



For the Week of March 4, 2012

Good Questions, Straight Answers

Daily Life Notes for Individuals & Couples

Introductions

We are studying the gospel of John together throughout 2012 in order to deepen our understanding of God as we explore tough questions and straight answers. We're so grateful you're joining us for Life Notes, and we pray you'll be able to spend time with God each day, writing, praying and asking the Holy Spirit to guide your heart into healthy relationship with him. One thing we know for certain - if you spend time connecting with God each day, you will experience change. Spiritual formation happens as we allow the Holy Spirit to transform us from the inside out. Let's draw close in an intimate, honest, real relationship with our Creator.

Note: Saturday is used as a "sabbath" day experience, but you might work on Saturday and be off some other time during the week that would be more appropriate to celebrating rest. Please feel free to adjust the **Life Notes** schedule to fit with your own.

The Word: John 3:22-36

After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized. (This was before John was put in prison.) An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less.

"The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

Monday

If you've been doing **Life Notes** regularly, then you're accustomed to taking time to read the passage. We believe that taking time to read and reflect on God's Word helps clear the mind and prepare the heart to hear from God. So read the passage at least twice, listening thoughtfully to what God is saying and taking note of words or phrases that stand out as the passage is read. If you're enjoying **Life Notes** with someone else, read aloud to each other.

Take a moment to pray after reading and reflect on any words or phrases that stand out for you, asking the Holy Spirit to speak to you in that area/those areas throughout the week. We know that it's difficult to learn to listen, to seek instead of find, to rest instead of "do," but spiritual formation is all about developing a deep relationship with God as Father, Son and Spirit. And this passage talks about the Father, Son and Spirit and how they interact in a way that we rarely discuss. So look for God to deepen your awareness of himself and how he works this week. We'll do lots of question-asking and listening, clarifying and seeking.

EXAMEN: One spiritual conversation that is so helpful to practice is Examen. This simply means asking or examining two aspects of any conversation. For example, what did you like the most about lunch and what did you like the least about lunch? Taking a look at the "most" and the "least" helps us focus on how we're processing life, what we are feeling and what we need from God and others.

*What, in this passage, is the most comfortable or gratifying message for you right now?
What is the least comfortable or gratifying message for you right now?*

*What in this passage do you understand about God the most?
What in this passage do you understand about God the least?*

*What do you think John the baptizer understood about God the most and the least?
What do you think John's followers understand about God the most and the least?*

Today, simply give your spirit time to relax with God. It isn't easy to be a Jesus-follower at times - things don't always make sense to us, just as they didn't to the disciples or to John and his followers. John the baptizer loved Jesus. His whole life was devoted to preparing the way for Messiah. His whole ministry was devoted to making a way for Jesus. No one was more humanly pleased than John when Jesus entered public ministry. But it was also a difficult transition for John and his friends.

Journal about any difficult transitions you're facing right now. Journal about some of the "most" and "least" discussions you're having or need to have with God.

Tuesday

Begin the day today reading the passage one time, reminding yourself of the situations and relationships represented. Journal any thoughts you've had since yesterday's reading. We'll focus on John the baptizer and his followers a bit more today.

John makes a statement in this passage that is really amazing. John had great popularity and respect, and yet he had to lose his place of renown in order to make room for Jesus to step in.

Have you ever found yourself needing to become less so someone else could become greater?

How does the bridegroom illustration apply to your life?

Think about our culture of popularity and celebrity versus this attitude exemplified by John.

Who would you say are the most popular or well-known celebrities or public figures today?

What makes these people so popular?

In our society, what usually accompanies this kind of popularity?

What are the results of being popular or well known or a celebrity in our society?

Now reflect upon the idea of “becoming less” - a commitment from John the baptizer that seems quite different from our culture’s way of doing things.

What about “becoming less” do you think might have been difficult for John’s disciples?

Why do you think it was easier for John to accept “becoming less” than it was for his followers?

How is “becoming less” treated in our society?

