

For the Week of May 27, 2012

Good Questions, Straight Answers:  
slave or free

Daily Life Notes for Individuals & Couples

## Introductions

Welcome to **Life Notes**. This week, we'll be looking at John 8, focusing on who Jesus really is and why it's so difficult for us to release our old ideas and step into the freedom of life that Jesus offers.

The passages selected by Pastor Mark this week are copied below in their entirety, but it's best 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. You can view various Bible versions online at sites like [www.biblegateway.com](http://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 8:31-47

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus spoke.

Jesus: *"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

The Jews who had believed: *"We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"*

Jesus: *"I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father."*

The Jews who had believed: *"Abraham is our father."*

Jesus: *"If you were Abraham's children, then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the things your own father does."*

The Jews who had believed: *"We are not illegitimate children. The only Father we have is God himself."*

Jesus: *"If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."*

## An Overview of this Week

This week's passage comes on the heels of previous conversations between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders. Most recently, the Pharisees had challenged Jesus' statement, "I am the light of the world" by refuting his right to make such a statement. He responded by revealing even more about his Father, himself and their relationship. The Pharisees just couldn't release their old paradigm - they couldn't trust his word. And so they continued to question and argue and try to fit Jesus into their box.

At the conclusion of that conversation, we're told that many put their faith in him. And that's where this week's passage picks up.

*"To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'if you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'"*

The truth will set you free. Which of us doesn't want to be free? Freedom is what we long for, but how do we get freedom? Jesus told the religious leaders that they had to hold to his teachings. They had to be disciplined by Jesus instead of holding to their old ways and expectations.

Let's spend some time this week reviewing what they heard - what Jesus invited them to believe. Let's put ourselves in the world of the Jewish leaders in the gospel of John. Let's hear Jesus' words for them...and for our own lives. What is the truth that sets free?

## Monday's truth: the Father loves us...and Jesus is the evidence

Today, read this week's passage at least two times, putting yourself, as best you can, in the place of the religious leaders of that day. Remember that they knew what we refer to as the "Old Testament," and remember that they'd been waiting for Messiah for centuries. They'd been longing for a miracle, but it was difficult for them to recognize him when he appeared.

Journal your thoughts:

*Why do you think it was so difficult for the religious leaders to adjust their paradigm to accommodate what Jesus was teaching?*

*When and why is it difficult for you to adjust your paradigm to accommodate what Jesus is teaching?*

In John 3, we're told that Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Jewish ruling council, went to Jesus at night. He had a burning need to understand more about this man everyone was talking about. Nicodemus acknowledged that Jesus was a teacher who'd come *from* God, but he didn't yet understand that Jesus was God the Son. That idea didn't fit the paradigm at all. Jesus engaged, and the resulting teaching is encapsulated into a verse we all have heard.

*“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3:16,17)*

This is one of our most treasured promises. If we could truly grasp the soul-changing message Jesus brought, we would be free indeed.

You might have done this before, but a simple exercise helps us focus on the truth of the words. Make the verse personal, praying the words and really hearing them as you pray.

*“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

*“God so loved the Pharisees and religious leaders that he gave his one and only Son, that the Pharisees and religious leaders who believed in him would not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the Pharisees and religious leaders, but to save the Pharisees and religious leaders through him.”*

*“God loved me so much that he gave his one and only son, so that I can believe in him and not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn me, but to save me through him.”*

Substitute the name of any person you’re praying for...any person who needs Jesus that God has placed on your heart.

Pray this teaching over anyone you might be angry with or divided from right now.

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you be aware of this essential, foundational truth today: God loves you and those you love...he loves those you’re struggling to love...he loves the world so much that he gave his one and only Son to set us free.

## Tuesday’s truth: the Son imitates the Father

Begin your time today reviewing what we read yesterday.

*“God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only son, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

Reflect on God’s love for you and ask the Holy Spirit to prepare you for what he has to offer today.

*What did Jesus teach?*

*What teachings did he invite the religious leaders to follow?*

*What truths would set them free?*

Journal any thoughts that come to mind as we review another fundamental teaching.

*“Lord, Jesus. Teach our hearts today. Help us receive truth that sets us free.”*

Today, we'll focus on this teaching: the Son imitates the Father.

A family fact that is difficult to dispute is that children emulate their parents. We rarely realize the extent of their observation, but it's keen and it's repetitive. Children do what they see being done, particularly by those they admire, love or long for attention from.

Today, we see this simple truth in one of the lessons Jesus taught the Jewish leaders. In John 5:19 Jesus told the religious leaders,

*"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."*

We so often think of Jesus independently. We speak about him, repeat his parables, tell of his life as if he acted alone once he arrived in this world. But that wasn't the case. Jesus taught tirelessly that he and the Father are intimately connected and that he does only what the Father does - what the Father shows him and tells him to do. Jesus constantly imitates his Father.

Reflect on what this means.

*Think through all you know about the history of man and God. What had Jesus witnessed the Father doing for thousands of years?*

*In what specific ways did Jesus imitate his Father?*

*In what specific ways are you imitating the Father?*

*In what specific way(s) do you sense the Father asking you to imitate him today?*

Wednesday's truth: the Father is always at work, and the Son is working, too

Read our passage for the week at least two times and read John 3:16,17 and John 5:19,20 at least two times. Meditate on the Father at work in the world, then and now. Meditate on the Father at work in your life, throughout the course of your life.

In John 5:16,17 we see one of the conflicts between the religious leaders and Jesus. Jesus was healing on the Sabbath and they believed that such an action was in violation of the law. From their paradigm, Jesus was a lawbreaker.

