



RESILIENT

DEVOTIONAL

2024

BUILDING A LIFE THAT STANDS

Resilient

New Years Devotional 2024 by various authors

Colonial Woods Missionary Church

3240 Pine Grove Avenue, Port Huron, MI 48060

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from (1) the *Holy Bible, New International Version*[™]. NIV. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society All rights reserved.

Cover art and interior design by Chelsea Zalewski

www.cwmc.church

**"Put on the full armor of God
so that you can take your stand
against the devil's schemes."**

-Ephesians 6:11



Contents

1

Week 1- FOUNDATIONS OF A RESILIENT LIFE

- Day 1 DRESS FOR RESILIENCY by Pastor Phil Whetstone
- Day 2 FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST by Pastor Dale Rinke
- Day 3 SANDCASTLES by Pastor Brooke Weldon
- Day 4 CONSISTENT PRAYER by Reverend Tom + Brenda Seppo
- Day 5 RESTORATIVE WORSHIP by Pastor Matt Woodburn

2

Week 2- PERSEVERANCE IN TRIALS

- Day 1 ADVANCING THROUGH SUFFERING by Jerrell Jobe
- Day 2 A FORGE FOR PERSEVERANCE by Mike Schoettle
- Day 3 FIXING OUR EYES by Jeff Weldon
- Day 4 BABY STEPS by Pastor Rodney Arnold
- Day 5 COUNT IT ALL JOY! by Reverend Dr. Andrew Seppo

3

Week 3- THE ARMOR OF GOD

- Day 1 THE INVISIBLE BATTLE by Pastor Phil Whetstone
- Day 2 THE BELT OF TRUTH by Scott Crocker
- Day 3 GRAB THAT SHIELD by Erin Shakhmayeva
- Day 4 SHAMELESS AUDACITY by Pastor Bill Hossler
- Day 5 THE SWORD by Pastor Dwight Weber

4

Week 4- GROWING FORWARD

- Day 1 REMOVE AND REPLACE by Pastor Andrea Miller
- Day 2 FAITH THAT SHAPES (NOT SHAMES) by Calvin Bontrager
- Day 3 A JOURNEY FROM PAIN TO PURPOSE by Pastor Jeff Hossler
- Day 4 LIFE GIVING WORDS by Pastor Dan Hamrick
- Day 5 POINTED TOWARD HEAVEN by Pastor Josh Hossler

Week 1

Foundations of a Resilient Life

As we march into the new year, we want to begin this fresh chapter with a focus on the foundations of a resilient life. The Bible talks about building our lives on the rock of Jesus Christ rather than the sand of this world, so that when storms come, we can stand firm and not collapse.

In order to stand strong, we need to give special attention to what foundation we are building our lives on.

Reflect

If one were to look at my life (how I spend my time and resources, the things I talk and care about) what would they say my life is built on?

Dress for Resiliency

by Pastor Phil Whetstone

Read—Romans 13:13-14 & Colossians 3:12-17

Prayer—*Lord, I don't always put on the right clothing as I face people and tough situations. Forgive me for allowing life to determine how I view you. Today, help me to put on Jesus. Help me to practice the characteristics your word instructs.*

I was watching a morning financial show, and they had one of the members of the Federal Reserve as a guest. They peppered him with questions. They asked for insight on inflation, unemployment and of course, interest rates. They were looking for advance notice on what the Fed was going to do with the economy etc. His response struck me. "I have a very midwestern attitude," there is no such thing as bad weather...just poor clothing."

Translation? No matter what happens in life, be prepared. Or in another way, it's not so much what happens to you in life, it's how you prepare and how you respond. That little 5-minute interaction really hit me. As I pondered his outlook, I couldn't help but apply that into my life, my leadership, and yes, my Christian walk. My application was to be sure to tackle whatever comes with the right approach and attitude. Scripture tells us to *"Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ."* (Romans 13:14). Paul defines that further in Colossians 3:12-17 *"...as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive ... Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love... Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts... Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you...and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."*

Notice the characteristics with which he challenges us to "Clothe ourselves"- Humility, Kindness, Compassion, Gentleness, Patience, Forgiveness, & Gratitude. All impact how we approach others, ourselves and even God.

Amazing how these attitudes and expressions of the "Fruit of the Spirit" in our lives prepare us for the Resilient Life. I'm not sure how this may apply to you, but whatever the days have in store for you...be sure to dress appropriately.

Reflect—What trial or person in your life today is the Lord challenging you to "Clothe" appropriately?

