

Forward

There are absolutely no shortcuts to acquiring the level of skill and consistency of an Olympic archer. Experts say it takes six to ten years of discipline, dedication, determination, and hard work to compete on the Olympic level. And as with any sport, you must have a “can do” attitude and put a tremendous amount of hours into practicing. But if a person’s dream is to become an Olympic archer, then none of that should be a problem.

Listen to the words of the Psalmist, “As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth” (Psalm 127:4 KJV). Children are like arrows in the hands of a mighty man! Why, of all the illustrations, would the Holy Spirit direct the psalmist to use this one? Because before the archer lets go of that arrow, he has done one thing and he has done it well – he has sighted his target. “The requisite to good archery hardest to acquire is utter concentration of thought and sight upon the object to be shot at -- this more particularly upon the precise point of letting go the arrow.” (Maurice Thompson, *The Witchery of Archery*, 1879, p.157) When the Olympic archer lets go of his arrow, he has done what it takes to make his shot. He has calculated the distance, the wind speed, and the elevation. And he has prepared his body and mind with strength and mental conditioning, all for the purpose of sending his arrow straight into the middle of the bulls-eye!

Parents, we are God’s archers and our children are God’s arrows. When we step up to the line and draw back our bows, our challenge is simple yet daunting. We must do everything within our ability to send our arrows squarely into the middle of the bulls-eye! The place where our children will hear from their Lord, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21). This challenge is not easy and it will take many years of tremendous discipline, dedication, determination, and hard work on our part.

It is our prayer that this collection of devotionals for the family entitled, “In Our Father’s Hands,” will assist you with that task. Use these devotionals for personal and family Bible study. But make no mistake; getting your family together every day will not be easy. There will be homework to do, dishes to clean, baths to be given, clothes to be folded, the list goes on and on. These are important things we do as parents. But don’t let the hustle and bustle of life keep you from being the parent that God has called you to be. Godly parenting takes a “can do” attitude and the willingness to put in the time. Are you the mighty man God is looking for?

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January

1

Daily Bible Reading: Genesis 1-2; Matthew 1

Humble beginnings

Devotional Text: Matthew 1:18-25

Close your eyes, and imagine you are living over 2,000 years ago. Your clothes are different, your shoes are different, and you have a donkey in the stable out back. You are the owner and keeper of an inn located in a little town called Bethlehem.

One dark, windy night, a young couple knocks on your door and asks you for a room. "I have no rooms available," you tell them. Then you notice the young woman is pregnant. You feel sorry for the couple, and you offer to let them stay in your stable. Later you learn the young woman had her baby, not just any baby: the child was Christ the Savior, God's Son. "Oh, no," you say. "Had I only known, I would have given you my room. I would have thrown a party in your honor!"

When you start to seek praise and honor for your accomplishments, or believe you haven't received the recognition you deserve, just remember this: Jesus, who is God's Son, our Lord of Lords, our mighty King, ruler of everything, and was with God from the beginning (John 1:1-4), didn't come to this earth for praise and glory. He didn't come with trumpets sounding. The red carpet was not rolled out. He came quietly and humbly, placed in a manger, fleeing from danger – not to receive recognition, but to die on a cross for our sins.

"She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

2

Daily Bible Reading: Genesis 3-4; Matthew 2

Do the right thing

Devotional Text: Genesis 4:1-8

(Read devotional text) Here we read about the two sons of Adam and Eve. What were their names? (Cain and Abel) Excellent! What kind of work did Abel do? (Keeper of the flock) And what kind of work did Cain do? (Tiller of the ground) That's exactly right. Both Cain and Abel offered sacrifices to God. Can you tell me what they were? (Cain offered the fruit of the ground and Abel offered the firstlings of his flock.) Very good, you were paying attention! Was God pleased with both of these sacrifices? (No, Abel's offering was acceptable but Cain's was not.)

Now, here's the last question. Why wasn't Cain's sacrifice pleasing in God's eyes? That's a little tougher question, isn't it?

The answer to that question becomes easier when you understand what IS acceptable to God, which is something Cain should have known himself. As we learn in 1 Samuel 15:22 and Jeremiah 7:23, the type of sacrifice acceptable to God is the person who obeys! Did Cain and Abel know what God required of them? You bet they did! Abel's offering was found acceptable because he did what was right in the sight of God. Without a doubt, God always lets you know what he wants from you, and he let Cain and Abel know what he wanted from them, as well. We know today because we have His written word, the Bible. We all have choices to make everyday. Will you do the right thing?