How does “becoming less” directly apply to us in our faith journey today?

Return to the question we ended with yesterday.

Have you ever found yourself needing to become less so someone else could become greater?

How did it feel to become less?

What was the result of your becoming less?

When, where, with whom, how is God asking you to “become less” right now?

Micah 6:8, MISSION’s mission and vision, is all about becoming less.

“He has showed you, o man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

In closing today, reflect on Micah 6:8, on John and his followers and on your own life situation.

How are Father, Son and Spirit interacting in your heart and in your circumstances to show you what is good and what is required?

How do you see Father, Son and Spirit at work in your life right now?

What does it mean for you to be actively living Micah 6:8?

Wednesday

As you begin your time today, get your journal (or any paper) and a pen and write a letter of gratitude for everything that God has given you in your life right now. Focus on what you're receiving from Father, Son and Spirit. If you don't have time to write, just speak aloud or to your spouse all of the gifts that come to mind.

What did you learn from reviewing the gifts God is giving you? What did you experience in doing that review?

Let's do an examen together around God's gifts.

How is God gifting you most obviously in your life right now?

How is God gifting you least obviously in your life right now? (Maybe there are things you feel you really need or help you feel you really need and you can't seem to hear from God at the moment.)

How can focusing on God's gifts help put the rest of your world into perspective, at least for these few moments?

It is difficult to see God's gifts in every person and in every situation, but they are there. God works good in all things (Romans 8:28). God sends the Holy Spirit to pray for us when we aren't even sure how to pray (Romans 8:26,27). We are told that our present difficulties are nothing compared to the future glory that will be revealed in us (Romans 8:18). God freely gave us the gift of his Son (Romans 8:32). God is conforming or molding us into the image of his Son (Romans 8:29). Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ (Romans 8:35-39). The Spirit of God lives in us (Romans 8:9). And these are just a few of the gifts listed in Roman 8.

One of the most humble human beings in Scripture was John the baptizer. And the combination of John and Jesus was a beautiful example of who all of us are to be in relation to our Lord.

When his followers wanted an explanation from John about losing followers to Jesus, John's initial response was, "a man can receive only what was given him from heaven." That's a beautiful response and one we can focus on together today. We have what God is giving us, and that's all we can truly receive.

"There is an experience of the eternal breaking into time which transforms all life into a miracle" (from *A Testament of Devotion*, Thomas Kelly). Dear Father, Son and Spirit, help us today to receive the miracle.

Thursday

As you begin your time today, read the Scripture passage out loud and see if anything stands out differently for you. The Holy Spirit moves in amazing ways, teaching us something new each time we read God's Word.

This week, Pastor Mark brought us the gospel message by helping us understand God's love and his wrath. God's love is expressed in so many ways, but, particularly, through Jesus. God's wrath isn't arbitrary anger, but God's righteous and just response to sin. It's a difficult subject for us, but one that is clearly in Scripture and, therefore, one that God wants us to grasp.

Pastor Mark told us that for us to fully understand the wrath of God, we have to understand the love of God. We have to understand the reality of God's justice and our sin. And we have to receive the truth from God, not from man.

Jesus is really clear on this subject. There is eternal life for his followers, and there is wrath and condemnation for those who reject him. If you don't agree with that, if that doesn't fit in your personal theology, you're calling God a liar. It's not like, 'oh, I just disagree with the church on that.' We're not the one who said it, Jesus said it. And since Jesus speaks the words of God, if you disagree, you're saying God is untruthful.

In short, we choose to believe Jesus. He is our authority. He is God. To believe ourselves or a popular idea over God and his Word makes no sense. We need to discover what God says about salvation - God's forgiveness and his wrath - in our passage this week.

