

Forward

As peculiar as it may sound, the intent of this book is to get you to read another book. Herein is found a schedule to take the reader through the entire Bible in a year's time. Each day presents an Old and New Testament text and every seventh day has a reading from Psalms and Proverbs. There is nothing exceptional about this plan, but our prayer is that this book will help to promote and encourage reading the Bible every day.

Accompanying the reading schedule, this book contains a brief devotional for every day of the year based on a portion of the text from that day's reading schedule. If a choice must be made between reading the devotional or reading the scheduled text, by all means, read the Scripture. The words of this book are but reflections and applications made by feeble men. The words of Scripture are divine, powerful, life-giving, and eternal. Never choose the broken cistern over the fountain of living water (Jeremiah 2:13).

Two authors are noted on the front cover; Bill McFarland and myself. I have grown to respect and admire the preaching work of Bill over the past several years. I appreciate his faithfulness, Bible knowledge, and his ability to make application of God's word to daily life in such a meaningful way. Bill wrote the devotionals in this book for the months of July, August, September, and October. I wrote the devotionals for January through June, November, and December.

I wish also to highly commend Tyrel and Justin Hatfield. These two highly talented men have devoted themselves and their talents to God's service. They share a great concern for families as the God-designed and established primary forum for human spiritual development. Little Acorn, LLC, was conceived and planned by them to provide resources to help families accomplish God's intended purpose. I'm thankful to be associated with them in this project.

So, dear reader, I can say no more than Paul himself said, "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

David Deffenbaugh
October, 2007

January



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Daily Bible Reading: Genesis 1-2; Matthew 1

Beginning to the End

Devotional Text: Genesis 1:1

Today marks many beginnings; this is the beginning of a book, it's the beginning of a new year, the beginning of a new resolution (to read God's word every day), and reading the beginning of the Bible. That is a lot of beginnings.

We know from experience that a beginning, no matter how good or well intentioned, does not guarantee a successful end. It is also true that no successful end can be reached without a beginning. A well-known proverb suggests that a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. The question is: What is that journey? What is the destination toward which the beginning step is being taken today? Is it a journey to achieve an objective, to read through the Bible in a year? Is it a journey to alleviate the guilt of not reading the Bible like you should? Is it a journey to gain someone's approval (spouse, parent, peer)?

This journey should be to come nearer to the heart of God. Other motivations may have led to the first step on this journey, but will they also lead to the second, third, fiftieth, and 365th steps? Even if one were to read and meditate on God's word every day of this year, the journey would have only begun. It's not measured by a calendar, but by a life. Only a destination so grand, so magnificent, so lofty as the heart of God will move us to such heights; every day, a little closer; every day, a little nearer; every day as we meet God in His word.

"For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His" (2 Chronicles 16:9).

Sometimes It's Hard

Devotional Text: Matthew 2:16-18

A recent survey conducted by a major news magazine has found that 79% of Americans believe in the virgin birth of Jesus. Sure, it would be nice if that number were higher, but it is rather astounding considering the consistent bashing the Bible and Christianity have taken in the mainstream public for many years. Though many aspects of Jesus' life and teaching have not attained such a high level of acceptance, the accounts of His birth are widely acknowledged (witness the Christmas celebrations each December).

The arrival of Jesus on earth is a story that continues to thrill the human heart. But let's not be too taken by all of this. Not everyone is excited to hear about Jesus' arrival. What was good news to the magi (wise men) was troubling news to Herod and turned into very sad news in Bethlehem. The excitement of the birth of the king of the Jews was soon drowned in the tears of "weeping and great mourning."

Not everyone is glad to hear that Jesus has come. To those who love the darkness rather than the light, to those who would love their lives rather than lose them, to those whose treasures are on earth rather than heaven, news of Jesus arrival is not well received.

Blessedness, joy, and peace are all part of the Christian experience, but there is a hard side as well. Jesus talked about his followers being hated, insulted, ostracized and persecuted (Matthew 10:22; Luke 6:22; Matthew 5:10-11). We should not pursue the former and be surprised when we find the latter as well. If all we want from our faith is pleasantness and tranquility, following Jesus will be a bitter disappointment. It is not this life, but the next, that promises "joy inexpressible" and "an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison" (1 Peter 1:8; 2 Corinthians 4:18).

A Walk With God

Devotional Texts: Genesis 5:24; 6:9

People gain notoriety for any number of reasons; office or position, amassed wealth, athletic prowess, talent to entertain. People who gain attention and adulation today don't even register, for the most part, on the Bible's radar screen. But the converse of that is true as well. Those whom the Bible recognizes, our world ignores. Only twice does the Bible use the simple but profound description that someone walked with God. These words are reserved for Enoch and Noah.