Faith in Jesus Christ

by Pastor Dale Rinke

Read—Hebrews 11:1

Prayer—*God, I ask you to build in me an unshakeable faith in you Jesus Christ, so that my shield of faith can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the enemy, in the name of Jesus! Amen.*

Faith is foundational to living a resilient life in Jesus Christ. Faith is believing in what is not seen and being confident in our hope found in Jesus. It's believing in and leaning on God's promises fulfilled in Jesus. Not our own understanding, not what science tells, and certainly not what politicians or the news/social media tell us.

A strong faith is built by living a spirit-led, disciplined life. I know my faith and assurance in Jesus grows as I pursue him with all that I have and all that I am. Prayerful dependence on the Lord, plus daily intake of God's Word, worship, sharing the gospel, serving, giving, fasting, journaling, life-long learning, and perseverance are core to building and "taking-up" a shield of great faith. Vance Havner said it well, "The alternative to discipline is disaster."

Remember this, "...without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." (Hebrews 11:6).

Is your faith in Jesus Christ growing or is it flat, dull, or stalled? Some of us grew in faith when we came to Christ, but now have plateaued. Pursuing Jesus through the disciplines maybe the answer or breakthrough that you have been looking for. Our faith should call us to action by not just speaking Jesus but being Jesus. (James 2:18-19)

Faith is foundational to living the resilient life in Jesus Christ.

Reflect—What have you placed your faith in? Some of us place our trust and hope in our job, money, lifestyle, beauty, image, and _____. The truth is that only Jesus can deliver on the good life promise!

Sandcastles

by Pastor Brooke Palmer

Read—Matthew 7: 24-29

Prayer—*Father, today help me to hear from you and identify one area of my day in and day out life that I am not building on a strong foundation rooted in your word. Thank you for what you will help me to see today. Amen.*

It wasn't all that long ago that we were sitting out at the beach along Lake Huron, listening to the waves and feeling the sun and the sand on our skin. I remember doing that years ago, when one of my my daughters were very young. She would love to build sandcastles near the shore, because if she was close enough to the water, she could construct an entire system of rivers and a large moat that would fill with water from the lake making for a much better, and much messier, experience. The problem with building a sandcastle too close to the shore, however, is you never know when a large wave may come crashing to shore, destroying the hours of work on a castle in the sand in an instant.

Isn't the same thing true with our journey following Jesus? When we build our lives, even one portion of it, on our own knowledge, understanding, opinions or agendas we are just like my young daughter risking her hours of work in the sand too close to the shoreline. All too often our own understandings of things are clouded by our fickle feelings or the words we hear from others around us, and those feelings and outside voices become louder than the Word of God. They are the sandy foundation that Jesus refers to in today's passage, and the house that comes down with a great crash isn't a harmless sandcastle, but rather our relationships, our finances, our peace, or our joy. It's only when we seek after and apply the Word of God first and foremost in our lives that we stand on a solid foundation and are ready to weather any surprise waves that come crashing in.

Reflect—What area of my life is not standing on a firm foundation? Finances? Relationships? Addictions? Conflicts? Something else? Identify one of these areas and begin to study how God's word can help transform that aspect of your life in the days ahead.

Consistent Prayer

by Reverend Tom and Brenda Seppo

Read—Luke 18:1-8

Prayer—*Lord, help me to trust you as I pray for _____, that your purpose will be accomplished.*

I know a woman who has been praying for her son, who had drifted far from God. She asked many friends to pray and stand with her for his salvation. She spent 25 years praying for him and wouldn't give up. Although she became discouraged many times, she knew ultimately her part was to continue to pray for God to save and transform her son. We just received word that he has asked Jesus to come into his life. He said that something has been tugging at his heart his whole life and that awareness had to mean something. After going through many hardships, he realized that God had been working on him for the last 12 months. He had a void that he could not fill. He finally understood it was Jesus! While watching the film, *"I Can Only Imagine"* at home, he cried for hours, releasing his pain and embracing God's purpose for his life.

Wow! That mother was blessed beyond measure!

You may be facing a similar situation that is deeply concerning to you. You may have been praying for years, and have not seen a breakthrough yet. Just like the persistent widow in this passage (and my friend), continue to ask God to intervene in His time and in His way. People may let you down or disappoint you, but God will *"never leave you or forsake you"* (Deuteronomy 31:8). Be faithful to believe His promises, (John 14:14 *"You may ask Me for anything in My name, and I will do it."*), and don't get discouraged. Then, stand in faith, do not waver, and see what God will do! Remember, the battle is not ours - it is the Lord's (2 Chronicles 20:15)!

Reflect—What area or situation in your life do you need to release to the Lord, and trust Him to work it out?

