



For the Week of April 29, 2012

Good Questions, Straight Answers:
who is Jesus: a festival of the heart

Daily Life Notes for Individuals & Couples

Introductions

Welcome to **Life Notes**. This week, we'll be looking at the reality of Jesus in our lives and what we can learn about relationship with the Father from his example.

The passages selected by Pastor Mark this week are copied below in their entirety, but it's great to use your own Bible so you can make note of things that interest you or speak to you in some way. It's always good to read a passage at least twice, so that your mind begins to get involved with what the Holy Spirit is saying. It's also great to read a second version so you can compare what's going on. The following is the NIV. You can view various Bible versions online at sites like www.biblegateway.com

Note: Saturday is used as a "sabbath" or "rest from our every day work responsibilities" 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 your own.

The Word: John 7:1-31

After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life. But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, Jesus' brothers talked to him.

Jesus' brothers: *"You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world."*

Even his own brothers did not believe in him.

Jesus: *"The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil. You go to the Feast. I am not yet going up to this Feast, because for me the right time has not yet come."*

Having said this, he stayed in Galilee. However, after his brothers had left for the Feast, he went also, not publicly, but in secret. Now at the Feast the Jews were watching for him and asking this question.

Jews: *"Where is that man?"*

Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him.

Some people: *"He is a good man."*

Other people: *"No, he deceives the people."*

No one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the Jews.

Not until halfway through the Feast did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. The Jews were amazed.

Jews: *"How did this man get such learning without having studied?"*

Jesus: *"My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?"*

Crowd: *"You are demon-possessed. Who is trying to kill you?"*

Jesus: *"I did one miracle, and you are all astonished. Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a child on the Sabbath. Now if a child can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the Sabbath? Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment."*

Some of the people of Jerusalem: *"Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ? But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from."*

Jesus (still teaching in the temple courts): *"Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, but I know him because I am from him and he sent me."*

At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come. Still, many in the crowd put their faith in him.

Many in the crowd: *"When the Christ comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?"*

Monday: remembering, a festival for the heart

Pastor Mark taught us about how people viewed Jesus. Some thought he was just an ordinary man, some thought he was a good man, some thought he was a liar, some thought he was crazy or demon possessed, some wanted to believe he truly was Messiah. But most didn't know for certain - they didn't know how to process his identity from the world of knowledge and experience they'd known.

As we come to grips with the reality of Jesus as God, Messiah, anointed one, redeemer, perhaps our best view is to examine what he said about himself. Who did Jesus claim to be?

Jesus: "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him." (John 7:16-18)

Jesus (still teaching in the temple courts): "Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, but I know him because I am from him and he sent me." (John 7:28,29)

Jesus' claims are clear. He is God's Son, and he continually relied upon, obeyed and pointed his life to the Father. He told those listening in John 7 to test him and find out if he was speaking the truth - and he gave just one criteria. Was he speaking on behalf of himself or to bring glory to the Father? Time and again throughout John, he gives glory to the Father and to the interworking of Father, Son and Spirit (we'll see this later in John 7:37-39 and John 14-17). And as he receives what the Father gives, he does so with remembrance of God's faithfulness, with gratitude, with comfort, with rest, and with certainty or trust in the Father's purpose and love. We see this picture time and again throughout the gospels. Jesus does not operate alone.

It's no coincidence that this chapter begins with preparation for a festival. The Festival of Booths (Feast of Tabernacles) is a celebration that honors God the Father for all he has provided. In Leviticus 23 and in other Jewish commentaries, we learn that the Israelites are commanded to build and then dwell in a temporary shelter for 7 nights to commemorate what their ancestors experienced in the wilderness. The temporary shelter is referred to as a sukkah (sue-kah), and the festival is meant to be a joyful time as the Israelites remember God's 40-year provision. Historically, they build a shelter that creatively reflects their own faith walk. They decorate the shelter, fill the shelter with reminders of God's faithfulness, invite loved ones into the shelter, sleep in the context of God's blessing while they feel the wind blowing or gaze at the stars. They literally reenact what it was like to depend on God daily - in every way, for everything.