Noah is familiar because he built that ark. But the reason God chose him to do so was that he walked with Him. Noah is described as a "righteous man, blameless in his time" (Genesis 6:9). His "time" was one in which "the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and . . . every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). He walked with God without support and encouragement.

Enoch's record is very brief, but that brevity belies great depth. So close, so intimate was his walk with the Creator that God determined that Enoch should not suffer the consequence of sin that comes to every man. In this list of the "generations of Adam" (Genesis 5:1) each person's record concludes with, "and he died." Not Enoch. Instead, "he was not, for God took him." Enoch shows us just how close that walk can be.

Enoch's listing among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 includes the obvious statement that "he was pleasing to God" (Hebrews 11:5). That description introduces the well known verse that follows, "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

Faith is all about my walk with God.

A Wedding Rejection

Devotional Text: Matthew 22:1-14

We've all heard stories of brides and even grooms being left at the altar. Perhaps it is that since a wedding is among the most significant occasions of acceptance, that rejection in that setting is so dramatic. In Jesus' parable of the wedding feast, we're met with wedding customs different than our own. But the rejections on this joyous occasion are no less striking. The guests originally invited to the wedding reject the call to come when the wedding day arrived. The father of the groom rejects those same guests in rather dramatic, and violent, fashion. A spontaneous and gracious invitation to previously uninvited persons resulted in a full wedding hall. Both the evil and the good responded. This is a remarkable turn of events. Jesus said this parable, like so many of His, was to teach the nature of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 22:2).

God's gracious invitation to all humanity to participate in the joys of His kingdom, as depicted in this parable of a wedding feast, is not without its own rejection. The king rejected a guest who had come to the wedding to enjoy its pleasures, but had refused to wear a provided wedding garment. In that day more than just the attendants were provided with appropriate clothing for the wedding. Here was someone who presumed to enjoy what the king provided (a wedding feast) without submitting to the king's terms (wearing the supplied wedding clothes). That person was rejected.

The message is pretty straightforward. If we wish to enjoy the blessings and privileges God provides, it will only be on His terms. Therefore, we cannot presume to come to God on our own terms. It is His or nothing at all. Despite our culture's message and emphasis, we are not the measure of all things and we are not the final arbiter. We comply to God's wishes, not He to ours. Simple enough.

A Rock and a Hard Place

Devotional Text: Matthew 22:15-22

Jesus was accustomed to traps. Not the kind with ropes or nets or cages, but the kind with words and ideas and emotions. His enemies laid many traps for Him to try to catch Him in a mistake or discredit Him in the eyes of the people. It never worked, though. They were unable to achieve their goal.

Once Jesus' enemies posed a question about a tax. This tax, the poll-tax, was especially unpopular. To speak out in favor of the tax was to risk the anger of the Jewish people over this loathsome representation of Rome's dominance. To speak against the tax was to take a position against which legal action could be taken for insurrection. This was a dilemma.

Jesus' famous response to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's," didn't just avoid the dilemma. Jesus took these devious questioners further than they had been willing to go on their own. This wasn't just a matter of playing on popular emotions about the heathen Romans ruling over God's chosen people. This was about fulfilling responsibility and duty. This was about giving men their due, but also giving God His due, too.

These religious leaders had never given a second thought to their obligations and duties to people they didn't like. This is why Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan was (is) so striking. We are called to do good to "all people" (Gal. 6:10). When Peter gave instruction to "honor the king" (1Pet 2:17), the king at that time was none other than Nero. This man would ultimately be responsible for the deaths of Peter and Paul.

God expects His children to treat people responsibly, even when the person may not deserve it. After all, He's treated us pretty well when we didn't deserve it.

The Opportune Time

Devotional Text: Luke 4:13

Believe it or not, the Bible does present Satan as a real being. He's not just a representation of evil or an impersonal influence. His efforts are very real as well. No one is exempt from them. Jesus certainly wasn't. Famous are Satan's attempts to derail the Messiah's ministry (Luke 4:1-12). It is precisely here that we learn that Satan is an opportunist. He left Jesus when these temptations were completed but only until an opportune time. The question is, what was an opportune time for Satan to return to Jesus and tempt Him?

Was this when Jesus was put to the test by His enemies? When His own disciples did or said something foolish and He wanted to speak harshly to them? When He was tempted in the various ways we too are tempted (Hebrews 4:15)? Whenever it was, we can be sure of this, Satan seized every opportunity to tempt the Christ.