Restorative Worship

by Pastor Matt Woodburn

Read—Romans 12:1

Prayer —*Father, please remind me to be aware of Your revelation in my life. May I know You more so I can be in awe of You. May I live a resilient life marked by consistent pure worship of You, because You are worthy.*

The God of the Bible is described differently than any other god or family of gods in any other religion. Every other religion asks people to earn their way to heaven through adhering to rules and regulations. Our God saves by grace (the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus) and then asks us to put our faith in that story. It is not what we do, but what He has done for us. Worship is a crucial aspect of that story.

The Greek pantheon of gods has made its way into a variety of media. Readers, movie buffs, and gamers can, if they have interacted with the stories of these gods, tell you one important thing. The gods need the worship of human beings. When humans fail to worship them, the gods are weakened and lash out. This is not our God! Our God generously reveals Himself to us. We are in awe of Him. Our God doesn't need our worship. Through His love for us, He created us to be in a relationship with Him. Not because He was a lonely God or a God desiring to boss His children around. He is a loving God. We get to worship Him. Worship for the Christian is less like etiquette at a party and more like the first time you experience the vastness of an ocean or the heights of a mountain range. When we worship, we are not adding to God, but declaring what we are seeing.

Reflect— When you worship God, are you concerned more with how the experience makes you feel or how the experience centers around who God is?

Week 2

Perseverance Through Trials

The challenging thing about this life on earth is that it has, well, challenges. Some people have the wrong idea that once they come to faith in Jesus, that everything will become easy. But Jesus says in John 16:33, "*In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*"

So in order to be RESILIENT, we are going to need to adjust our mindset and recognize that the trials we go through in this world are going to come, and that often the difficult things we go through are what shape our character and growth the most.

Reflect

What is a current trial or challenge I am in? How can I adjust my mindset towards it today and submit it to Christ?

Advancing through Suffering

by Jerrell Jobe

Read—Philippians 1:12-18; 2 Corinthians 11:23-28

Prayer —*God, help me to see all my life from your perspective, especially the parts I don't like...*

Years ago in a survey, thousands of people were asked to identify a season in life where they experienced the greatest personal and spiritual growth. The responses were surprising. While things like powerful church services, worship experiences, and mission trips all made the list, they weren't the most frequent response. The number one answer was a season of suffering.

People shared how they grew more during times of loss, pain, crisis, and suffering than they did at any other time. It's a reality many of us know to be true, but the truth most of us would like to forget during difficult times. Paul's reflection is a helpful reminder.

The Apostle says, "Now I want you to know that what has happened to me..." What had happened to him? Sleepless nights, deprived of food, warmth, and clothing. He had been shipwrecked, hungry, with thirst, beaten, and imprisoned. Talking about a portfolio of hardships and suffering!

Paul then expounds, that these things have "actually served to advance the gospel."

These were hard times, yet they produced something of great value. The Greek word for "advance" speaks of "a person on a journey" or "a pioneer cutting their way through the brushwood." It's a military term for "blazing a trail before an army." In short, Paul contends that with each step during these seasons, we can progress down the path toward Christ-like transformation. Trials and suffering are hard, but if we persevere, our faith will advance, our characters will be forged, and our relationship with Christ will grow deeper.

Reflect— Is there a circumstance in which you're struggling? Ask God to show you how it is being used to "advance" His purpose in your life.

A Forge for Perseverance

by Mike Schoettle

Read—James 1:2-4

Prayer—*Heavenly Father, thank You for who You are and everything You do for me. In the midst of my trials, I turn to You, seeking the strength to endure with steadfast perseverance. Fortify my heart with Your love and forge in me a resilient spirit as I walk through these trials. I give You all glory and honor in Your powerful and wonderful name, in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

Have you ever observed a blacksmith skillfully shaping a horseshoe or a sword? If you have, the vivid image of the glowing, red-hot metal and the resounding clang of the blacksmith's hammer might still be etched in your memory. The process at play here is known as: a meticulous sequence comprising heating, holding, hitting, and shaping. These steps are not merely technical; they are the essence of transforming a piece of metal into something robust and enduring. Without this intentional forging, the metal wouldn't be equipped to fulfill its purpose.

Consider the potential impact on a horse's well-being if a horseshoe is improperly forged or the peril of wielding a poorly crafted sword in battle. The same principle applies to our lives - just as a blacksmith subjects metal to intense heat to mold it, the Lord allows us to undergo trials to shape our very being and character. In the midst of challenges, our instinct might be to escape the heat, yet it is crucial to embrace these trials with joy. In forging our spiritual resilience, the Lord, much like the blacksmith, steadfastly holds us through the refining process. It may be painful, but within that discomfort, we are being strengthened by His unwavering love and grace.