3

Daily Bible Reading: Genesis 5-6; Matthew 3

Doing God's will

Devotional Text: Matthew 3:13-17

Imagine you are standing on the banks of the Jordan River. You and many others from the area have come to hear a man called John the Baptist. As you listen to his words about repentance and baptism, you realize the need to obey God's commands. You and the others rush to confess your sins and be immersed in the Jordan River. Then, you see a man from a distance walking up to John the Baptist. John is excited to see the newcomer, but refuses to baptize Him. You ask those beside you, "Why won't he baptize this man? Isn't this baptism for all?" You hear this man speak of "fulfilling all righteousness," and once John agrees to baptize Him, a marvelous thing happens. The heavens open and the Spirit of God descends, lighting Him. Could this be? A tremendous voice announces from the heavens, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." Yes, this is the man John told you about! This man is Jesus! But what need did the Son of God have for repentance?

Jesus had no sins to be forgiven, but that's not why He was baptized. As Jesus said, He was baptized to "fulfill all righteousness." What does that mean? Simply, to do God's will. Although Jesus had no sin, He still obeyed God's will that all men should be baptized (Mark 16:16). Jesus showed his obedience to God and at the same time set a powerful example for us to follow. In what ways can you be obedient to God?



Discussion for the family:

For children: Discuss minding Mom & Dad (Colossians 3:20) or Loving your neighbor (Galatians 5:14).

For teens: Be ready to discuss baptism. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:4; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21)

1

Daily Bible Reading: Exodus 9–10; Matthew 21:33–22:14

The chosen few

Devotional Text: Matthew 22:1–14

Picture yourself at a school gym. Several kids are standing before the class surveying everyone. “Bobby,” one of them calls out. A kid named Bobby runs over to the other side. “Oh, pick me! Pick me!” you mutter under your breath. “Susan!” A little girl with long curly hair skips over to the other side. There’s not much time now. If they don’t pick you, it will be too late. You wait, longing to hear your name. You anxiously watch a short little kid in braces as his gaze moves from person to person. He smiles, laughs, then shakes his head at the many attempts from others to win his vote. Finally his eyes rest on you! Could this be it? Will you be the last one picked? The anticipation is killing you. His gaze moves on. “Oh no!” you say, “he’s not going to pick me!” Then with a flash he looks back at you and says your name! You’ve been chosen!

After waiting anxiously for so long, when we finally hear our name, we are so excited! We feel appreciated, validated, loved, admired and respected. Isn’t it a great feeling to be chosen? You bet it is! We would do just about anything to be chosen.

Did you know that God calls all of us to his team, but Jesus says in Matthew 22:14, “few are chosen.” Why? Why would He call us all to him and then not chose us? That’s easy to answer. There are a couple of conditions that must be met for us to be chosen. First, we must be willing to accept the invitation. If we do not accept, we won’t be chosen. Second, those who accept the invitation must then live by God’s word (Hebrews 12:14–17). If they don’t, then they, too, will be rejected. You have been offered the invitation. Will you accept it? Will you live by the word of God? If so, then you too can be among the chosen few!

2

Daily Bible Reading: Exodus 11–12; Matthew 22:15-46

Heart, soul & mind

Devotional Text: Matthew 22:34-40

During the time that Jesus walked the earth, there were many people that followed Him and loved Him deeply. There were also those that hated Him and wanted to do Him harm. Among those people were the Sadducees and Pharisees. Today we want to look at one such a time when a Pharisee sought to ask Jesus a question he thought He could not answer. His question was, "Of all the commandments in the law, which is the greatest?" This question was easy for Jesus to answer and it applies to us today just as it did way back then. Jesus quoted to the man Deuteronomy 6:5, which said, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND" (Matthew 22:37).

When you love God with all your heart, you are loving Him with all your thoughts, words and attitudes. When you love God with all your soul, you are loving Him with the eternal spirit that is within you. And when you love God with all your mind, you are loving Him with your intellect and will. Jesus teaches an important lesson - if you love God the way it is taught in the scriptures, then you will obey all His commands, and you will "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39).



Discussion for the family:

How can we seek to love God with our heart, soul and mind?

Heart - Colossians 4:6; Hebrews 12:1

Soul - John 4:24

Mind - Psalm 119:104; 2 Timothy 2:15

9

Daily Bible Reading: Deuteronomy 22-23; Luke 3:21-4:13

Tempted?

Devotional Text: Luke 4:1-13

Items you'll need: A clear glass of water , A water gun (hidden)

(Parents: Hold up the glass of water) See this glass of water? This is a special glass of water filled with the most wonderfully clean and pure tasting water you have ever had in your entire life. Now, close your eyes. Imagine that you are in the desert. You see before you an ocean of sand and nothing else as far as you can see in every direction. The sun is directly above your head, beating down on you. There is no shade anywhere to escape the sun. You are so hot that your hair is wet from the sweat. Your mouth is really, really dry. You can hardly swallow. You've never been so thirsty in all your life.