If Satan looked for opportune times with Jesus, we can be sure he does so with us as well. He is looking. He is waiting. Thankfully, we are able to know how our adversary works (2 Corinthians 2:11). Not surprisingly, the Bible warns us to not give Satan an opportunity (Ephesians 4:27). Maybe that's one of our biggest failings, making Satan's job too easy. We play into his hands. We open the door of opportunity for him to tempt us.

Certainly, winning over Satan includes more than being strong to resist temptations. It also involves eliminating, or at least minimizing, his opportunities.

Justified

Devotional Text: Luke 18:14

Sometimes attitude carries the day.

What kind of person are you? What kind of person do you wish to be? Jesus provides an interesting contrast in his parable of the two men who went to pray. On the one hand, we have one person who is admired and well-respected and another who is resented (if not despised) and vilified. These two are on opposite ends of the public opinion polls.

On the other hand, we have a person whose life is exemplary in many respects. He's kept himself from many of the faults that have ruined others and he's a participant in activities of public devotion. The other, well we just don't know, other than the fact that he confesses himself to be a sinner.

What kind of person do I want to be? I want to be the kind that stands justified before God. Obviously that justification is not determined by public opinion. The one whom man accepts, God may well reject. The basis on which acceptance is given, or not, is the question. Obviously, God's concern is for an underlying attitude of heart. Humility of heart, confession of sin, acknowledgement of the need for God's grace is what God is looking for. The Pharisee's trust was in himself, not God. Isn't keeping from sin important? Obviously it is (James 1:27). The difference here is that it is not our own ability to keep ourselves pure that justifies. The fact that we may be able to keep ourselves from sins of which others are guilty leaves no room for spiritual snobbery.

What kind of person do I want to be? More than to be one who does not commit sin or than to be one whom others respect and admire I desire to be one who humbly acknowledges my own sin and relies upon God for His mercy.

A Growing Child

Devotional Text: 1 Samuel 2:26

Samuel seemed destined for greatness. His birth resulted from impassioned prayers offered by his pious mother. From a very young age, his life was given in service to God. His development is summarized in the statement that “the boy Samuel was growing in stature and in favor both with the Lord and with men.” Interestingly, essentially the same statement is made of Jesus and His own growth as a boy. “And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” (Luke 2:52).

Key elements of a well-rounded development are found in these statements. As the child Samuel grew physically, he also developed spiritually and socially. Favor with God suggests a spiritual development. A stark and immediate contrast follows (1 Samuel 2:27-36) as the Lord’s disfavor with the sons of Eli (the man then serving as priest and judge) is introduced. Eli himself is rebuked for not disciplining his wicked sons (1 Samuel 3:13). The point is that the development of youth must also include spiritual development. Favor with man involves the appropriate relationships with the people we encounter. Favorable social interaction involves traits of honesty, kindness, and responsibility.

An important question to consider is the emphasis we give to the development of our own children. It would appear that educational, athletic, and artistic concerns are given high priority. These may well be the socially acceptable emphases for developing youth, but where is the favor with the Lord? Where is the spiritual development? Where are the traits that will promote godliness? Though there may not be much demand for such qualities from our culture, there is with God. A day is coming when social acceptance will not matter one whit. That same day the only thing that will matter is God’s favor. Are we developing our children (and ourselves) to be ready for that day?

Who Is Adequate?

Devotional Text: 2 Corinthians 2:14-16; 3:4-6

Both Jeremiah and Paul were set apart by the Lord and sent into His service (Jer. 1:5, 7; Gal. 1:15, 16). Neither of them had sought out such a role, but each acted faithfully and courageously to fulfill his mission.

However, both the prophet and the apostle found that in serving there are responsibilities to meet, opponents to face, and burdens to carry. Both dealt with physical hardship and mistreatment. Jeremiah learned what it was like to be a man of strife and contention, laughed at and cursed by all, and left to struggle with doubts and questions alone (Jer. 15:10, 17; 20:18). Paul knew what it was like to be belittled by critics, hurt by those who should have made him rejoice, and endure anguish of hurt with many tears (2 Cor. 1:7; 2:3, 4).

It is no wonder, then, that both men came face to face with their own human inadequacy. Jeremiah first felt that he did not know how to speak, then that he wanted a place in the wilderness away from people, and finally that his pain was incurable (Jer. 1:6; 9:2; 15:18). Paul said he was utterly burdened beyond his strength (2 Cor. 1:8). "Who is adequate for these things?" he asked, as he thought of his service (2 Cor. 2:16).