It's through the development of perseverance that our faith flourishes, echoing the sentiment found in the James 1:4 (NASB), we become perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. Just as a meticulously forged piece of metal emerges resilient and fit for its purpose, we do the same through trials, growing in faith and character, ultimately becoming whole in the arms of the Lord.

Reflect— What can you do to consider it joy and rely more on God when you are facing trials? What does your joy look like?

Fixing Our Eyes

by Jeff Weldon

Read—Hebrews 12:1-13

Prayer—*Father, thank you for this time with You. Persevering through trials is hard. I admit that I don't always get it right. Reveal to me Your way, and give me the courage to follow it. Amen.*

The Parks Half-Marathon is a beautiful course, rolling & twisting through the shady forests of the county park system in Montgomery County, MD. It was my first ever race, in 2021, and it was going well. I maintained an easy, steady pace, and took part in the chatter of the runners around me. Until mile 9. In front of me was a hill that I learned was "affectionately" called "The Silencer". The pleasant conversations came to an end, as runners labored up the long, steep hill. I was 9 miles into my first race. I was tired. And I had never run a hill like that!

But I had a pacer I was running with. And so, after she gave some encouraging words, I fixed my eyes on her, and followed her up the hill. She set the pace. She blazed the course. And I followed, step by step – until we reached the summit, and blissfully began to run Downhill!

In Hebrews 12, the author encourages us to run the race of life with perseverance by "fixing our eyes" on Jesus – the ultimate pacer. He is the pioneer of our faith, going before us in all things. He's already endured the cross, paying the debt we could never afford. And He's seated with the Father, making our relationship with God right again. And, by the way – He loves you more than you'll ever imagine.

When we run into the trials of life, it's easy to try & overcome them by our own strength. Or crumble in anxiety & worry. Or try to escape by distracting ourselves with addictions, Amazon & social media. But there's hope – because Jesus provides a better way. Fix your eyes on Him. Allow Him to strengthen your arms & knees. And follow Him up the hill, step by step.

Reflect— What is your "go to" response when you run into trials? What would it take for you to make a commitment to lay aside unhealthy, unhelpful habits, and instead fix your eyes on Jesus?

Baby Steps

by Pastor Rodney Arnold

Read—Zechariah 4:10

Prayer —*Lord, please help me to rejoice at even the smallest steps of work that has begun, even when my impatience demands immediate relief.*

Building my house ten years ago tested my patience more than anything I have experienced. As we say in the South, "It was enough to make a preacher cuss." (Don't worry, I didn't!) Failed inspections, material shortages, and a snowstorm culminated in months of delays and thousands of added dollars, all while I was essentially homeless with a wife and new-born baby.

In hindsight, this was a first-world problem to say the least. But in the moment, there were days that the weight added up quickly. It seemed that almost daily I was losing my temper and testimony with the contractor. Other times it seemed that almost daily I was letting down my family or getting too distracted from my calling as a pastor.

I had a breakthrough one day when the Lord smacked me in the face with this verse: "Do not despise these small beginnings, for the LORD rejoices to see the work begin..." It was as if the Holy Spirit shouted these words to me, "If I can rejoice at simply seeing the work begin, why won't you rejoice in the small things, too?!"

In my feelings of defeat, I was missing the baby steps of spiritual openness the contractor was showing when I wasn't being demanding, the small acts of grace my wife was showing on a daily basis as she held our family together, and the baby steps of growth that I experienced as my perseverance and faith were tested.

In the midst of your trial – be it trivial as mine was or evermore so serious – there will be many opportunities to stop and rejoice that the work has begun, even if it seems the finished work is far off in the future. In those moments, rejoice at the grace you have been able to show or the grace that has been shown to you, even if it seems that it is not enough yet to complete the work. Just start by rejoicing that the work has begun.

Reflect— Where do you see the Lord beginning the work of grace in your trial or uncertainty? How can you pause and rejoice in this moment that the work has begun and is underway?

Count it All Joy!

by Rev. Dr. Andrew Seppo

Read—James 1:2-12

Prayer —*Lord, give us a heavenly perspective to view our current, trials, difficult days, and challenges as opportunities to persevere and mature our faith.*

Going through difficult situations is never a popular topic. But Scripture tells us not only are trials essential for us to experience maturity and growth, but we're actually supposed to count it all joy when we meet trials (James 1:2). Just as we train our physical bodies through exercise, we can't gain strength spiritually without meeting resistance and bearing the burden of a heavy load.

