

Friday: Remember... Faithfulness

Read: Exodus 34:6-7 ⁶ The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness..."

Reflect:

A sad reality is we live in a world marked by fleeting interests, short term commitments, and constant change. No wonder we erect walls around ourselves and find it hard to trust other people.

In contrast, the Hebrew noun for "faithfulness" carries the sense of certainty, dependability, and reliability (Mangano, p36). This is critical for us as Christians to grasp not only in our minds...but also in our hearts. While others may (and actually always will...at least from time to time) let us down at points – God never will. Yet knowing that fact does not make everything fall into place. Unfortunately we often want to define God's faithfulness on our own terms.

Yet if we have seen anything thus far in the Devotional Guide this week...God's ways are not (automatically) our ways (cf. merciful and gracious). So what makes us think our view of how God should be faithful (which usually factors in our comfort) is valid? This is not to say there is nothing good about us (far from it – and more next week). But it is to say we need to humbly seek how God is faithful and be content with it – not wish for what we want. Remember, God has always moved first...

Pray: Pray for King Solomon Christian Service Camp; a mission New Life supports. Ask God to increase your faithfulness towards Him. Pray for Bob Griffin and Larry Hayes, New Life's elders; pray they will continue to faithfully follow God. Pray for protection from sin and strength during times of testing.

Respond:

If God removed all difficulties from your life, what would you learn? Would you be shaped into Christlikeness? Would you repeat the same mistakes and then cry out again for God to be "faithful" and remember you?

What great things has God done for you lately (how has He been faithful)?

Saturday: Remember... Won't Forget Sin?

Read: Exodus 34:6-7 ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

Reflect:

When we consider our own sin...when we really pray for God's Holy Spirit to shed light on the dark parts of our lives and hearts...we cannot help but be so appreciative of the fact and remember (realize) God has indeed acted first.

When we consider how our sinful choices impact others (in a negative way) for whom we want the best...it is so humbling. How can we truly be forgiven if our bad choices negatively impact others – sometimes for years to come? Let God take care of that (cf. merciful, gracious, slow to anger, et al).

On one hand v7 seems to say those who follow behind us (i.e., children) will reap the "rewards" of our sin. Yet that is at odds with other passages in God's Word (cf. Mic7:18-19; Deut24:16; Jer31:29-30; Ezek18:1-4). So what gives? Exodus 20:5 says God visits the iniquity of fathers (and mothers) upon only the children who follow the example of their parents. This certainly seems to coincide with grace and mercy does it not? Furthermore, it has been suggested the phrase "third and fourth generation" is a Semitic (Jewish) phrase denoting continuity, not an equation for figuring out how far sin will persist. Remember, God has always moved first...

Respond:

Obviously it is difficult for children to not follow in the steps of their parents – this is why the Holy Spirit (e.g., Gal5) is so vital.

Is there a sin for which you think you are not forgiven? If so why? Does this match up with the Bible (cf. Ps103)?

Pray: Pray for the National Missionary Convention; a mission New Life supports. Pray for Ed Asbury, Keith Krause, and Mike Haag, deacons at New Life; pray they are shaped by God's forgiveness. Pray our worship tomorrow at the Church Building. Thank God for the comfort we can receive in knowing our sins are forgiven.

What Do We Know About God?

January 24 – 30

"An unknown God can be neither trusted, served, nor worshipped..."

- (Arthur Pink in *The Image of God* by Mark J. Mangano, p23)

That is quite a profound statement. And what I just typed is a drastic understatement. Let's ponder the short quote for just a bit now (the one by Pink, not me).

Creation proclaims God's existence (Ps19). So why do so many people not worship Him?

- Could it be because they have suppressed the truth (cf. Rom1)?
 - Yeah, but I think there is more to it than that – for some cases.
- Could it be because people think they know about God, but in reality they have a collection of random thoughts based on "facts" about God which are not from the Bible?
 - This seems reasonable – again, for some cases.
- Could it be because they do not trust Him?
 - Once again, this also seems reasonable – for some cases.

