

Devotions 12/21 to 12/26

Monday: Thankfulness

Habakkuk 3:17-18 - Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, ¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.

A thankful attitude opens windows of heaven. Spiritual blessings fall freely onto us through those openings into eternity. Moreover, as we look up with a grateful heart, we get glimpses of Glory through those windows. We cannot yet live in heaven, but we can experience foretastes of our ultimate home. Such samples of heavenly fare revive our hope. Thankfulness opens us up to these experiences, which then provide further reasons to be grateful. Thus, our paths become an upward spiral: ever increasing in gladness.

Thankfulness is not some sort of magic formula; it is the language of Love, which enables us to communicate intimately with Christ. A thankful mind-set does not entail a denial of reality with its plethora of problems. Instead, it rejoices in Him, our Savior, in the midst of trials and tribulations. He is our refuge and strength, an ever-present and well-proved help in trouble.

Stay safe, stay healthy, take care and God Bless! Pastor Mary Lou

Tuesday: Hear His Voice

John 10:27-28 New King James Version (NKJV)

²⁷ My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. ²⁸ And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

Be content to be one of Christ's sheep; eternally known, eternally secure. He wants us to hear His voice, so we can follow Him closely all the days and moments of our lives. He speaks to us in many ways, though most clearly through His Word. We need to maintain a listening attitude in order to hear Him. This requires both patience and perseverance: waiting in His Presence, eager to hear from Him. Jesus,

our shepherd-King, not only leads us through each day of our lives; He also opens to us the gates of heaven. We do well to remember that the Shepherd who so tenderly leads us is the King of eternity.

Though our earth-body will someday die, we ourselves will never perish. When we become absent from the body, we will be present with Him in a deep, rich, glorious way beyond anything we can imagine! No one will be able to snatch us out of His hand. This assurance of our eternal destiny sets us free from fear of death. It also strengthens us to live bountifully today; joyously following our Shepherd.

Sheep are not designed to live independently. They need a wise, loving shepherd to guide them carefully. Similarly, we live best when we follow Him humbly, in sheep-like fashion. As we trust Him to know what is best for us, He lovingly guides us in paths of righteousness.

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Wednesday: Gift of Love

1 John 4:15-18 - if anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. ¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. ¹⁷ This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

Jesus is the gift that continuously gives; bounteously, with no strings attached. Unconditional Love is such a radical concept that even His most devoted followers fail to grasp it fully. Absolutely nothing in heaven or on earth can cause Him to stop loving us. We may feel more loved when we are performing according to our expectations. But His Love for us is perfect; therefore it is not subject to variations. What does vary is our awareness of His loving Presence.

When we are dissatisfied with our behavior, we tend to feel unworthy of His Love. We may unconsciously punish ourselves by withdrawing from Him and attributing the distance between us to His displeasure. Instead of returning to Him and receiving His Love, we attempt to earn His approval by trying harder. All the while, He is aching to hold us in His everlasting arms, to enfold us in His Love.

When we are feeling unworthy or unloved, come to Him. Then ask for receptivity to his unfailing Love.

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Thursday: Always With Us

Matthew 6:34 - Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Jesus is perpetually with us, taking care of us. That is the most important fact of our existence. He is not limited by time or space; His Presence with us is a forever-promise. We need not fear the future, for He is already there. When we make that quantum leap into eternity, we will find Him awaiting us in heaven. Our future is in His hands; He releases it to us day by day, moment by moment. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow.

He wants us to live this day abundantly, seeing all there is to see, doing all there is to do. Do not be distracted by future concerns. Leave them to Him! Each day of life is a glorious gift, but so few people know how to live within the confines of today. Much of their energy for abundant living spills over the timeline into tomorrow's worries or past regrets. Their remaining energy is sufficient only for limping through the day, not for living it to the full. He is training us to keep our focus on His Presence in the present. This is how to receive abundant Life, which flows freely from His throne of grace.

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Friday: In His Presence

Ephesians 2:13 - But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Jesus is all around us, hovering over us even as we seek. His Face. He is nearer than we dare believe, closer than the air we breathe. If His children could only recognize His Presence, we would never feel lonely again. He knows every thought before we think it, every word before we speak it. His Presence impinges on our innermost being. Can we see the absurdity of trying to hide anything from Him?

We can easily deceive other people, and even ourselves, but He reads us like an open large-print book.

Deep within themselves, most people have some awareness of His imminent Presence. Many people run from Him and vehemently deny His existence because His closeness terrifies them. But we, His own children have nothing to fear, for He has cleansed us by His blood and clothed us in His righteousness. Be blessed by His intimate nearness. Since He lives in us, let Him also live through us, shining His Light into the darkness.

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Saturday: Jesus Is With Us

Matthew 10:29-31 - Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. ³⁰ And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

Jesus is with us in all that we do, even in the most menial task. He is always aware of us, concerned with every detail of our lives. Nothing escapes His notice; not even the number of hairs on our heads. However, our awareness of His Presence falters and flickers; as a result our life experiences feel fragmented. When our focus is broad enough to include Him in our thoughts, we feel safe and complete. When our perceptions narrow so that problems or details fill our consciousness, we feel empty and incomplete.

Learn to look steadily at Him in all our moments and all our circumstances. Though the world is unstable and in flux, we can experience continuity through our uninterrupted awareness of His Presence. Fix our gaze on what is unseen, even as the visible world parades before our eyes.

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