Our spiritual maturity cannot deepen without the resistance of trials. A mature Christian is a person who reflects the nature of the Spirit of God and the evidence of the Spirit is "love, **JOY**, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

Joy isn't an emotion. It isn't dependent on your current situation, good or bad. Joy is an unshakable trust that no matter what, God will be faithful to sustain us through every high and low that life can throw at us. God is always calling us into deeper levels of trust. Everyday is an opportunity for our faith to grow, and further cement Jesus as our source of Joy and contentment in the highs of life and, especially, in the lows.

Reflect— What are some areas in your life where you're constantly complaining about and frustrated with? Write them down, and then spend time in prayer, inviting God into those trials to find Joy where there once was misery and despair.

Week 3

The Armor of God

Our theme verse for this series and devotional is Ephesians 6:11 which says, "*Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your **stand** against the devil's schemes.*"

If we are going to build a life that stands, then we need to dig deeper into this passage. The entire chapter of Ephesians 6 talks about the armor of God and so this week, we are going to focus in on different pieces of our armor and how we can intentionally dress ourselves with it to prepare for the attacks of the enemy.

Reflect

Read through Ephesians 6:10-20. Write down your observations from this chapter as we begin this week's focus.

The Invisible Battle

by Pastor Phil Whetstone

Read—Ephesians 6:1-13; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

Prayer—*God, help give me spiritual eyes to see where my battles are actually being fought.*

I love how God's Word uses descriptive words and phrases. One of those is *"take your stand."* (Ephesians 6:11). Paul uses that concept several times in this passage and the idea comes from a Greco Roman wrestling. Like a wrestler who is getting ready to dig in on an opponent, we need to get ready to take on our opponent, the enemy of our soul, that is the devil.

However, what is so hard about that battle is that you can't see your enemy. Paul says that we are in a battle, at war, but the struggle you are in isn't the neighbor who's yelling or even the crazy culture you are living in. Our real struggle is a battle happening on a different level, a spiritual level.

That's why with all the different elements that Paul mentions in this passage, he brings it right back to the unseen weaponry at our disposal which is **prayer**. He asks us no less than four times to pray: Pray in the Spirit (being led by God), pray for other Christians, pray for Him (the one delivering the message) and even pray for courage and boldness. Paul recognizes that to do battle means to fight where the real battle is taking place.

Think about that the next time you have a person swearing at you, or acting in a wrong manner, or even you are struggling with thoughts, emotions, etc. Go to battle, and begin to engage, and take your stand!

Reflect— Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. What do you learn about the "weapons " at our disposal? How can you apply this to your life?

Reflect— Read Ephesians 6:10-20. What are the different tools at our disposal that stick out to you?

The Belt of Truth

by Scott M. Crocker

Read—Ephesians 6:14

Prayer —*Father, I thank you that you have given us your Word, which is the ultimate truth. Thank you that it is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*

In our modern age, belts are made to keep our pants from falling down or, in some cases, they are designed to be a fashion accessory. But in Roman times, a belt meant so much more, especially for soldiers preparing for battle.

Under their armor, a Roman soldier would wear a tunic, which was common for their culture. These tunics, which were long, flowing cloaks, would get in the way when a soldier was required to run in battle. In order to prevent them from getting tripped up, they would take the corners of their tunic and fold it up under their belt so they could be free to run unencumbered. The belt served additional purposes as it also secured the breastplate and held a soldier's sword.

A Roman soldier attempting to enter a battle without their belt meant they would be unprotected, they would frequently get tripped up and they would have no place to store their weapons to battle their enemies.

So it is for Christians who attempt to navigate our world without the Bible, God's truth, as our guide. With the advent of modern technology like artificial intelligence, we can be exposed to things that are untrue without even realizing it. The Bible, God's love letter to us, provides the real truth about how God feels about us, provides direction on how we are to relate to other people and explains the role that we can play in God's plan to redeem all of his creation. It is not "fake news." It is real. It is timeless. And it is true.

Reflect— What are ways that you can more regularly incorporate the reading and study of God's Word into your daily routine? What forms of entertainment or social media can you cut back on in order to spend more time reflecting about God's truths?

Grab that Shield

by Erin Shakhmayeva

Read—1 John 5:4

Prayer —*Help us Lord, to be overcomers when faced with difficult trials and attacks, by holding onto and not letting go of our shield of Faith.*

Throughout history shields have traditionally been made from wood, animal hides, metal, and even bamboo. But regardless of their composition, the purpose of a shield has always been the same: to protect from attack.

