but because we are assured of God’s love, provision and riches, we are called to die to our comforts on behalf of others. How might you live this out today? What does it look like today to take up a cross on behalf of another, or to serve as the

Wednesday



Matthew 5:43-48; 2 Kings 6:8-23

In Matthew 5 we are challenged to love our enemies, for God does good things even for those who are evil. In fact, Paul writes in Romans that it was while I was in rebellion against God (an enemy of God), that Jesus took a great risk and died for me in hopes that I would come to understand His love (Romans 5:6-8). This is a huge challenge.

This week we are looking at conflict. Conflict occurs in our closest relationships, but it also occurs with those who call us “enemy.” Our challenge is to see them as God does, as potential friends, rather than see them as they see us, as enemies. This is especially hard because often we can name our friends, but we place our enemies in a “group.” God never does that. He sees each individual; He seeks to build relationships one at a time. What a huge challenge.

The passage in 2 Kings is a great one to keep in mind as we seek to love our enemies. The King of Aram was trying to destroy the Israelites. His main focus soon became Elisha. Elisha had the opportunity to destroy the king’s forces; but rather than giving into the temptation, he loved them and he threw them a great feast. This act of kindness changed the heart of a whole nation. Rather than a continued cycle of violence, the cycle was broken and peace was obtained.

Elisha was able to take this risk because he saw what his servant couldn’t; he saw the forces of God at work. All too often when engaged in conflict with friends or enemies, I see what is in front of me, like Elisha’s servant did. The challenge is to allow the Holy Spirit to pull back the curtain and to see what God might be doing.

Today as you are tempted to speak ill of another and as you find yourself engaged in conflicted situations, do two things: One, try to see the individual as God does and not a generalized group. And two, ask God what He might be up to and how you might be like Jesus, bringing a saving presence into the situation even before those you are with acknowledge that they want His saving work.

Thursday

Psalm 59, 1 Samuel 24 and 26

During a recent word search for the word “enemies” in the Psalms, I discovered that it was used 70 times in 150 Psalms. I love the Psalms. I love them because they are so real, so filled with emotion. David does not hold back as he writes. He gets mad at God; he calls for the destruction of his enemies. And throughout all of his emotional ups and downs, he leaves the matter with God; he does not take matters into his own hands but trusts God.

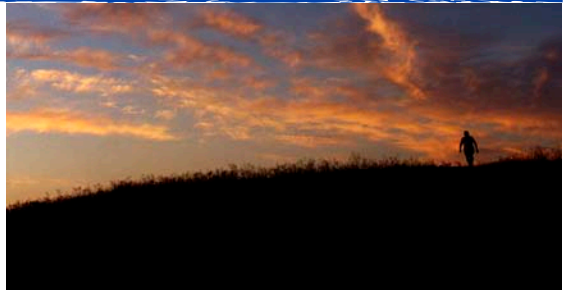
David is called the “man after God’s own heart.” But he is by no means perfect. Despite trusting God with Saul, who was trying to kill him time and time again, David actually planned the murder of Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah (2 Samuel 11). David has plenty of successes, but he also has some very glaring failures.

What I learn from David and the Psalms is that there is hope. Hope for my failures, hope for my emotions, hope for my circumstances. But the hope does not come from my cleverly devised plans, but from turning situations over to God and waiting on Him and His timing.

This is not easy. And I often fail. Being seen as someone “after God’s own heart” is not dependent upon me getting it right all the time. But it is dependent on attempting to trust God, on attempting to wait on God, on calling out for help and giving God everything—even the destruction of my enemies.

Today our enemies come in various forms. Yes, they include terrorists; but on a day-to-day basis, they can include those I live with, those I work with, and those who are seeking their own good at my expense. Often an enemy really is someone who is going against God’s ways, someone who really is deceitful and destructive. God, though, has power over these individuals and the circumstances they bring about.

The question is: Will I trust God and wait on Him, or will I take matters into my own hands? It’s not easy, and I often cry out in anger to God. But all that I have discovered about God teaches me to trust His timing and His ways. Where do you need to cry out and wait today? What hinders you?



Friday

Matthew 5:21-22; 18:12-17; John 13:34-35; Romans 12:17-21



Conflict was definitely a part of the early church. In fact, at one point Paul actually rebukes Peter in front of the church (Galatians 2:14). Jesus, though, says that people will know us, not by our conflict, but by our love. How are we doing?

In the Matthew passages, the guiding principle is love and peace. I have always found it interesting that in Matthew 5, I am commanded first to watch my attitude towards another person. And secondly, I am told that if my brother has something against me (not if I have something against my brother), I am to go and make peace with them even before I go to worship (i.e., as soon as possible, immediately). If I have something against my brother, I can take it up with God and wait on God. But if my brother has something against me, I need to go to him.

Later when Jesus does call me to go to my brother and confront him, it has to do with confronting a sin he is committing, not a conflict between us. In this case, Jesus is concerned about the eternal state of a person and the sin presently in his (her) life.

Unfortunately, I often get all of this mixed up. I choose to ignore the person who is struggling with me, go to the person I am struggling with, and all too often turn my back on my brother's sin (unless I am gossiping). The result: the church is known not for its love, but for its continual conflicts, for its hypocrisy. Being at peace, really loving and working for the best for another, and going out of my way for my enemy is not easy. But Jesus wants so much more than my relationship with Him; He wants me to be in relationship with my brothers and sisters (those who know Christ and those who do not).

How are we doing? Are we rationalizing our conflict or dealing with it head on? Are we holding on to that which we should be letting go of? Are we stepping out to be the first to make peace with those we do not see eye to eye with? Do I really trust Father God to provide? Do I really allow Him to be Lord of my relationships?



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