



Devotions Week Six

The final component of this week's lesson is a Bible study that enhances the big ideas from the video. There are five days of devotions to be completed during the week. Researchers found that couples who read the Bible and pray together daily have a nearly 100% success rate for their marriages, so we believe that developing that habit is non-negotiable.

If you already are involved in a daily study that includes reading passages from the Bible, please don't feel it is necessary to put that one on hold - these devotions are available to you as an option. The part that is not an option for a successful marriage is doing some form of daily Bible reading and study together.

Day One

Read Jeremiah 29:11-14

Isn't it comforting to know that God has a plan for us? Really, that's so much better than floating along aimlessly, hoping that through some cosmic lottery we will wind up doing something significant. God has a plan for us and he has known what that plan is all along, but He needs us to do our part too. It isn't that He can just zap us into whatever situation He wishes, but He won't. He gave us free will, and along with that the ability to choose for ourselves the things that we will do.

The people of Jerusalem exercised their freedom of choice, and were making some pretty bad ones. As a result, God allowed the Babylonians to come in and conquer them, which included taking most of the people into captivity. Jeremiah, a prophet, was left in Jerusalem and wrote to his fellow kinsmen who were taken captive. That had to be kind of a hard letter to write because he had been warning them to change their behavior prior to the invasion

and they essentially ignored him. Now he is passing on more words from God, and those are the words from today's reading.

God never plans to be separated from His people; He wants to be in relationship with them and with us. However, just like in a relationship between two people, a relationship with God requires an investment from us also. We have to be willing to call on His name, pray, and seek Him; in response He will listen, answer, and come to us. He wants to take care of us, but we have to want that care.

We may not have prophets like Jeremiah walking around giving us messages from God, but in a sense we do. We have the Bible, which is God's Word, to tell us what He expects. We have a model of how to behave in the life of His Son, Jesus Christ. We have pastors and ministers to help us process through it and apply it in our lives. We have the Holy Spirit to fill us with God's presence and guide us in our daily actions. We also have the responsibility to make the choice to live by His design; and that's really pretty simple. Simple, but not necessarily easy. Jesus summed it up for us in a quick verse in Matthew 13:34: "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

Discussion Questions

- What are the defining standards by which you judge your behavior? How do you decide if what you are going to do is right or wrong?
- When you think of how others would describe your actions, what words come to mind? Do others see that you are using God's Word as your guide for decisions?
- Do you believe that God has a plan for you? How would you know what it was? How would you know you were traveling down the right path?

Close your time by praying together. You may pray on your own or use this one as a model:

God, thank You for taking care of us, even down to having a plan for us. Help us to see how moving forward in Your will is taking us to what You have for us. Give us the strength of character to make the choices that are honoring to You when the world around us criticizes us for not looking out for ourselves as the number one concern. Thank You for sending Your Son as a model for us. In His Name we pray. Amen.

Day Two

Read Luke 12:22-34

Where do you tend to put your security? In these verses Jesus is instructing us to not worry, or put our security in, the things of this world. He tells us to not worry about those basic things of life, food and clothing, because God will provide them. He doesn't really expect us to believe that our dresser drawers and cupboards will automatically refill through some miraculous duplication system; although those things are possible, what He is intending for us to understand is that we need to live lives that are dominated by faith in God rather than in trust in our own ability to provide for our needs.

God promises us the provision necessary to accomplish the work He has designed for us to do. That doesn't mean that we are non-participants in the process; we have to step forward and utilize the opportunities and resources that He is putting in our path. It also doesn't mean that we are going to be provided with the things we need to do the work that we create for ourselves. When we are functioning in His will, and moving forward in His plan for us, we can expect to have what we need when we need it.

So what does that have to do with worrying? I know that for many years I prided myself on being a master-level worrier. During those years I could find things to fret over that others hadn't even considered as possibilities. I have been working on getting that under control because what I have come to understand is that worrying is born from a feeling of not being taken care of. For many years I felt that I needed to be the one to charge forward and see to my own needs; I felt that no one else could or would step up to look out for me, and I had extended that feeling to include my opinion about God's care for me. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Yesterday's reading explored the truth of God's desire to care for His children. We have to believe and accept that if we want to be able to put our worrying way to rest. We simply need to believe that He will take care of us and provide us the means to acquire the things we need. It doesn't mean that we can sit back and not accept any responsibility. We are called to be good stewards of the resources He provides for us - whether those resources are in the form of finances, jobs, time, experiences, people, raw materials, or any other thing He puts in our midst to help us accomplish His work. We need to wisely use the vast array of resources

in front of us, but we don't need to worry that we won't have enough.

He has provided for our eternal salvation through His Son. The game has already been won, we know the final outcome; our job is to play through to the end in a manner that impacts the people around us for Him.

Discussion Questions

- What are the things that you spend most of your time worrying about? What does it benefit you to worry about that?
- What are the things that you truly need right now to be able to take the next step in His will? If you think creatively, are some of those needs already being met? (Sometimes our needs are met in ways that we don't anticipate or by people we don't expect.)
- How much faith do you have that God will provide for your needs? In verse 33, Jesus is using a dramatic example when He says to sell everything you own and give it to the poor, that isn't a direct command; however, it is an illustration of the amount of faith we are to have in God's ability to provide. Where do you draw more security - from your bank account or from God?

