

Camp Devotionals

Introduction

This document contains five devotionals and related handouts to use with your group during camp. We wanted to provide these resources to give you a way to spend time looking at a passage together each day, one that connects to the chapel message and overall theme of the camp.

The hope behind these devotionals is twofold. First, they can provide further reflection on the themes of each day and the week overall. We wanted to help everyone to have more opportunity each day to ponder and enjoy looking at Jesus and growing in their relationship with Him. Secondly, they give everyone some opportunity to practice and grow in looking at Scripture together to see more deeply the good character and purposes of the triune God. For some, this may be a first opportunity to “try on” the habit of meeting God in His word on a regular basis. For others, it is hopefully a chance to enjoy fellowship with their group in God’s word.

Knowing that you most likely will have limited time, I wrote these devotionals so that you could do them without much preparation. You can read the text I have written to the group or go over the passage and what I wrote ahead of time and talk about the passage using your own words. I am assuming a devotional time of 15 minutes. I wrote them as if they were being done in the morning cabin time, before the chapels, but they can be used any time that works best in your schedule.

On the handout given to the campers and in your materials, I have included with the passage what translation I am using. You will notice that all of them are either ESV or NIV. I did take time with each passage, looking at the different translations out there, including The Message. Each time, I chose one that I thought was the close to the Greek text and I thought most helpful for the devotional.

I want to provide as much help to you as I can in being able to provide these times for those you are caring for and to find joy in doing so. If you have not led a small group devotional before, I have a few suggestions that I hope will help:

If possible, take some time before you come to camp to look over the materials yourself and ask God to give you insight and enthusiasm for what He shows you in these devotionals. I always find it helpful to me to have spent time beforehand with God and feeling some familiarity and interest in the passage at hand.

Mention to your group at the beginning of the week that you will be having a short devotional together each morning (or whenever you plan to do it) so that they see this as part of what they will be doing through the week. I think this helps them to be more prepared to listen and be invested when you have your time together.

Along with mentioning these devotionals at the beginning of the week, you can mention at the beginning of the day when you will be having this time. Again, the idea is to help everyone to make room in their minds and hearts for this time of considering Jesus in His word together.

Try to find or create a setting to have this time that reduces distractions and encourages sharing together. Take the time to create a small circle for everyone to sit in together. What I am trying to communicate to others when I do this is that I am looking forward to this time together with them and I want to help us all to attend more fully.

I think it can be helpful to begin and end your time together with a short prayer – thanking God for already being fully with us, for being a speaking God who wants to communicate with His children and asking Him to help us, by His Spirit to hear His living word to each of us in this passage. To end with a prayer can help us all remember that God has been present with us and leads us out as well – we are not alone.

I would suggest that you have the group read over the passage silently first, then you or someone else read it again out loud.

I have one discussion question or idea at the end of each devotional that you can go over if you have time.

Devotional 1: Jesus' Invitation

Overview

The theme of this week is living in, enjoying and growing in our relationship with Jesus Christ and, in Jesus, with one another. Today we want to take time, now and in the chapel, to think about this relationship that Jesus is giving us with Him.

Matthew 11:27-30 (NIV)

27 All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. 28 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

When Jesus said these words, Matthew tells us that He was traveling with His disciples through the villages in Galilee to teach. And here we have some of what He was teaching. So what does Jesus teach? What does He want His listeners to know? What is His subject?

When I think of teaching, I usually think of instructing people about something else – like math or history. But here we see Jesus teaching about Himself and His relationship with His Father and, even more unusual His teaching consists of calling His would-be students to come to Him and take up His yoke! What can He mean by all this?

It seems that what Jesus is telling us is that to listen to and receive His teaching involves learning about Him and His Father and being involved in a long-term, close relationship with Him – being “yoked” together to use His image. He tells us that what He wants to give us as we walk with Him is rest. So the first thing we can know about Jesus from this passage is that Jesus is very interested in our being with Him – spending time with Him, learning what He is about in our lives, and walking with Him and knowing His rest, deep in our very souls.

