



Weekly Devotional

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

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 20 - 24, 2012

Questions & Prayers

1. How would you define faithfulness, integrity?
2. Do others see you as a person of your word? Can you be trusted for your simple "yes" and "no?" What steps might you take to be seen before God and others as a person of integrity?
3. Note Luke 6:45: How do our words and actions reflect what is going on inside us? Are there some things that need to be changed inside of you? How might you go about this?
4. Which of the 10 Commandments is the most difficult for you and why?
5. With what words does God introduce the 10 Commandments in verse 2? What might this imply about the nature and purpose of the Commandments?
6. What is revealed about God's character and personality in verses 1-6?
7. What is revealed about God's desire for human relationships in verses 7-17?

Pray for the following local organizations that we support:

Compassion In Action
Community Work Day
Harambee Center & Prep School, Pasadena
Homework House, Azusa
Living Stones
Monte Vista Grove, Pasadena
Prison Ministry, Azusa



Monday

Exodus 20:1-12; Ephesians 6:1-4



If someone asked you to recite the Ten Commandments from memory, could you? I had a Sunday school teacher ask that question once. He followed the question with this comment: “The ones you forget are probably the ones you are most apt to break.”

The first half of the Ten Commandments deals with our relationship with God; the second half deals with our relationship with others. The middle commandment deals with our relationship with our parents. Obedience does not come naturally; we are born with a rebellious spirit. Learning to be obedient to our parents teaches us to be obedient to the Lord. It teaches us the disciplines we need to be successful at life rather than selfishly rebellious. Selfish rebellion breaks down relationships. This is why Paul points out that this Fifth Commandment is the first commandment with a promise: “That it may go well with you and that you may live a long life.”

Paul continues on in Ephesians, asking fathers to “not exasperate your children” as you teach them. This is a huge challenge. Our discipline needs to be like the Lord’s. The discipline of Father God comes out of grace; it comes out of a desire to want what is best for us and not out of a sense of controlling us.

I often ask people, “When were the Ten Commandments given? Were they given before God freed the Israelite slaves or after?” The answer is “after.” The Ten Commandments begin, “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt out of the land slavery. You shall...” God frees us and then teaches us to live so that we are never enslaved again. When we break the commandments, we find ourselves enslaved. For example, when we covet, we find ourselves trapped in the desire to have something. We can become so fixated on our desire that we become jealous, get in debt, or find ourselves breaking one of the other commands. Breaking the Sabbath command leads us into a treadmill exhausting lifestyle that so many of us are trapped in. Keeping the Sabbath reminds us that God really is a God who keeps His promises and will provide all our needs. Which commands are you close to breaking?

Tuesday

Romans 1:18-32; Ezra 9:1-10:17



In Romans 1, Paul penned these words describing the society of his day almost 2000 years ago. The same, though, is true of every society. We would rather fulfill our selfish desires now than trust that God really does know what is best for us. The verse that has always captured my attention in this passage is the last verse. Even though they (godless men) know what they are doing is wrong, “they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.”

I remember hearing a story about a family going to see *Gone with the Wind* in the movie theaters back in the 60’s. On the way out of the theater, the family overheard two older women complaining: “How could a Mom take her children to see that awful movie?” The problem with the movie was that it ended with Clark Gable using a four-letter word beginning with “d.” When the movie first came out, this was unheard of; today the word is probably admissible on television at any hour. As the values of our world around us change, we tend to go with the flow. As I read the list of sins that Paul highlights, I am struck by how many are common place: no mercy, no love, no understanding, disobedience to parents, arrogance, gossip, slander, greed, deceit, and boasting.

When the Israelites returned from Babylon, they discovered that they had been unfaithful to God’s law. They set out to make some pretty radical changes. I often wonder: Are we willing to make radical changes when we discover that we are going against God’s ways, or are we more apt to make excuses and try to find loopholes? What is probably worse than our loopholes is that we encourage others with their loopholes and excuses.

God calls His people to a high standard. We are not to be like the rest of society. Being faithful to God means being faithful to His ways so much that we are like light in a dark world. It is not easy to stand apart, especially when obedience costs something and when fulfilling God’s laws requires being disciplined, turning from temptation, and going against societal norms. How are we doing? Are we lights?

Wednesday



Matthew 5: 17-20; 33-37; Matthew 15:1-6

The Pharisees were great at substituting traditions for the commandments. In an effort to apply the laws of God to everyday situations, they created lists of right and wrong actions that became traditions. They ended up obeying these and missing the whole intent of God's commands. For example, in Matthew 15 Jesus showed how the Pharisees actually used their traditions to get out of their responsibility for caring for one's parents. People could say, "I gave the money I would have used to care for you to God."

Do we not also try to get out of keeping our commitments? There are lots of lawyer jokes that go around today. The profession of law is a noble profession. But, have we not discovered how it is being used all too often to get us out of our promises, out of doing the right thing? In some cases a defense lawyer will find some loophole in order to help his client get by with wrongdoing. In these instances lawyers would have made good Pharisees. They know the law in order to get around the law and do the very things that the law was created to keep them from doing. The problem is that we all too often try to do the same thing.