But, both Jeremiah and Paul were strengthened by the Lord for the work the Lord gave them to do. God supplies the adequacy for His servants to do what He sends them to do. More than once, He told the prophet not to be afraid because He was with him (Jer. 1:8, 19; 15:20). The apostle saw that God had been dealing with him to make him rely not on himself but on God (2 Cor. 1:9). He concluded, "Our adequacy is from God" (2 Cor. 3:5).

Service inevitably brings demands that are too big for us. The Lord's grace, however, is sufficient for the Lord's servants. "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8).

Comparing Self With Self

Devotional Text: 2 Corinthians 10:12-18

Five hundred drivers were asked to compare their driving habits with those of other motorists. The results provided an amusing view of human nature. It seems that 92% considered themselves to be courteous drivers, but only 40% thought others were. And, 93% judged themselves to have an excellent knowledge of the rules of the road, but only 48% thought others did. Similar percentages showed up in every category.

You see our habit, don't you? We tend to see ourselves in a favorable light when compared to others. We just don't think of ourselves as being responsible for any of the problems out in the world.

Sometimes the consequences of this kind of thinking can be quite serious. It may, for example, make us the victims of pride. Jesus told about the Pharisee who prayed, "God, I thank thee that I am not as the rest of men" (Lk. 18:11). That man was rejected because he compared himself to others and thought he was better.

At other times this way of thinking can lead to self-pity. We may see ourselves as more deserving than others and conclude that we are not receiving what is due us. Or, we may begin to feel that no one else has problems as bad as ours. Such an attitude can drown a person in a sea of self-pity.

Still another fruit of our comparing ourselves to others may be blindness to our own responsibility. One who assumes that other people are always messing up the traffic may fail to see his own bad habits. Likewise, one who concludes that he is better off spiritually than someone else may ignore the faults in his life which he needs to correct.

Some in Paul's time measured themselves by themselves, too. He stressed then as now that a Christian compares himself to the Lord, and that keeps everything in perspective.

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Bible Reading Schedule: Ezekiel 46-48; 2 Peter 1

A Need to Escape

Devotional Text: 2 Peter 1:4

How likely is it that a person will escape danger if they are unaware the danger exists? Pretty slight, huh? And what if that person actually views as good that which is in reality a danger? This is precisely the scenario regarding man's spiritual condition living in this world. Peter says that corruption is in this world and that it must be escaped. Wouldn't corruption be obvious to all and easily avoided? The problem is that this corruption is "by lust." That is, by our fleshly desire. The fundamental struggle of human existence is between the flesh and the spirit. They are "in opposition to one another" (Gal. 5:17). Fleshly lusts "wage war against the soul" (1 Pet. 2:11).

The world preaches indulgence. God teaches self-control. When we embrace the corruption that is in the world by lust we have befriended the world and thus become God's enemy (James 4:4). When we embrace the world, we love it and therefore are without God's love (1 John 2:15).

So, in order to escape, we've got to be "partakers of the divine nature." That sounds like an awfully tall order. But the fact is Peter explains how this happens: when we are diligent to supply moral excellence to our faith, and to that, knowledge, and to that, self-control, and so on (2 Pet. 1:5-7). In that way, we are able to make sure we are both fruitful and useful (v. 8).

Ironic isn't it? People embracing what needs to be escaped and people loving what makes them God's enemy?

Nothing or Something?

Devotional Text: Habakkuk 2:20; Zephaniah 1:7

Speaking up and being active are often the order of the day. When people are being taken advantage of, wrong is not being opposed, or maybe someone is just being negligent of their responsibilities, it's time to speak up and do something. Apathy is responsible for much that is amiss in our world.

But, like everything else, we can get things out of balance. We can be so concerned with being heard, making sure our needs and wishes are given expression, and being active in pursuit of all we believe to be needful and right that we forget to be still and to listen. That is precisely what God calls His people to do.

"But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him." (Hab. 2:20).

"Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near," (Zeph. 1:7).

"Be still and know that I am God" (Psa. 46:10; NIV).

So, how often do we do that? Action is not always the order of the day. Yes, it is hard in our fast-paced, busy, always-on-the-go world to stop and devote time silent in God's presence. Maybe we would even feel guilty doing so. Someone might object, "I can't just do nothing." Nothing? Really? Why is the thoughtful and quiet contemplation of God "nothing"? If it brings us back in tune with God and His will, if it allows us the time refocus on priorities, if it permits a few moments of close, personal communion with our Creator, that certainly seems like something.