In the same way, Paul encourages us in Ephesians to take up the shield of faith in order to fend off the flaming arrows of the evil one. Notice that Paul says to “take up.” That indicates an action on our part. We need to grab hold of and keep holding on to our shields of faith. It’s hard to guard yourself in battle if your shield is lying dusty on a shelf. So how do we do that?

Taking up the shield of faith means knowing what we believe, and then standing firm on that. We can do this by spending time in the Word of God, praying, and studying God’s character and goodness. Then we’ll have taken up our shields. But we need to keep holding on to that shield. If a soldier throws his shield down in the middle of a battle, he’ll be unprotected from the enemy’s blows.

Keep holding on to your shield by making your faith-building exercises a daily practice. Then, when attacks of fear, frustration, and doubt come at you, you’ll be able to fend them off because you’re holding onto your shield of faith.

Be an overcomer, and grab that shield!

Reflect— What are ways that you can more regularly incorporate the reading and study of God’s Word into your daily routine? What forms of entertainment or social media can you cut back on in order to spend more time reflecting about God’s truths?

Shameless Audacity Praying

by Reverend Dr. Bill Hossler

Read—Ephesians 6:18; Luke 11:5-8

Prayer —*Lord, please help me pray with tenacity and fervor for the things that further your Kingdom.*

Steadfastness in our Christian walk must include "steadfast praying." Such praying is with a sensitivity to what the Spirit is saying to us about what we need to pray for - this ability improves with usage, but such praying implies a tenacity and persistence in pursuing the focus of our prayers. Jesus tells two stories about the attitude we need to possess in praying. These stories are not found in the "Lord's Prayer" or in the prayer of John 17, but in two rather unusual stories.

Luke 11 tells about a man who came to a friend at night asking for some bread because he had some unexpected visitors – there were no 24/7 stores at the time. The other one was about a widow who was being denied justice. In both stories Jesus emphasized a dogged determination to get what we came for. In Luke 18:18 it says, *"Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up."* I am drawn to the NIV wording in Luke 11:8 which says, *"yet because of your **shameless audacity** he will surely get up and give you as much as you need."* I would not even consider this type of praying if Jesus had not told us to pray this way – this is an "in your face" type praying. The Living Bible uses the word "persistence" in successful praying.

The Holy Spirit is desperately concerned with our continued Christian walk and is the promised One to come along side to help us, but the Holy Spirit does not do for us what we need to do for ourselves. Paul reminds the Ephesian Church in Eph 6:18 *"Pray all the time. Ask God for anything in line with the Holy Spirit's wishes. Plead with him, reminding him of your needs, and keep praying earnestly for all Christians everywhere."*

Reflect— For what am I praying with "shameless audacity" for things on my prayer list?

The Sword

by Pastor Dwight Weber

Read—Ephesians 6:17

Prayer —*Father, would you give me the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that I may know You better. I pray that the eyes of my heart may be enlightened so that I may know the hope to which You have called me, and Your great power that is in me because of You.*

What does Matthew 4:4 have in common with the sword of the Spirit, today's focus? Jesus' first public act was to be baptized by John, and then the Holy Spirit (4:1) led Jesus into the wilderness, a place apart from everyone to be tempted by Satan himself, face to face. How does Jesus defend Himself from these attacks on who He is, His calling, His power, and His identity? Not with physical power, even though He is the greatest power force in the universe; not with intellect, even though He is truth and the author of all truth. He defends Himself by quoting the words of scripture. The Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit and written in the scriptures given to man. Each temptation is responded directly to by a simple passage that relates to the appropriate response. Talk about a "mic drop" moment. Look how Satan responds: *"Then the devil left him."* (v. 11)

Jesus models for us resilience. He shows us how to stand our ground when temptation comes, not if temptation comes, but when temptation comes. In Ephesians 6:17, Paul instructs us on how we are to stand against the schemes of the devil. The same devil who came to Jesus and attacked His calling, provision, identity, and power. Paul makes it clear that God has given us protective equipment, but He has also given us the offensive tools to defeat Satan when he comes at us in temptation, doubt, and discouragement. Ephesians 6:17, *"Take up the helmet of Salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."*

Jesus used the scripture to defeat the tempter, and so must we. The big question is, do you know the words of God that speak to your temptations, identity attacks, or Satan's word of discouragement? How do the scriptures speak to your challenge?

Reflect— Take a few minutes and identify the top three to five temptations Satan throws at you. Then spend time identifying what God's word already says about your issues in scripture, and when Satan whispers in your ear... read those lines back to him... out loud.