Let's just take a moment to think about this. Jesus wants a real relationship with you. He doesn't just want you to know that He loves you but to be with you each day, as you go through your tasks and spend time with family or friends. He

wants you to receive His presence and rest when you are hurting or struggling and when you are happy.

Let's look further at the passage to understand more of this relationship that Jesus is inviting others into.

First of all, Jesus tells us something about His relationship with the Father. In these few words, what do we learn? First Jesus tells us that everything has been committed or handed over to Him by His Father. Jesus' relationship with His Father is such that all that the Father has, He is happy to share with His Son! The second thing He tells us is that the Father and Son know each other completely – they are in a relationship of such deep knowing that Jesus can say that no one can have this level of relationship unless Jesus Himself finds a way to bring them in. He has to show us His Father and He can do so in such a way that we can share in this relationship. What would a relationship feel like where you both fully know and are fully known by the other person and where you fully share what you have with one another?

This verse tells us quite a bit about God. And how interesting that this is what Jesus wants us to know here. Jesus has come to teach us that God, in Himself, is wonderful and deep relationship; here He speaks particularly of the Father and the Son.

How wonderful that Jesus chooses to let others in on this relationship. He is not keeping His relationship with His Father to Himself. But who might Jesus be speaking of? He tells us in the next verse. Jesus calls to all who are experiencing weariness and feeling burdened. There is no qualification given here about how one might feel weary and weighed down by their lives. He simply invites whoever knows they are troubled by their lives, whoever is aware of struggling to carry the weight of relationships or responsibilities they have or even ways they have sinned or been sinned against. These are the people Jesus chooses to reveal His Father to. Jesus calls you in the midst of your weariness and burdens.

And how does He propose to share His Father with them and us? Let's look at the words Jesus uses here. He tells us to take His yoke and learn from Him. A yoke was a wooden bar that would connect two animals together, like oxen, to enable them to pull a load. So, Jesus is offering somehow to share something with us by connecting us up to Him. He speaks of His yoke as being easy and His burden as light. Compared to the heavy burdens we come to Him with, His burden

is light. In fact, He says that by taking His yoke, we will find rest – not just a break before we take up those heavy burdens again – but a deep and abiding soul rest.

By speaking of our burdens and His yoke or burden, Jesus wants us to see a connection between the two. In order for us to take His yoke, we come to Jesus to let go of the burdens we are already trying to carry. And from looking at other Scripture, what we come to know is that we can hand Jesus' all of our burdens because He already knows all about them, has taken them Himself to redeem and heal us. Jesus is telling us "I know what is wearying you. I know your burdens, your struggles, your trials. Let me have them and stay and walk with me. Instead of being yoked to your troubles, be yoked to me."

Remember where the passage begins? Jesus tells us about His wonderful relationship with His Father. Could we say from His description that Jesus is yoked to His Father? Jesus lives in an ongoing, secure, loving relationship with His Father. He seeks to reveal His Father, share this relationship with others, with us. So, when we take His yoke and learn from Him, we enter and share in this relationship that He has with His Father.

By inviting us to take His yoke, Jesus is also inviting us to give Him all that is burdening us, that is making living in His rest hard. We can, each day, respond again to His call to us and hand over what is filling up our hands and making receiving His presence and rest difficult. We can simply tell him about our cares, worries, regrets and hurts and we can pray to Him about them. We can know that as we trust in Jesus and stay in touch with Him, He'll be with us, go through things with us, no matter what the situation. And He will lead us through our troubles and concerns – we can count on Him to do so. We can depend on Him to never leave us or forsake us. He is a faithful friend.

In taking His yoke each day, we are following along with Jesus where He is going, we are participating in the good work He is doing in our lives and even in the lives of others. When we are weighed down by our burdens, we are tempted to think that they are too big for God to do much with and so we may think there is nothing He can give us or teach us here. But Jesus tells us here that He is and remains our gentle and humble teacher who is always ready to teach us about Himself and His father and give us a rest that can only come from Him.

What burdens are you trying to carry today? Write them down on a piece of paper. In your prayer time together, hand them over to Jesus.