Now, open your eyes. How do you feel? Thirsty? Look at this water, this pure, clean, refreshing water. I'll bet you'd really like some water right now, wouldn't you? Who wants some water? (Parents: When they raise their hands, pull out the water gun and squirt them) Okay, who really wants some water? (Parents: Squirt them again; keep doing this until they stop raising their hands) When I offered you water, what was I doing? I was tempting you! I made you all feel really thirsty and then offered you water; but I didn't give you the water you were expecting, did I?

Jesus was tempted just like I tempted you, only He was tempted by the devil. The devil always tries to trick us into doing things that seem really cool, but are wrong. We have to read God's Word so we'll know what is right and wrong. We have to try, just like Jesus did to resist temptation.

"For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18).

10

Daily Bible Reading: Ruth 4; 1 Samuel 1; Luke 18:9-34

I'm the best!

Devotional Text: Luke 18:9-17

It was a beautiful, cool, breezy, spring day. Perfect for playing basketball, or at least a good game of HORSE. I would mention who I was playing and who won, but that's not important to the story. What I want to tell you about is the most amazing shot ever known to basketball...well...the most amazing shot I've ever made anyway. I was behind the basketball goal, aiming my shot at the branch hanging over the goal, planning for it to stop the ball and drop it straight in the goal. You know, your typical HORSE shot. What I got was much different. My ball was well short of the branch but caught the top of the backboard, causing the ball to bounce straight into the air. When it came down it landed right on top of the backboard, rested there a while, then dropped straight through the hoop! Everybody went crazy. I jumped up on a nearby stool and yelled out, "That's right, that's right, I'm the best!" No sooner had the words come out of my mouth, than the stool toppled over underneath me and I fell to the ground!

In our devotional text today, Jesus tells us a story about a Pharisee and a tax collector. The Pharisee bragged to God about how good he was. He wasn't humble. He saw himself as being better than others and only thanked God for not being like other men. The tax collector, however, approached God with a humble attitude. He realized that he was wrong and needed God more than anything. God forgave him because he admitted his sin. Over and over again the Bible teaches the same simple message it teaches us in Luke 18:14 - to live a life of humility. Sometimes it even takes a fall to remind us of those things!

"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

11

Daily Bible Reading: 1 Samuel 2 – 3; Luke 18:35-19:27

A wee little man

Devotional Text: Luke 19:1-10

Close your eyes and imagine that you live during the time of Jesus. The city you live in is beautiful! Filled with all kinds of trees, shrubs, and roses. As you begin to look around, you notice it is a wealthy city. You also notice that you are unlike other people. You are wealthy! But this doesn't make you happy because you notice the people hurrying by you are looking at you in disgust. You think, "Why would they look at you that way?" Then it hits you, "I'm a tax collector!"

OK, open your eyes. Who were you? Any guesses? You were Zacchaeus! Zacchaeus wasn't just any tax collector, he was the chief tax collector of a great center for taxation; Jericho. It's no wonder why the people looked at him the way they did. They didn't like him because he took their money! But our lesson isn't about the relationship that Zacchaeus had with the people of Jericho. It's about his relationship with Jesus. Remember the song? "Zacchaeus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he. He climbed up in a sycamore tree, the Savior for to see. As the Savior came walking by, He looked up in the tree. And He said, 'Zacchaeus, you come down from there!' For I'm going to your house today!" Let's see if we can learn something new from a story that is so familiar to us.



Discussion for the family:

It seems strange for a grown man to climb a tree to see Jesus. What can we learn from it? (Zacchaeus had a sincere desire to see Jesus.)

Who asked Zacchaeus to come down? (That's right, Jesus did.)

Why? (Because He came to save the lost! - Luke 19:10)

What can we learn from the story of Zacchaeus? (That Jesus loves us all! We in turn should show that same love to others.)

24

Daily Bible Reading: Job 7 – 9; 2 Corinthians 2:12-3:18

A sweet savor

Devotional Text: 2 Corinthians 2:14-17

How do you smell? Sweaty, stinky or sweet? Did you know that you can run ten miles, wear the same socks for a week, jump in a pile of mud and still come out smelling sweet to God? You can! Let's find out how!

In times of old, the sacrifices that were made to God were said to be a sweet savor unto Him. Like when Noah made a burnt offering to the Lord after he and his family left the ark (Genesis 8:21), or when Moses made a burnt offering per the Lord's instructions to set apart Aaron and his sons for a holy priesthood (Exodus 25:1; 29:1,18). These sacrifices were sweet savors to God. We, too, can be a sweet savor to God. Not as sacrifices like Noah or Moses made, but as Paul made.