The reality is we cannot know for certain why so many people do not worship God. Yet another reality is we all know people who do not worship Him (have you asked them?).

This week we will look at Exodus 34:6-7. This is a significant passage because here God (The LORD – YHWH) reveals His name (cf. Exod33:19). This takes place after Moses asked "show me Your ways" (Exod33:13).

- One thing will be clear from the sermon – I am not going to tell you all there is to know about God. I cannot do it. But that's OK – no one can. If someone thinks they can they have just made an idol.
 - In other words, God cannot be exhaustively known. Any attempt to do so reduces Him. Not a good move...

Perhaps this is a solution to the question about people not worshipping God. Since creation makes it clear there is a God. And since 87% of the people in a 25 mile radius of the Church Building claim to believe in God...perhaps the reason so many of those 87% do not worship Him is because they think they have Him all figured out. However, the reality is they have settled for a cheap substitute of God. I do not blame them for not worshipping that. In other words, while claiming to know about God – He really remains "unknown" to them.

- Oh YHWH, that we may know more of You and Your ways...

Monday: Remember... Merciful

Read: Exodus 34:6-7 ⁶ The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness...

<p>Reflect: The background for this text is quite amazing. The Hebrew people had recently been brought out of Egypt by The LORD (YHWH) and were now in a covenant relationship with Him. They had received information on worship, the Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, etc. Then the “unthinkable” happened. They blatantly disobeyed God and worshipped a golden calf which was made by their own hands.</p> <p>Many lost their lives as a result of the idolatry (cf. Gen32:25-29), and when all the smoke finally cleared it was Moses and YHWH talking. During this conversation we learn a foundational truth about God – He is merciful. In fact, this adjective (with the possible exception of Ps112:4) is used only of God (cf. Exod34:6; Deut4:31; 2Chron30:9; Neh9:17,31; Ps78:38; 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 145:8; Joel2:13; Jonah4:2).</p> <p>To be merciful means “deep, tender feelings of compassion are awakened by the trouble, weakness, suffering, or vulnerability of another in need of help” (ISBE, 3:322). In other words, God does not like it when His children are entangled by sin. He wants to help. In fact He has helped. God has always moved first...</p>	<p>Respond: It seems people often want to get back at others who have wronged them, but what does God do (cf. Ps103:8-12)?</p> <p>A verb related to “merciful” shows we too can have mercy (cf. Ps103:13). To whom do you need to be merciful?</p> <p>Be honest, do you ever fear God’s mercy towards you will “run out?” Why? Why not?</p>
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Pray: Pray for Ryan Nelson and “33 Church” in Olathe; he is the latest “church planter” hired by the CEA. Thank God for four ways He has been merciful to you lately. Thank God for our time of worship together yesterday at the Church Building. Continue to pray for workers in God’s Kingdom (Mt9:36-38).

Tuesday: Remember... Gracious

Read: Exodus 34:6-7 ⁶ The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness...

<p>Reflect: Not only is YHWH “merciful,” He is also “gracious.” Gracious has been described as, “the dimension of divine activity that enables God to confront human indifference and rebellion with an inexhaustible capacity to forgive and to bless. God is gracious in action” (<i>Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible</i>, p898).</p> <p>There is a category of Christians typically referred to as “strong” Christians. While descriptors of this group vary, quite often they are looked up to by others. These “strong” Christians may be admired for their Bible knowledge, their acts of generosity, the wisdom they share in a timely manner, etc.</p> <p>Yet even the “strongest” of Christians reveals himself (or herself) to be nothing more than a fool if they think they are earning God’s favor. Even if (and this is impossible) a person became a Christian and never sinned the rest of their life (again, impossible), this does not negate the fact God was gracious to them first. No matter how instep we are with God now...there was a time when we (more or less) ignored Him. Yet He was still gracious toward us. God has always moved first...</p>	<p>Respond: When was the last time you thought you were earning God’s favor?</p> <p>Read Nehemiah 9. Allow yourself to be astounded by God’s grace (esp. vs17, 31).</p> <p>Who has wronged you lately? In other words, towards whom ought you be gracious?</p>
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Pray: Pray for God to be at work at LCS, MCC, and OCC; missions we support. Confess to God any tendency you have towards thinking you are earning His favor based on what you do – ask the Holy Spirit to release you from that thinking. Continue to pray for the people of Haiti. Continue to pray for God’s people to have boldness to speak for Him (Acts4:29).