Devotional 2: Our Good Father

Overview

As we continue our theme of living in and growing in our relationship with Jesus, we will focus in today's chapel on our participation in Jesus' relationship with His Father through worship and prayer. In this devotional, we want to take some time to consider with Jesus the active care our heavenly Father takes in our lives.

Matthew 6:25-34 (NIV)

25 Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

28 And why do you worry about clothes? See the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Yesterday we considered Jesus' invitation to bring all that makes us weary and burdened to Him and to take instead His yoke. As we live yoked to Him, He gives us deep soul rest, even in the midst of much trouble or sorrow. To be yoked to Jesus is to live in a real relationship with Him, one of talking with Him in prayer and listening to His word to us.

Jesus calls to us to come to Him again every day. Why does He call us again? Because we can get anxious and burdened again, can't we? Our lives

change, our relationships change. We don't really know what is going to happen next. And we find ourselves feeling anxious and stressed again.

Jesus knows all about this. He knows we are tempted to be fearful and anxious. He knows that our lives here will involve difficulties and uncertainties. As you look at your life right now, at situations in your home, your church or community, our nation and the world, there are probably several things that can cause real anxiety.

And what I find is that when I am anxious, I have a hard time experiencing much of Jesus' rest.

In this passage from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks to people who are tempted like us to be anxious. What does Jesus do to help them in their anxieties? Does He just tell them to try really hard not to worry? Does He claim it is all in their heads and that the world really isn't as uncertain as it is?

No, Jesus knows He is speaking to people who live in a very uncertain world. The people of that time were intensely aware of their own inability to control most aspects of their own lives. Many of them had only the bare essentials of life, and all of them were dependent on the weather and the soil for the crops that were needed to sustain them.

Notice that when Jesus speaks of anxiety here, He speaks of being worried about having the basics of life – food, drink, and clothing. These fundamental necessities of life are universal and would likely be the most pressing concerns for Jesus' listeners. It would be tempting for them to live and work each day out of fear of whether they can secure what they need and want for their daily lives.

Jesus addresses their temptations to worry in a few different ways in this passage, but His central and deepest point is to remind them of the good character and work of their heavenly Father. It is important to remember that Jesus is speaking here to Jews, those who already know and seek to live in relationship with God. They know His provisions for His people over the many years since God called Abraham to leave his homeland to a place where God would show him. He reminds them here that they are not like the pagans, those who do not know God and therefore live as if there is no God who sees them, knows them, and cares for them.

The fact that they know who God is and what He has done for them and is doing does not, however, automatically keep them from being tempted to be anxious. They know about God, but they forget when they focus on those things they feel anxious about.

To help His listeners remember who God, their heavenly Father is, Jesus asks them to consider the birds and the flowers. He chooses parts of creation that are small and may escape their notice. This is especially true when He speaks of the flowers, or the grass of the field as He calls it. They are here today and gone tomorrow.

The birds do nothing to grow and harvest their own food. The grass spends no time making fabric and then sewing it into clothes to wear. Yet, they are provided for. But notice how Jesus describes God's provision. He doesn't say, "God makes sure there are things around that birds can eat." He says that God feeds the birds and clothes the grass. What is Jesus telling us about God here? That He is actively and intimately concerned for His creation. God is not negligent or absent. He has a direct interest in, and takes direct action in the lives of the creation He has made.

Notice also the name Jesus gives for God. Who is feeding the birds and clothing the grass? Your heavenly Father, Jesus says. This is what your heavenly Father is like, Jesus tells us. He knows about His creation down to the smallest members and He is active in His care.

And if your Father cares in such a personal and active way for birds and grass, you can trust His awareness of and care for you. In fact, Jesus says at another time that our heavenly Father knows the very number of hairs on our heads! Knowing that God, our Father, knows all about us frees us to seek His kingdom – to seek to live in relationship with the One who is both king and our loving, watchful Father.

Jesus is not saying that we do not need to work and find ways to care for our needs. What He is saying is that He and the Father desire that we live, and work and care for others out of a growing deep sense of His presence and faithful activity to give us a share in His life, His very rest as we learned about yesterday. How would it be different to go through your days trusting your heavenly Father sees and is caring actively for you compared to living and acting out of anxiety?