This week, we're going to host a festival of booths with the goal of learning from Jesus and pointing our lives toward the Father. We're going to see what God has done for us and celebrate his gifts. We're going to take a look inside our lives and see how God has made his home there. And then we'll know, with renewed certainty, that Jesus is who he claims to be. He is God the Son, Messiah, Risen Lord.

As we enter into this festival week, it is possible that you do not feel festive. It's possible that your life holds certain uncertainties, challenges, losses, anxieties or changes that hardly seem worth rejoicing. It's all right. We aren't celebrating the situations, we're celebrating God and his unique way of providing for our needs regardless of our circumstances. Remember that the Israelites were commanded to hold this feast to remember God's provision during their 40-year trek through the wilderness. Yet as you might recall, there were days when they complained bitterly in the midst of God's provision. God knows us. He doesn't expect us to act happy or never struggle, he simply invites us to stay connected to him - to stay focused on who he is rather than on our own concerns or failures or frustrations. He asks us to take time to remember that we are loved and always have been.

Let's begin with a booth - a symbolic place of commemoration you'll "live in" this week. Some people create a literal "space" in their house. Some people draw their booth with detailed reminders of God's provision. Some people find an outdoor space. Some people write a psalm each day or a story about their life. Some draw a timeline that focuses on God's provision. This is a symbolic experience, so just ask the Spirit to open your heart to remembrance.

The following questions might help as you create your booth.

How have you historically, specifically experienced the provision of God in your life?

How do you currently, specifically experience the provision of God in your life?

Think about a time God truly provided for you. What kind of booth could you erect to celebrate this feast of remembrance - this dependence upon God?

What would you build to reenact a period in your life where you daily had to rely on the Lord for provision and guidance?

How would the booth be designed or decorated?

Where would the booth be located?

What would be inside the booth?

What spiritual family members would be inside with you?

What would you want to include that might specifically help you “remember” God’s faithfulness and your total dependence on him?

As you conclude your time of reflection and worship today, simply spend a few moments in silent meditation “in your booth” - remembering all that God has done for you. Let yourself experience his provision.

Tuesday: comfort, a festival for the heart

As you settle in for your time with Father, Son and Spirit today, let yourself relax in the memory of God’s provision. Are you aware of any specific way God demonstrated his love for you in the past 24 hours? Have you thought of other things that God has given you or done for you? Today, we focus on comfort.

Read the following at least three times as you place yourself in the context of your festival booth.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.” (2 Corinthians 1:3-7)

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” (Matthew 5:4)

“For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.” (2 Thessaalonians 2:11-13)

What do these verses mean to you?

How have you experienced God's comfort in your life of faith?

The author of Hebrews says that we comfort others out of the comfort we receive from God.

In what ways did Jesus receive comfort from God?

How did what Jesus received from God translate into what he gave to others?

How does what Jesus received from God translate into what he gives to you?

How does God's comfort to you translate into comfort that you give to others?

Concentrate the remainder of your time on ways that God has specifically comforted you in the past, ways that he might be comforting you right now, ways that you long to experience his comfort and others in your life who might need God's comfort through you today.

Wednesday: rest, a festival for the heart

Today, take a spiritual seat in your booth and reflect on rest. Read the following at least three times, allowing the concept of spiritual rest in God to be your companion.

Jesus: "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. 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. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:25-30)

*LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup;
you have made my lot secure.
The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
surely I have a delightful inheritance.
I will praise the LORD, who counsels me;
even at night my heart instructs me.
I have set the LORD always before me.
Because he is at my right hand,
I will not be shaken.
Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest secure,
because you will not abandon me to the grave,
nor will you let your Holy One see decay.
You have made known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand. (Psalm 16:5-11)*

*Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him.
He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. (Psalm 62:5,6)*

Journal your thoughts about these passages.

When Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest," what does that mean to you? Do you remember a time in your life when you experienced such rest? What were your burdens at the time? How did you experience God's rest?

The psalmist discusses both physical rest and soul rest.