(Read devotional text) When Noah and Moses followed God's instructions and made sacrifices to Him, it pleased God. Paul pleased God by following his instructions and spreading the good news of the gospel. The apostle Paul was a sincere servant of God whose only mission was to teach others the saving message of Christ. It was his actions and the message he preached that made him and those like him a sweet savor to God. So no matter how dirty, sweaty, or muddy we get, if we obey God's word and spread the good news of Christ, we too can be a sweet savor!

"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma" (Ephesians 5:1-2).

30

Daily Bible Reading: Job 20 – 21; 2 Corinthians 10:1-11:15

You Jerk-ified Twerp!

Devotional Text: 2 Corinthians 10:3-4

If someone at school were to call you a “Sludge-brain” or a “Goof-a-lous twerp”, what do you think your first reaction would be? Would you push them in the dirt? Would you call them a “Pimple poppin booger eater?” Too often, these are the typical responses to this kind of behavior. We don’t like to be made fun of, do we? So, if we are made fun of, we get mad and do the first childish thing that comes to mind. Now, I know what you’re thinking. “How am I childish, when I’m the one being made fun of? I’m just standing up for myself.” My question to you is, “Is that the way God teaches us to stand up for ourselves? With physical weapons and insults?” I don’t think so. Let’s look at our devotional text for the day.

(Read devotional text) Sound confusing? Paul is simply stating that as Christians, we are different. We do not use weapons of the flesh like name calling, lies or deceit, but we use spiritual weapons like the sword of the spirit, truth, righteousness, evangelism, faith and prayer (Ephesians 6:11-17).

We are to be different in every aspect of our lives - by the way we think, act and talk. So the next time someone says, “You Jerk-ified Twerp!” Hold up that shield of faith (Ephesians 6:16), and respond with the sword of the spirit (Ephesians 6:17)!



Discussion for the family:

What is the best way to respond to those who call us names or wrongfully accuse us? (Read Matthew 5:39)

1

Daily Bible Reading: Ezekiel 46 – 48; 2 Peter 1

Do you have the right ingredients?

Devotional Text: 2 Peter 1:5-7

(Parents: Prepare ahead of time the ingredients for your kids' favorite cookie recipe. Have them lying out somewhere so your children will be able to see them easily.) Do you know what all these ingredients make? They make your favorite cookie. Can you name each of the ingredients? (Parents: Let your children name the ingredients and talk about each of them and how they help make the cookie.) What if I told you that we were going to make some cookies with these ingredients. Would you be excited? Why are you so excited? I know, I know, because they are so delicious, and you want one, right?! But, what if we left some of the ingredients out, do you think they would taste as good? You're right! They wouldn't taste as good. Why is that? Because each ingredient does its job in making our perfect cookie. If we left one out, we would only have something that looks similar to our favorite cookies. But they wouldn't taste near as good!

Did you know that we are a lot like our favorite cookies? We are! Let's read our Bibles and find out. (Read devotional text) Did you catch the ingredients that Peter says makes up a Christian? What are they? (Parents: As you name each of the Christian ingredients, take time to talk about each one and how they make up a Godly person.) Let's name them together. The ingredients are: Faith (Belief in God,), moral excellence (courage to do right), knowledge (of God's will), self-control (mastering desires), perseverance (holding to your convictions, regardless of what your friends may say), godliness (loving God more than anyone or anything), brotherly kindness (loving your brother), and love (the ingredient that holds all the others together). Just like our cookies, without one of these ingredients, we are not the type of Christian that God wants us to be. Everyday, let's ask ourselves the question: "Do I have the right ingredients?" Now, who will help me make some cookies?! (Parents: Use this as an opportunity to spend quality time with your children, have them make the cookies.)

22

Daily Bible Reading: Habakkuk 2 - 3; Zephaniah 1; Revelation 15

The ultimate victory

Devotional Text: Revelation 15:2-4

In Revelation chapter 15, we see the martyrs standing beside a body of water. These are the ones mentioned in Revelation 6:9, the souls who had been “slain because of the word of God.” These are the lives taken by the Roman Empire during a terrible time of persecution.

So how is it that these Christians, who were tortured and maimed for the cause of Christ, called “victorious” (Revelation 15:2)? Have they not been slain? Aren’t they dead? You’re right! Rome managed to take their physical bodies, but they are victorious because their cause survived and they now have a home in heaven.

Is that good news for us? It’s great news! Because, no matter how our life is here on earth, we have a greater hope. We may be made fun of for the way we look or what we believe, but if we turn the other cheek, show God’s love, deny ourselves, persevere, keep the faith, and press on the prize, someday we will stand before God and sing praises unto His name. Someday we, too, will take part in that ultimate victory!

“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith” (1 John 5:4).