Jesus is also not saying that when we trust God, life will be easy. At the end of the passage, when telling His listeners not to worry about tomorrow Jesus says that each day has enough trouble of its own. Life here is challenging, isn't it? Every day brings its trials. Jesus is encouraging us to remember the deepest truth about our lives in the midst of whatever tempts us to worry. And that truth is – that we have a heavenly Father who is the source of our lives and He is a good Father, who is aware of and cares intimately for His creation and especially then of us, His children.

Even more than revealing to us the caring heart of His Father, Jesus came as one of us to take and redeem and heal all our anxieties. In the Letter to the Hebrews, the author tells us that Jesus, in becoming one of us, has been tempted in all the ways we are. He knows our struggles, our brokenness. He knows the hurt we have both given and received. And He knows what tempts us to be anxious. He has taken all of this on Himself to be with us in our deepest anxieties and to give us His rest. Even as we still struggle to turn from what makes us anxious to Him, we can remember and rejoice to know that He is not anxious about us. Jesus knows our heavenly Father is for us and is working even now to give us a share in His peace.

He has got you, in His grip – this one who takes such infinite care with even the birds and the flowers.

What are some ways that you have seen your heavenly Father at work in your life recently?

Devotional 3: We Live by Faith

Overview

As we continue to consider the relationship Jesus gives us with Himself, today we are focusing on looking to and listening again to Jesus so that we can live and act out of confidence and hope in His real presence and good work.

Hebrews 11:8-12 (ESV)

8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. 11 By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

This passage is a part of a longer chapter in the Letter to the Hebrews, often thought of as the “faith chapter”. The author is seeking to encourage his readers and us to live by our trust in God’s real presence and active work in our lives. This is a theme we have been seeing in all of the passages we have considered so far this week, isn’t it? Jesus encourages people to come with their burdens and hand them to Him, taking His yoke out of trust that it is indeed light and easy and that they’ll find rest for their souls in Him. Jesus taught that we don’t have to live out of anxiety because we can trust in the care and activity of our good heavenly Father.

The author of this letter encourages us by reminding us of many of the people from the Old Testament who had come to know God and who obeyed Him out of their confidence in His faithfulness to His promises. They didn’t obey God to gain His favor or to get Him on their side or just because they thought they had no choice. As they came to know who He was and what He is up to, they wanted to live more and more according to His presence and work.

Notice that the phrase “by faith” is repeated here. If you were to read the whole chapter, you would see it repeated many more times. The author is speaking

of a variety of things that people did, received, or went through – and he says that all they accomplished, received or endured, they did “by faith.”

What is the author’s point? Why is it so important that we know they lived by faith? Why is the author encouraging us to live by faith as well?

The fact that each of these people lived and acted by faith is important because it tells us about the kind of relationship they had with God. And this tells us something about God and the kind of relationship He desires to have with His people, with us. The triune God wants us to know Him, to see and receive His love and His good work in our lives, to trust Him even when we don’t immediately see how He is working in a given situation.

This passage is referring to the story of Abraham. The full story of Abraham is found in Genesis, chapters 12-25. The details in our passage today focus on God’s calling Abraham to leave his homeland and go to a land God would show him with the promise that He, God, would make Abraham the father of a great nation, a nation that would bless all the peoples of the earth. Abraham trusted God to be faithful to His promise and so obeyed. He saw the goodness in God’s intentions for his life and responded accordingly. His trust in God set him free to joyfully do what God commanded him to do.

Likewise, Sarah trusted that God could be and would be faithful to His promise to them, even though she was actually too old to be able to have children. Sarah was not trusting in her own capacity to bring about God’s promises; she knew she couldn’t. God would have to bring about the fulfillment of His promise, not her, even though it was her body that God would bless and use.

Think about the difference it makes in your own life when you know well and trust the person you are obeying. If your parent or a teacher or friend asked you to do something and you knew that person was trustworthy and that he or she has your best in mind, how does that affect how you go about doing what they ask? It makes a big difference in our relationships when we have great confidence in the other person – in both their character and their purposes.