How does the psalmist see the difference between physical rest and soul rest? How do you distinguish the difference? Have you experienced soul rest? If so, when? Have you learned to rest in God before the anxieties or uncertainties become overwhelming? How did God teach you to release those cares and receive rest in return?

End your time today focusing on being at rest in God. Thank God for moments of soul rest in your past and ask him to help you turn quickly to him when cares of this world threaten peace.

Thursday: trust, a festival of the heart

Begin your time today sitting in your spiritual (or literal) booth and thinking about confidence and trust.

When you have confidence or trust in someone, how does that feel? What is different about your actions, your thoughts, your emotions?

When you don't have confidence or trust in someone, how does that feel? What is different about your actions, your thoughts, your emotions?

What does it take for you to have confidence or trust in someone?

Focus on those areas you are able to trust to God most of the time. Journal how that feels for you and the difference trusting God makes in your life.

Read the following passages at least three times.

Jesus: *"Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these."* (Luke 12:25-27)

Paul: *"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."* (2 Corinthians 12:9)

*"The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed,
a stronghold in times of trouble.
Those who know your name will trust in you,
for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.
Sing praises to the LORD, enthroned in Zion;
proclaim among the nations what he has done."* (Psalm 9:9-11)

*"But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.
I will sing to the LORD,
for he has been good to me." (Psalm 13:5,6)*

*"Now I know that the LORD saves his anointed;
he answers him from his holy heaven
with the saving power of his right hand.
Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the LORD our God." (Psalm 20:6,7)*

*"He put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear
and put their trust in the LORD.
Blessed is the man
who makes the LORD his trust,
who does not look to the proud,
to those who turn aside to false gods.
Many, O LORD my God,
are the wonders you have done.
The things you planned for us
no one can recount to you;
were I to speak and tell of them,
they would be too many to declare." (Psalm 40:3-5)*

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." (John 14:1-3)

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13)

As you close your time today, focus on how you feel - physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually - when you are able to trust God with every aspect of your life. The Israelites had to completely rely on God during their wilderness journey, even though it was difficult for them much of the time. As we celebrate God from our booth position, we can trust him for everything.

What "next steps" can you take to trust God with your today-life?

Friday: gratitude, a festival of the heart

Perhaps you've allowed yourself to feel grateful this week - grateful for the gift of God's love, for the gift of his provision, for the relationship you have with God the Father, Son and Spirit. If this has been a difficult week for you to focus on your relationship with God, perhaps he is simply becoming more real to you and the intimacy which a personal relationship requires feels uncomfortable. We are each and all in process in our faith journey. A relationship with God isn't a destination, it's the journey itself.

As you spend your time today, imagine yourself comfortable in your booth - surrounded by memories of God's faithfulness and a lifetime of love offered you each moment of the day. Imagine God right there, in person with you, in whatever form comes to mind. And imagine yourself simply thanking God for the gift of life, the gift of love, the gift of relationship. Focus on a sampling of passages that remind us of God's love and faithfulness, and welcome your mind, body and emotions into a time of thanksgiving.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11)

*"Praise be to the LORD, for he has heard my cry for mercy.
The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped.
My heart leaps for joy, and I will give thanks to him in song.
The LORD is the strength of his people, a fortress of salvation for his anointed one." (Ps 28:6-8)*

*"You turned my wailing into dancing;
you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,
that my heart may sing to you and not be silent.
O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever." (Psalm 30:11,12)*

*"Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.
Worship the LORD with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.
Know that the LORD is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.
For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations." (Psalm 100)*

"Jesus told the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people. They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over." (Matthew 15:35-37)

"Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Ephesians 5:19,20)

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Colossians 3:15-17)

This week has been our own Festival of Booths, as we've recounted the ways God has cared for us. It has also been a chance for us to view God through the eyes of his Son, our Lord. Jesus loved the Father, the Father loved the Son, and the Father, Son and Spirit work together to care for us in every way. Their relationship is inseparable, and nothing can ever separate us from God's love (Romans 8).

Saturday: Sabbath

We encourage 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.