The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

Pastor Mark taught us that WHOEVER believes or follows Jesus is forgiven and eternally set free from separation from God and punishment for sin. This is amazing news. This applies to you and me - to whoever chooses to follow Jesus. And we aren't free from our sin circumstantially, until the next time we sin or until something bad happens or until we make yet another mistake, we're free from sin...period...forever... forgiven. When we reject Jesus, we remain in God's wrath, where the punishment for our sin is exactly as it must be. Pastor Mark taught us:

Here's the good news, the gospel...out of his incredible love for us, God provided a way of forgiveness for your sins, a way that you, in spite of all your sin, can stand before God and be declared not guilty. He took all the wrath due your sin, and instead of pouring it out on you, he poured it out on his Son. On the cross, Jesus bore the wrath due for your sin. God administered his righteous reaction against your injustice, but he administered it upon his Son.

So that now, when you put your faith in Jesus, you are united with him and the sacrifice of Christ is applied to you. Your sin is forgiven. When you meet the Father and the enemy rightly accuses you of sin, the Father will declare you clean, not guilty, your sin already paid for through the blood of Jesus. You will be saved from the dreadful wrath of God, and you will have eternal life in the kingdom.

God's overwhelming love moved Jesus to accept the punishment for our sin, and so as we follow him, throughout our life here and now and for eternity, our sins are forgiven and we are restored to a beautiful fellowship with Father, Son and Spirit.

Today, spend time thinking about your own gospel story.

*What was your life like when you were first introduced to Jesus?
Who was instrumental in leading you to Jesus and who has been instrumental in your faith-life?
What has changed about your life and your relationships as a result of knowing Jesus?*

As you close your time today, find yourself wrapped in God's overwhelming love for you.

Friday

Today, read the passage for this week along with the following verses, taking note of any words or ideas that encourage or instruct you.

Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me." (John 7:16)

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." John 11:25,26

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

Our passage for this week explores the Father, Son and Spirit in the dance that is so beautifully God. God the Father loves us so much that he sent God the Son into this world to free us from wrath - from our bondage to the eternal effects of sin. God the Holy Spirit is with us and in us, as believers, and he reminds us of everything Jesus has said, he prays for us and walks alongside us throughout our journey. This is why it's so important to allow God to form our souls - so that we can truly experience kingdom life with God right now and for eternity.

Today, spend time thinking about those in your life who you believe do not know Jesus as Savior.

Who in my life needs to hear about Jesus? (There might be more than one.)

You might now take an **Examen** approach to the above question and ask,

Who on my list do I find it easiest to talk to about Jesus and why?

Who on my list do I find it most difficult to talk to about Jesus and why?

How does my story intersect with each life I've identified? Why are each of these people important to me?

What about my Jesus-story does this other person need to hear? (How can I make my Jesus-story relevant to this other person(s)?)

What about my life right now might help someone else come to know God's love and forgiveness?

Close your time by praying about those in your life who do not know Jesus as Savior. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring opportunities to simply love that person/those people, to help you speak words they need to hear, to help you get past fears of sharing your story and to help you be a light in the world around you.

Saturday

We are encouraging you to let Saturdays be a “mini Sabbath” moment. If Saturday is a work day for you, simply exchange this day in **Life Notes** for the day you have off. It’s really important to learn to simply “be” with Jesus, with yourself, with those you love, without an “agenda.”

Sabbath simply means “cease” and “rest.” So, today, spend moments truly resting with God the Father, Son and Spirit. “Cease” all of the detailed work and worries that creep into your life everyday.

Couples, if possible, spend some Sabbath moments together reading, taking a walk, drinking coffee outside, sharing a song you both like, inviting friends over and cooking for them, taking a drive or a bike ride, exercising, watching a movie. Whatever you might like to do to truly rest, do it together. You might laugh or cry with God about things that have happened in your life together this week. Just let the time unfold. Sense God’s love for you; seek his peace and pursue it.

Families, spend a Sabbath day together. Let different members of the family choose what to do each week. Simply enjoy God’s company together. Or maybe serve somewhere as a family or invite neighbors over, simply because you care.

Discover Jesus in all you do. He’ll delight and amaze you.