How does our trust in someone else grow? Primarily it grows by getting to know them and seeing over time their concerns and purposes and their faithfulness to their own word. If you were to look at the account in Genesis, you would find that God had several interactions with Abraham and Sarah over many years. Neither Abraham nor Sarah always responded to God in trust, but God continued

to be active and interactive in their lives. He showed Himself in various ways over those years to be faithfully involved with them. And their trust in Him grew.

Abraham and Sarah came to more deeply trust God and desire to be a part of His great purposes – purposes they were to participate in, but not actually see completely fulfilled in their lifetimes. Abraham and Sarah left their homeland trusting on God's word, but they did not receive the land as their own. Even Isaac, the promised child they had, was not born until 25 years after they first heard the promise and left their homeland.

But the author tells us Abraham was okay with not seeing it all happen in his life. He was trusting God to be faithful not just to him in his immediate life, but for the ultimate end that all God's work was going to lead to. Abraham and his son and grandson all lived on the Promised Land in tents, temporary housing, as if strangers in a foreign land. But Abraham could do this because he was "looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God". Notice he too is not counting on what human beings could accomplish, but on what God could and would do.

This is the key point of what living by faith means. The author repeats it in various ways throughout the chapter. All of the people he describes here did not live to see the complete fulfillment of God's promise to make us His people, the children of His heart, able to know and live in His great joy and life every moment. Abraham was both confident in the faithfulness of God and hopeful in the great and glorious purpose of God. He saw how much better was the place God was going to take him and us and all of creation and He came to live every day for that, even though it meant a life of waiting in many ways. He experienced some of what God had promised, but only a small proportion.

In this passage we see that when we live and obey by faith, we are trusting in God Himself, the giver of the promises, to be faithful to His wonderful work in our lives in His own time and way. We are not so much trusting in His promises, but in God Himself, the promiser of the promises.

And what are we trusting God for? Ultimately, we are counting on Him to fully bring about His good purposes for us, for all of His creation – that we live now in hope of one day entering fully and completely into the loving communion of the triune God and participate in His righteousness, in truly right relationships with God and in Him in right relationship with one another and with all of renewed creation.

What God has always been about, is giving Himself to us in such a way that we can now begin to enjoy life-giving, joyful and loving relationship with Him. But even more than that, we can have real hope, confidence, that there is to come new life that awaits us when all things will be truly remade and completely healed in Christ upon His return. And that fulfillment of God's promises will be so much more than even the best moments we have in our lives here and now.

So we trust Jesus to bring about all of what we are coming to hope for in Him. And our obedience to Jesus is our response of trust in Him. This means that we act in our current lives from a place of trusting He is present and at work, even when we don't clearly see how. Like Abraham, we are waiting for the best that is to come, even as we can and do grow in real relationship with Jesus and His Father now by His Spirit. For growing in trust, in faith, is the fruit of a life-long relationship with God according to his Word and by his Spirit.

And we live now, listening to and looking towards Jesus – growing in knowing Him so that our trust in Him can grow. When we see who Jesus is, we see the lengths God goes to, to redeem us and give us new lives. And that's what frees us to count on Him, no matter what, just like Abraham and Sarah.

What helps you to see and remember who Jesus is and what He is up to?

Devotional 4: Loving Others in Christ

Overview

As we continue to consider our relationship with Jesus, today we want to think about how our relationship Christ affects our relationships with other people, both those who know Christ and those who do not yet know Him.

Colossians 3:15-17 (ESV)

15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

This week we have been considering who Jesus is and the kind of relationship He gives us with Himself. He has come to take our burdens, struggles, even our guilt, all that wearies us. He wants to share with us His good, loving, life-giving relationship with His Father, to give His very Spirit to live in us.

He calls us to follow Him and learn from Him as we grow more able to trust Him, receive from Him and know His peace and rest in the midst of our lives and relationships. We grow in our trust in Jesus as we turn to Him in thanksgiving and prayer and as we learn and remember who He is and what He is up to as we study His word, the Bible.

And as we turn to Christ and receive from Him, we turn away from all that blocks our receiving from Him and leads us away from enjoying our fellowship and communion with Him. We grow in resisting all that would distract us and undermine remaining in His peace, abiding with Him.