Week 4

Growing Forward

As we launch into the next portion of the year, we want to be intentional about continuing our growth in the days ahead. Growth almost never happens without intentionality, so how are you intentionally fostering growth in your life?

Whether it's healing through past hurts, living in community, serving, practicing gratitude, or just living with purpose; there are many ways that growth continues to develop in the life of a believer.

Reflect

How are you going to intentionally foster growth in the days ahead?
Ask the Lord and then reflect on what that should look like as you launch into the next portion of 2024.

Remove + Replace

by Pastor Andrea Miller

Read—Ephesians 4:17-5:4, Colossians 3:15-17

Prayer —*Jesus, thank you for the forgiveness You extend to us. Help me now to learn from Your Word what gratitude can do. Amen.*

I like mugs. They can hold tea, coffee, icecream, soup, with fun sayings or something inspirational—obviously they're so diverse and multifunctional! However, my mug "collection" has grown to the extent that my husband has put a rule into effect: before I can add one, I must remove one. (Sometimes there are exceptions, thankfully and seasonal mugs don't count!) Besides the bonus of removing clutter, it's also made me reflect: what meaning does a mug hold for me? Do I want to "remove" this one? Will I miss it? Is there a benefit to hanging onto it? Am I thankful for it?

In Ephesians the apostle Paul speaks about removing habits of talk or treatment of others that aren't honorable to the new life Jesus has to offer us, but to replace it with something better that does. We see this happen three times in this passage, and the first is in verse 29—"No foul language is to come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear." The second one is in verses 31-32, to remove bitterness, anger, and wrath, and to instead be kind, compassionate, and forgiving one another just as God forgave us in Christ. A few verses later, Paul continues one more time in chapter 5 to say that there should be no more coarse, foolish, or crude joking, but to give thanks instead. Giving thanks is the alternative to hurtful words or thoughtless comments. The more I read these three segments, the more I see the life of gratitude Paul encourages us to have. When would someone not be thankful for receiving grace or encouragement? What could be more important than extending forgiveness to others because we're grateful for the sacrifice of Jesus and our relationship with Him? Could giving thanks turn around a conversation that's about to go sideways?

You could totally accuse me of thinking too deeply about my mugs, but humor me here. What would happen in our lives if we replaced the clutter of bitterness, anger, and thoughtless words with thanksgiving to make us more like Jesus, in word and deed? How can we alter our lives to live in gratitude, to transform us more into His likeness? What transformation could happen in us?

Reflect—What can you "remove and replace" with gratitude, so that Jesus is glorified in you and seen through you? _____

Faith That Shapes (not shames)

by Calvin Bontrager

Read—Hebrews 11:1

Prayer—*Lord, thanks for truths that set me free. Reveal one now, I pray!*

Hebrews 11:1 is likely the most ambiguous verse in the Bible. "Faith", this powerful thing that moves mountains but we are often so unclear about what it actually means. Do I muster it up with singing? Do I pray for it? It is just something inside me that I have to figure out how to tap into? Is it based inside me or God? Then there is the reality that when I really feel I need faith the most and I am broken or discouraged and defeated, it is nowhere to be found. All of this kind of thinking is what I call a misunderstanding of what faith actually is. It is the understanding that shames us but never shapes our reality.

Today I am going to give you the definition of faith that shapes reality and will allow you to grow and persistently gain ground no matter what you are facing. It is super simple so hold on. Once you see it you will be a powerful person of faith based on decisions and choices NOT FEELINGS.

FAITH...(The substance of things hoped for) so... when I begin to add substance to the things that I hope for.... (the evidence of things unseen) THEN I begin to see the evidence of the things that were hidden before I added the substance.

That's it! Faith is the action I am willing to apply toward the things that I hope for and once I start I then begin to see the results of what was unseen before I applied my efforts. Want faith that moves mountains? Get a shovel and start scooping. Soon others will be scooping and excavators will show up and dozers will move in and your faith will see the mountain move.

Reflect— Am I willing to add substance in the direction I believe God is moving me and not sit around feeling bad that I don't have enough faith?

A Journey from Pain to Purpose

by Pastor Jeff Hossler

Read—2 Corinthians 1:3-5

Prayer—*God, please bring healing to our hurts so that we can be better used by you.*

I can still vividly remember that moment when a ministry leader challenged a room full of us college students to move from pain to purpose. He said that we could hold on to the hurt and pain in our past or we could allow God to bring healing and use it for His purposes. I was dealing with the pain of regret over some choices that I had made, and I was struggling to move past that hurt and regret.