Have you ever broken an engagement with someone with an excuse—though maybe true, such as "I have a headache"—that really masked your real intention: "I just do not want to go out tonight"? Jesus calls us not to bear false witness, not to lie, to let our "yes be yes," and our "no be no," to let our words be taken as a commitment we will fulfill. Yet we live in a society that tries to get out of contracts. We have lawyers and financial advisers who in many cases will tell us to walk away from commitments and contracts and start afresh. And because we are able to separate our business and financial matters from what we do at church, we listen and agree with them.

Jesus, though, calls us to be more righteous than the Pharisees. The excuse that "everyone else does it" does not fly with God any more than it did with our parents while we were growing up. How are we doing? Are we really faithful to our word and to our contracts in all circumstances? Are you keeping your vows to God?

Thursday

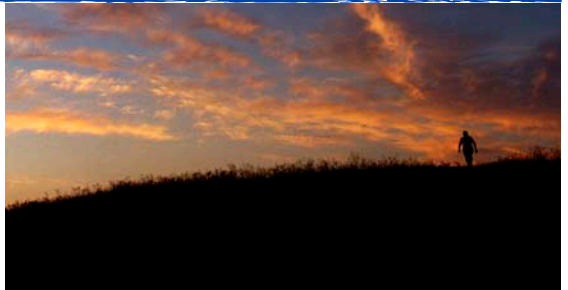
Luke 6:43-45; 1 Corinthians 4:5; Matthew 12:33-37

Think back over yesterday—everything you said, everything you did, everything you thought. How would you like every bit of it displayed on a large screen so that the whole world might see? What would people think? Would you be embarrassed if people knew who you really are inside?

Recently I was literally stuck on a chair lift with a man who claimed to “work” in a church. Upon further discussion I discovered that the church he went to was not really a Christian church, but a church that used some of the teachings of Jesus and others to help folks become “better human beings.” Praying and searching for words to respond (and not wanting to be kicked off of the chair lift that was stopped some twenty feet above ground), I responded, “I am really glad I do not have to have it all together. I am really glad that I can fail because the truth is, I know what is inside of me and I know what would come out were it not for the Holy Spirit of God forgiving me and doing a radical makeover.” The questions for us are: Are we pretending to be better than we are? Or are we allowing the Spirit to do the makeover?

When I read these passages about one day when I will be held accountable for all my actions and thoughts, I become very thankful for the cross. Jesus’ gift on the cross is to provide a large jar of “Wite-Out.” But I have to apply the “Wite-Out.” I do that by confessing. I do that by learning to listen to the Holy Spirit. I do that by having as my goal not the things of this world, but the goal of becoming more like Jesus, the goal of hearing some day: “Well done, thy good and faithful servant.”

When our goals are centered on God, the fertilizer we use through the Holy Spirit will bring about good fruit that others will enjoy. When we allow the world to provide the fertilizer, the fruit of our lives is distinctly different. What are your goals? How does looking back over yesterday inform you as to what is really important to you? Is there something you might need to confess?



Friday

John 8:31; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5



This verse has nothing to do with speaking the truth, but everything to do with knowing what is true and living a life based on that knowledge. Satan wants to imprison us. He works most often by telling us lies. Some times little lies, some times large ones. He will tell us that we are not worthy, not acceptable, and that others are laughing at us. He will tell us that there is no hope, that we will never be happy in our current situation, that we should get a divorce, and even that our children will be happier when we do. He will tell us that it is okay to live together outside of marriage, that it is okay to cheat on our taxes, and that it is okay to turn a blind eye to something that is occurring that is wrong—after all, he will say, “It’s better not to get involved.” Satan’s ways bring darkness and the need to hide in the darkness.

Jesus, though, calls us to walk in the light, to walk in the truth of who He is. When we know the truth of God’s ways and live accordingly, even when it is not easy, we discover a new freedom. We do not have to hide; we do not have to pretend to be something we are not; we do not have to live in the fear of being “found out.” When we live in the truth of giving a tithe, for example, we discover that we are freed up from greed. When we live in the truth of not speaking ill of another, we do not have to live with the fear that others might speak ill of us. When we live in the truth that all we have comes from God and is a gift from God, we can live in the freedom that if it is all gone tomorrow, God through His power can give it all back to us the next day (if it is best for us).

The word *hypocrite* comes from the Latin word for *actor*. To be hypocritical is to “behave in a way that suggests one has higher standards or more noble beliefs than is the case” (*Apple Dictionary*). God wants us to be free of such fear of having our real selves discovered. And so He says, “Be honest and confess your sin; then you will not need to live in fear but in the forgiveness. Do I listen to Satan or do I allow Jesus to set me free? Where am I play-acting? How might I be more real?”



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