As we hand our burdens and even our sins, again and again to Him and take His yoke, we find His yoke is indeed easy and His burden is light. We live in joyful obedience to Him, trusting in His Word to give us life. We are coming to know without a doubt that He alone offers real and true life that is far, far better than what we may at times be tempted to run after now. Abundant life as Jesus tells us.

This ongoing, every day relationship of walking with Jesus is most fundamentally what the Christian life is about. God, in His word and His Spirit is

meeting us today, this moment. And our growing in this relationship with Jesus affects not only our inner lives, but the whole of our lives – all that we say and do, all of our relationships with others. This is the point that Paul is making here in this passage.

These verses are a part of a larger section of instructions given to the Christians living in the city of Colossae. The passage comes towards the end of the letter, after Paul has spent a considerable amount of time teaching and reminding the Colossians about who Jesus is and who they are in Him.

Let's consider the passage. What does Paul tell us here about living as followers of Christ?

The first thing I notice is that the two main commands Paul gives us here both start with the word "let". We are to "let our hearts be ruled" by the Jesus' peace and we are to "let His word" to us dwell richly or fully in us. What does it tell us when the command begins with "let"?

Paul is not telling us to try and get the peace of Christ somehow or to work hard on feeling peaceful. Which is good because it is very hard to try and make yourself be peaceful when you are feeling stressed or anxious, isn't it? Instead, Paul is saying that we already have Christ's peace. He spoke of the peace that Christ has given us earlier in the letter. Jesus has taken our brokenness, sin, and conflict and given us His peace, His confidence that He can and will make all things right. We have a share in His peace that He already has. It may be hidden, covered up, but it's there and we can count on it being there.

Paul is telling us to let this peace Jesus gives us rule in our hearts. In other words, instead of allowing other things – like our anxiety or resentments or feelings rule – we turn from those to receive again Christ's peace and act towards others from that peace. When we are followers of Jesus, He lives in us by His Spirit and is sharing His peace with us right now. He remains peaceful even when we aren't. But His peace is there for us to receive and enjoy as we turn to Him and realize He is peaceful in all situations.

The second command is that we let the word of Christ dwell in us richly. Again, Paul is not telling us to go out and find Christ's word, but that we are to make room for His word that He already is giving us in our lives. How do we let this word dwell fully in us? By turning away from other "words", other places or people that we may be tempted to listen to or to give us life or tell us who we are

and give us value, and turning towards Jesus to hear what He has to say. We can attend to what Jesus is saying to us and trust Him at His word and as we do, we receive more of what He is actually giving us.

Isn't it wonderful to realize that God is a speaking God? He tells us what's on His heart and mind and informs us of His ways. He gives us promises that He will keep. He wants us to hear His words, to know His loving and good presence. He has given us His written word, the Bible and His very Spirit to enable us to know and trust him. By attending to his Word we can grow in knowing and living in more and more His gracious work.

In the moment we are in, talking with someone, dealing with a difficult relationship, seeking help in a trial, we can recall what we have read in His Word or remember what we know about God's purposes or ways. We can be reassured by recalling His promises and faithfulness—to us or to others we know.

By the working of the Spirit we can receive from Him in that moment and so speak or act out of our relationship with Him in any and every situation—like those first disciples learned when they were in a storm in the boat with Jesus. Living in Christ, we can be patient when someone is being impatient with us. We can be thoughtful and helpful when others are thoughtless and unhelpful. We can forgive when others hold a grudge against us. We can ask for forgiveness when others refuse to ask it of us. We can be for others, even those who are against us. This is the kind of freedom Jesus can give us as we trust Him and His word.

As we dwell deeply in His Word, Paul tells us, we live in praise and thanksgiving in our hearts. We will worship God in joy that breaks out in all kinds of song. Notice that Paul mentions being thankful here 3 times – in all 3 verses.

Being thankful is both a result of our living in and under the peace of Christ and helps us to know His peace. When we are thankful for His wonderful word that He gives us, we are more able to hear His word. I am so thankful that Jesus is both present and active in each moment of my life. I am thankful He is reminding me of the truth of who I am in Him, He is giving me His confident peace that He is redeeming this situation, no matter how difficult it may seem at the present. He will work all things together to bring good out of it. And so we can always be thankful to God, our Redeemer.