In that moment, I asked Jesus to heal my pain and I committed to allow Him to use it if He so chose to. I would love to be able to say that was the last time that took place in my life, but the truth is that there have been many moments where I've had to turn to Him to bring healing to my hurt and allow Him to use it for His purposes.

In 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 we see an incredible glimpse of God's heart. Paul tells us that "God is the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all of our troubles." Think about that. In all of our hurt, in all of our pain, God is right there bringing us comfort. He's not distant, He's with us!

But Paul moves on to tell us that as we allow God to comfort us and heal us, we can then be used by God in ways that we never would have been otherwise. God comforts us not just because He loves us but because He wants to use us as instruments of comfort to those around us. The same way He comforts us, He wants to use us to comfort others.

Maybe you have some hurts that are holding onto you. They might be of your own doing or they might be of someone else's doing. Whatever the case, God can bring healing and purpose if you'll let Him. He doesn't just heal our hurts, but He redeems and transforms them, using them for His purposes.

Reflect— Will you allow God to move you from pain to purpose? What hurts do you need to surrender to Him?

Life Giving Words

by Pastor Dan Hamrick

Read—Hebrews 10:24-25 (NLT)

Prayer—*Lord, help me be intentional as I encourage the people around me today.*

When I was a kid, I played baseball. I was never great, but I enjoyed being on a team and hanging out with the other kids. When you start playing baseball as a kid you first start in tee ball. It's where you put the ball on the tee and hit it from there. Once you mastered that you graduate to a pitching machine and then finally to having an actual person pitch. The year I moved up to an actual pitcher was my final year. It's not because I got hit by a pitch at least a dozen times that season, although that would have been a good reason. It was because the coach was so discouraging every time I got hit by the ball. Letting me know that I should have swung anyway or that I should have moved. The way he talked to us as players, and specifically me, as we were trying to learn this game and have fun doing it made this community, I was so excited to be a part of, no longer enjoyable.

The author of Hebrews says "Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near."

As believers we are called to live in community. And "showing up" is so important when living in community. But what stood out in this passage to me was the phrase "but encourage one another". We are all called to encourage one another. Showing up...yes! Pushing each other to be better...yes!! But, encouraging them when they are up and when they are down...THIS is what is missing so often.

In our world today we need encouragement. We need people who love Jesus and want to share Jesus with others by encouraging them in the way of the Lord. Living in community means that we don't give up on meeting with one another and encourage those who need it. And we all need it!

Reflect— Where is God calling you to be intentional in your encouragement this week? Where can you invest with your words or your smile to encourage others in the world around you as you do community with one another.

Pointed Toward Heaven

by Pastor Josh Hossler

Read—Philippians 3:12-14

Prayer—*Lord, as we move forward, empower me by your Holy Spirit to live a resilient life.*

Have you ever been driving a car, looked over at something for just a moment, and before you knew it you were feeling the rumble strips on the side of the road? I'm sure we've all been there. It's easy to get distracted and pulled off course!

The same thing can happen in life. Everything is great, our destination is set, then something happens and we get blown off course. We find ourselves up against the rumble strips, the guardrail or worse yet, in the ditch.

Paul was addressing the believers in Philippi, like us, they were being pulled in all sorts of directions. They were facing persecution. They were facing lack of provision. They were facing uncertainty of the future. In the midst of this, gives them the counsel they need. He tells them the "one thing" they need to know and do.

He doesn't tell them they'll be fine. He doesn't say, "Just put your head down and keep going." He doesn't say escape. He tells them this... Keep your feet pointed toward heaven! He reminds them, they are to wake up every morning and be reminded, that although this is where they reside, this is not their home.

God called him heavenward! This is where Paul's focus was. Everything he did was seen through and done through the lens of heaven. How will this bring glory to God in heaven? What impact will this have on eternity in heaven? Even though things aren't going the way I want them to now, my hope is in heaven.

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." Hebrews 12:1-2

Reflect—Are you living today with your feet pointed toward heaven?

Notes

RESILIENT

{ri-zil-yent} adjective *English*

the capacity of a person to maintain their core purpose and integrity in the face of challenging circumstances, the ability to not only overcome setbacks but to also move forward through our walk and relationship with Christ

It's a new year, and as a church we want to start 2024 building a life that is RESILIENT.

Life is going to have challenges, but as believers, we don't have to walk through those difficult times on our own. God has given us all that we need to be able to weather life's storms but it first requires that we build our foundation on Him.

Join us on this devotional journey as we learn the foundations of a resilient life so that no matter what comes our way, we can "STAND".



www.cwmc.church