Wednesday: Remember... Slow to Anger

Read: Exodus 34:6-7 ⁶ The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness...

<p>Reflect: I know several people who struggle with a bad temper. I do not think they want to struggle with it...but the fact they do is a reality. Truth be known, I had a bad temper in the past as well. Truth be known...I still get upset (though not in the same ways, nor as quickly). A deeper truth be known – sometimes it “feels good” to be upset (more on that next week I hope).</p> <p>In addition to God’s grace and looking at what the Bible says about losing one’s temper (e.g., Prov14:29; 15:18; 16:32), one of the things which really helped me to submit more of my temper to God was observing others when they lost theirs. Honestly...they looked foolish. By default I assumed the same was true of me. Sometimes seeing what is “ugly” in others can be a motivator for us to change (because we now know a former blind spot).</p> <p>Fortunately God’s nature is to be slow to anger. The “literal” meaning of the phrase is “long of nose.” Confused? If someone has a short nose, which often means it is broader, when they are upset their nostrils will (at times) flare in and out. Conversely, if someone has a long nose you cannot really tell if they are upset by looking at it (yet in the case of humans you can tell by the flushing of their skin). Fortunately God has been patient with you (e.g., Eph4:32). God has always moved first...</p>	<p>Respond: When was the last time you got upset? What was it about?</p> <p>Thinking back to “merciful” on Monday – have you ever wanted someone to be paid back for how they wronged you?</p> <p>If you were God, would you have struck you down for the sins you’ve committed by now?</p> <p>Read and joyfully pray over 2Pet3:9.</p>
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Pray: Pray for Shiloh Home of Hope and Emporia Christian Schools. Thank God for His patience with you. Thank God for being “slow to anger” towards a neighbor, friend, or coworker who needs to know Jesus. Continue to pray for God’s Word to spread rapidly (2Thess3:1).

Thursday: Remember... Steadfast Love

Read: Exodus 34:6-7 ⁶ The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness...

<p>Reflect: The Hebrew word <i>hesed</i> is common in the Old Testament. It is frequently used to speak of God’s covenant love for His people. This is a love which never ends – God always keeps His end of the covenant.</p> <p>God’s <i>hesed</i> (i.e., steadfast love) is so amazing because it is uncaused and unmerited. We do nothing to earn it – He just loves us! This is quite humbling to ponder because far too often we love others if they reciprocate it in some way toward us. Yet God loves us just because He loves us. It has nothing to do with our performance (or lack of it), or what we know (or do not know), or anything else (e.g., Deut7:7-8). God loves because He IS love (1Jn4:7-11).</p> <p>Part of God’s <i>hesed</i> is protecting those who follow Him. David writes of this in the Psalter, but we must not impose our definition of protection on what God will do for us. Even while fleeing for his life David would praise YHWH for His <i>hesed</i> (e.g., Ps144:2; 31:7-8; 32:10; 40:11; 86:13). Yes, if it were not for YHWH’s <i>hesed</i> we would be utterly lost (e.g., Ps51:1-2; Ps130:1-4). God has always moved first...</p>	<p>Respond: Who, among humans, has been extremely loyal to you? Have you thanked them?</p> <p>Read Psalm 141; pray its words. Note especially v5 (use of <i>hesed</i>) and pray for a humble heart to accept correction from those who love you.</p> <p>Who have you failed to show <i>hesed</i> towards lately? Have you asked their forgiveness?</p>
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Pray: Pray for the ministry of Cookson Hills (a Christian Children’s home and mission New Life supports). Praise God for His *hesed* – try and sit still for at least two minutes and ponder it. Pray for Brent McCrory, the preaching minister at New Life Christian Church; pray he will be shaped by God’s *hesed*. Continue to pray for open doors to share God’s Word (Col4:2-6).