We can act towards others, speak to them and respond to them from the peace that Jesus gives us. Paul is telling the Colossians and us that our whole lives,

our actions and relationships, come out this center, this living relationship with Jesus. This is what it means to live and act “in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Just like when something wonderful happens to us we want to share it with others and can hardly wait to get it out, so to with our relationship with Jesus Christ. We want to give others the best we have to give. So we look for opportunities to share with others about that relationship—we teach and admonish others, to trust and live in close relationship with Jesus Christ. We help others know Christ and all His benefits and join us in living under his Word and in worship of God through Him. So they too can be full of thanksgiving and the joy of knowing God’s grace.

What are some ways that you can pass on to someone else the peace and words of Christ that you have received, perhaps even today?

Devotional 5: Getting to work with Jesus

Overview

Today we are looking at the feeding of the 5000 from Mark's gospel to consider how Jesus makes room for and invites us to participate in His work in the world.

Mark 6:32-44 (ESV)

34 When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. 35 And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. 36 Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." 37 But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" 38 And he said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." 39 Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. 41 And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. 42 And they all ate and were satisfied. 43 And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. 44 And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

This week we have been talking about the wonderful living relationship that Jesus has given us with Himself and that He calls us to participate in every day. This relationship and right relationship with others is what we were created for and is most essentially what the Christian life is about.

What we are up to in following Jesus is growing in this relationship that He has given to us and gives us again each day. He is truly present and active, giving us His Spirit to live in us. He desires that we walk with Him, learn from Him, talk with Him and grow in enjoying His peace, rest, and joy that He shares with us. Jesus loves to give us Himself, to enable us more and more to live, act and speak out of His rest, trusting He is faithful and hoping in the fulfillment of His promises.

Jesus invites us not only to receive His good presence and work in our daily lives, He also invites us to participate in, get involved in, what He is doing – in His good purposes in us and in those around us. In Christ, we get to pass on the others the grace and good gifts He gives to us.

But how do we get to be involved? How can we ever be a channel of His blessing to others? How does Jesus help us to participate or get involved in His work?

This passage from Mark's gospel is a great picture of how Jesus both invites and enables us to be involved in His good work.

It may help to know what leads up to the feeding of this large crowd. Jesus had sent the disciples out two by two to go through the nearby towns preaching and healing in His name. They had just returned and reported to Jesus all that had happened. Jesus had them all get in the boat to head across the lake to a more uninhabited area for a rest.

But getting away just wasn't possible, was it? When they come to shore, they find a great crowd that had run ahead to them to be there when they landed. When Jesus sees the large crowd already waiting for Him, He is moved with deep compassion for them. They are lost and searching! So He teaches them. What does He teach? He tells them more about the good will and purposes of His Father that He has brought near in by being present with them (1:14-15).

Jesus teaches them until it is late in the day. The disciples, concerned that these people are hungry and need to find food, come to Jesus to encourage Him to dismiss the crowd.

But Jesus says something that obviously shocks them. He tells them that instead of sending them out to find food on their own, the disciples should feed them. Their immediate response to Jesus indicates their shock at the impossibility of such a request. They ask Jesus if they should spend 200 denarii on bread for these people. That is more than a half a year's salary for an average worker! Truly a small fortune!

The disciples could not imagine how they were going to obey Jesus. They are tempted to dismiss His command as being impossible for them to do. How does Jesus respond to them? Does He tell them to figure it out and get it done? Does Jesus say, "Look, if you want to be my follower you should to be ready to care for

these people and meet their needs. I won't be with you forever and you need to be figuring out how you will do my work on your own, when I'm gone"?

No, He gives them another command they can indeed readily obey— He asks them what they have and then tells them to find out. What they find is that they have very little – five loaves and two small fish. Certainly nowhere near enough to feed over 5000 people!