Today we see that God's goodness never rests. After the sixth day of creation, God enjoyed a Sabbath rest – but it was not a rest from his goodness. God's goodness never rests. Keeping the Sabbath was never intended to be at the cost of failing to do God's good.

God is always at work. And Jesus was and is always helping him.

*"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working. For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."*

Jesus taught over and over again that he and the Father are one. He taught the Jewish leaders and all who would listen that it was his Father's work he was doing, not something he thought up on his own. He told them that doing his Father's work was his heart's desire.

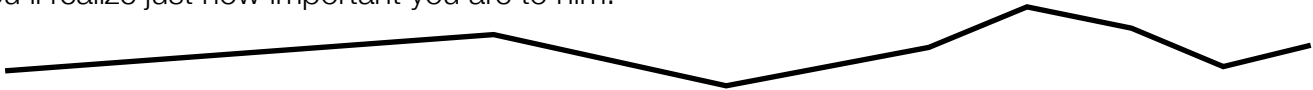
Look around you. Ask Father God to show you what he was doing in their lives.

*What work was the Father doing in the lives of the Jewish people through Jesus?*

*What work was the Father doing in the lives of the disciples through Jesus?*

*What work were they not seeing...what work were they missing out on?*

As you reflect on today's teaching, try something that you'll, at first, think you don't have time to do...or can skip, because it really wouldn't help that much. Even if you have 5 minutes to spare, sketch a time line of God at work in your life. Start at birth...or even before conception - wherever God leads you to begin...and fill in those "moments" when, looking back, you can see God at work. The experience will amaze you. And you'll likely want to return to fill in more blanks. What you'll see is God at work. And you'll realize just how important you are to him.



*What is the Father doing right now in your life through the ongoing work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit?*

*What work might you be missing out on, simply because you're living busy, ashamed, afraid, unaware or to fulfill desires you're experiencing?*

Bring your time today to a close, reflecting on God at work...always at work...in your life.

### Thursday: the Father speaks through the Son

As you begin your time today, look back at your time line. Have you thought of anything you want to add? Have you felt encouraged to see God at work your entire life? (If you didn't have time for this yesterday, go back and create your time line. You'll find this exercise invaluable.)

*Are you beginning to understand more about Jesus and his relationship with the Father?*

*Are you beginning to understand more about how the Father and Son work in your life?*

*Are you beginning to understand more about the truth that sets us free?*

Today, we'll focus on this truth: the Father speaks through the Son.

Jesus regularly taught in the temple courts with the Pharisees and religious leaders close at hand. Just in the first 8 chapters of John, we've watched them listen, evaluate, question those who had been healed, plot against Jesus, challenge Jesus...it seemed nearly impossible for them to switch their paradigm. They saw Jesus as a human being, not as divine God the Son, existing in eternal relationship with God the Father and God the Spirit. They were focused on refuting a human's teaching, not on encountering God.

Today, let's focus on encountering God. Pray that the Spirit will open your heart to new understanding as we see God speaking through the Son.

*"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."*

As Mark mentioned several weeks ago, the law said that a refuted man required a witness. God was Jesus' witness.

*What was the Father saying to the Pharisees and religious leaders through the Son?*

If you have time today, simply walk through the first 8 chapters of John and record what Jesus said about God and about himself to these religious leaders. We've looked at a few of the teachings, but we haven't exhausted the list. God was speaking, but they heard what they thought was only a man.

The Son did not come as man only – he came representing his Father. Hebrews 1 provides us with an expansive view.

*"In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."*  
(Hebrews 1:1-3)

Read that passage at least two times and then reflect on the following:

*How has the Father spoken to his people through history?*

*What is the Father saying to you through the Son right now?*

*What is the Holy Spirit revealing in your life?*

As we've learned, God is always at work, so he's working right now in your life. He's speaking into you right this moment and all of the time.

*Are you able to hear? If not, what is keeping you from hearing his message to you?*

## Friday's truth: we are free

We've been taking a close look this week at what the religious leaders had heard from Jesus when he spoke those powerful words,

*"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (8:31,32)*

*What teaching had they heard?*

We've explored a number of the teachings, and there is a common theme.

In a sentence or two, how would you summarize the teachings of Jesus at that point in John 8?

Today, let's take an honest look at what keeps us from experiencing the freedom Jesus talked about. Jesus told the religious leaders that they were slaves, but they balked. They argued, as they argued about most things. They wanted to insist that they weren't slaves at all. But they were. They were slaves to something deep in themselves.

The simply truth for today is this: Jesus sets us free. But it's difficult to experience freedom when we insist on keeping our own company with sin - and there are lots of ways that sin shows up in our lives.

Pastor Ryan spoke with us about how sin had shown up in his family. His father was an alcoholic who could not choose his family over his alcohol. He was a slave to something that could not love him, could not meet his needs, could not comfort him, had no value to his life. But it was captivating and enticing. Pastor Ryan told us that sin, at first, feels pleasurable - but then it demands more of us that we can possibly offer. Sin versus freedom. Our own will versus God's will. Slave versus free. It's our decision.

Let today be a day when you allow God to love you through any sin that currently holds you captive. Let God love you past your sin. You might need to seek specific help to break a pattern or you might simply need to yield control to God and believe the teachings of Jesus. Wherever you are in the journey, you are not alone and you aren't too far down the path of sin to turn and find Jesus right there with you.

*"I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." (John 8:36)*

The Jewish religious leaders fought the teachings because they had a paradigm that didn't include self-disclosure, taking up their cross, following Jesus in radical love for the world.

*What's your paradigm? Are you ready to release control?*

*Holy Spirit, thank you for revealing God's Words to us - for writing them down so that we could remember, so that we would never be alone. Help us to simply let go, believe and follow Jesus. Amen."*

## 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.