I wonder if the disciples were tempted not to bring to Jesus their small store of food. It must have seemed so insignificant in light of the need. What difference could these loaves and fish possibly make? Were they tempted to stall Jesus while they looked for more?

Whatever was going on in their minds, they did as He asked and brought to Jesus what they actually had, as insignificant as it must have seemed. They entrusted to Him all of what they had. What does Jesus do with what they have? He says nothing about how little it is, but takes it and offers it to His heavenly Father in prayer. Then He blesses and breaks it and hands it back to them to pass out to the waiting crowd.

The disciples hand out enough food so that everyone not only gets a piece, but is able to eat their fill. There were even leftovers to pick up!

What is Jesus teaching the disciples and us about participating with Him in His work? Jesus wanted the crowd fed and told His disciples to do what He wanted to happen. He told them to do His will. But what they didn't know at that point is how He would be involved in what they were going to do. They were going to be able to do His will only in actual, living relationship with Him.

He enabled them to obey Him by first having them give Him whatever they had, no matter how small and inadequate it seemed. He in turn offered what they had given Him to His Father. So even Jesus is not going to do the feeding by Himself. He and the Father are working together on this and Jesus wanted everyone to see that.

But Jesus is not done. He did not simply have the disciples be mere spectators, watching Jesus do amazing things, while they simply looked on, passively. Jesus handed those loaves and fish back to them, having been transformed by Jesus in his relationship to the Father.

Jesus didn't want them to be spectators, but to be participants in His ministry with the Father. And they got involved by entrusting to Jesus what they had and then receiving back from Him what they had given Him. And finally by handing on to others what they had given to Jesus and Jesus had blessed. In this way they actually did get to see and be involved in His transforming work.

And what lessons did they learn from all this? First to entrust to Jesus whatever they had to offer Him. Second, that what He asks them to do, they never do on their own, apart from Jesus own actions and involvement. In fact, third, His working is absolutely key. They could not do what He wanted them to do on their own. God works in ways that far surpass what we can do, even in our doing. And fourth, that all our doing involves relationship with the Father through the Son (and we could add in the Spirit). And that relationship involves listening, trusting and obeying. What a joy it must have been to see what Jesus could do with what they gave Him!

It is Jesus' delight to have us participate in His good work – is us and in others. It is tempting, I think, for us to wonder if what we have to offer is enough. How can the small and simple things we may have to offer in the care of others in Christ's name be enough to be effective? To really make a difference?

It's true--what we have, what we can give, is never enough on its own. But Jesus is never asking that it be enough on its own. Jesus delights in having us work with Him and in finding ways for us to be involved in His purposes. We may only be able to offer a listening ear or a prayer. We may only be able to wait quietly in Jesus as we care for another, waiting to see if He gives us a word to say. But, the good news that we learn here about Jesus is that He can always take what we give Him and use it in His gracious, redeeming work.

We can hand over to Jesus what we have today, trusting Him with it all. We can hand Him our strengths and our weaknesses, our relationships, our doubts and troubles, our questions. And as we even confess our sins to Him, we hand them over to him to receive His forgiveness. He knows us and knows what to do with where we are today. We can count on Him to bless us, and others, even if we don't see right away exactly how He will do that. We see in this story, as in all the NT stories, that Jesus is faithful and that we can know and benefit from His faithfulness as we stay in close relationship with Him.

How does this passage help you as you prepare to go home?

Devotionals: Handouts for campers

Day One: Jesus' Invitation

Matthew 11:27-30 (NIV)

27 All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”28 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

What burdens are you trying to carry today? Write them down on a piece of paper. In your prayer time together, hand them over to Jesus.

Day Two: Our Good Father

Matthew 6:25-34 (NIV)

25 Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

28 And why do you worry about clothes? See the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

What are some ways that you have seen your heavenly Father at work in your life recently?

Day Three: We Live by Faith

Hebrews 11:8-12 (ESV)

8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. 11 By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

What helps you to see and remember who Jesus is and what He is up to?

Day Four: Loving Others in Christ

Colossians 3:15-17 (ESV)

15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

What are some ways that you can pass on to someone else the peace and words of Christ that you have received, perhaps even today?

Day Five: Getting to work with Jesus

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