Close your time by praying together. You may pray on your own or use this one as a model:

God, thank You for already supplying all of our needs. Help us to rely on your provision more each day as we rely less on our own ability to take care of ourselves. We know that it isn't until that exterior shell of independence is completely cracked open that we can live fully the way you created us to rely on you. Fill us with your Spirit and continue to make us more like Your Son. In His Name we pray. Amen.

Day Three

Read Matthew 6:33-34

This passage is a parallel to yesterday's verse. Today, take the time to read these same verses in these different translations. Really stop and think about the differences in the nuances of each version.

33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (New King James Version)

33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (English Standard Version)

33 Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. 34 “Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes. (Message Version)

33 Instead, desire first and foremost God's kingdom and God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore, stop worrying about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Common English Bible)

33 Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. 34 “So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today. (New Living Translation)

Choose one (or more) version that speaks the most directly to you today and copy those words into a handy format. You can use an index card, smart phone, or tablet device. The idea is to have it close to you today as you move through your day. Each time you are tempted to worry about things that are outside of your present situation, stop and remind yourself of Jesus's words in these verses.

We recently had a situation in our lives that had the potential to be a huge problem. Things were happening around us that impacted us, but we had no control over the decisions

being made or the direction individuals were headed. I spent a lot of time worrying about what was going to happen if _____, or how would we handle it when _____ came up. I ran down dozens of rabbit trails chasing down multiple possibilities and outcomes. I had forgotten these powerful words: tomorrow will bring its own worries; today's trouble is enough for today. I wasted several days of impact by living out possible realities that never materialized. Today's worries/troubles/cares/toils are enough for today, for tomorrow will have its own.

Discussion Questions

- Think about one area of your life that you tend to worry about. Share this with your spouse. Talk about how you can help each other refocus your energy into the things that you can impact today.
- In the area you discussed, talk about where you doubt God's provision. Where do you think He will fail to provide "enough?" Is it fair to fear that He won't provide? Try to list at least three faith-builders from your past - three things that you can point to that show God does in fact protect and provide for you.

Close your time by praying together. You may pray on your own or use this one as a model:

Lord, thank You for always providing enough for us. You know what are needs are and you know what we need to experience in order to grow into the people you created us to become. Help us to grow in our faith and to increasingly trust you to meet our needs. Send Your Spirit to remind us to lean into You when we are feeling like things are out of our control. In Your Son's Name we pray. Amen.

Day Four

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-7

The Byrds made this passage of scripture popular in 1965 when they released their #1 hit "Turn, Turn, Turn." They really can't claim to have written the lyrics, nor can the several bands that sang this song prior to them. Except for the plea to "turn, turn, turn," and the line "A time for peace, I swear it's not too late," most scholars agree that King Solomon wrote

these words in the tenth century BC. They were true then, and they are still true today.

Turn! Turn! Turn! (to Everything There Is a Season) by The Byrds

To everything - turn, turn, turn
There is a season - turn, turn, turn
And a time for every purpose under heaven

A time to be born, a time to die
A time to plant, a time to reap
A time to kill, a time to heal
A time to laugh, a time to weep

To everything - turn, turn, turn
There is a season - turn, turn, turn
And a time for every purpose under heaven

A time to build up, a time to break down
A time to dance, a time to mourn
A time to cast away stones
A time to gather stones together

To everything - turn, turn, turn
There is a season - turn, turn, turn
And a time for every purpose under heaven

A time of war, a time of peace
A time of love, a time of hate
A time you may embrace
A time to refrain from embracing

To everything - turn, turn, turn
There is a season - turn, turn, turn
And a time for every purpose under heaven

A time to gain, a time to lose
A time to mend, a time to sew

A time to love, a time to hate
 A time of peace, I swear it's not too late!

Solomon was known for his wisdom. In this section, he is reiterating the point that everything that happens has a proper time and a proper sequence. By contrasting the two opposing actions we are able to understand that there is order in the world and God created that order to flow in a sequence. Check out the way this commentary explains it:

But these earthly pursuits, while lawful in their season, are “unprofitable” when made by man, what God never intended them to be, the chief good. Solomon had tried to create an artificial forced joy, at times when he ought rather to have been serious; the result, therefore, of his labor to be happy, out of God’s order, was disappointment. (Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible by Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown

We need to trust that God’s timing is perfect. I’m not sure why that is so hard for most of us. We tend to walk around with our planners and calendaring systems and think that we have a good idea when each thing has to occur. The mistake we make is that we forget that we only see a small sliver of reality; God is the one who sees it all and knows how things need to come together for His purposes. When we try to force our agenda, we may succeed in accomplishing our goal, but like Solomon, we will most likely be met with spiritual disappointment.

Discussion Questions

- When are you most likely to insist on your timing rather than on God’s timing? Why?
- It is easy to think of one of the statements as positive and one as negative (born/die, plant/reap, kill/heal, tear down/build up, etc.) Do you believe that both times come from God? Can you trust that His timing is perfect for “good” and “bad” things?
- Since your time to impact people is limited, what can you do to maximize your actions?

Close your time by praying together. You may pray on your own or use this one as a model:

God, thank You for bringing order into the world. You know the whole picture and keep everything moving the way it needs to. Help us to trust Your timing and to be patient

in our waiting. Help us to be efficient in the use of our time so we can make a difference to the people you put in our lives. You are in control and are the only one capable of filling that role. Thank You for showing us Your greatness. Amen.

Day Five

Read Joshua 24:14-15

Joshua is calling the people to do what you are being asked to do this week; put a stake in the ground and declare your intentions for moving forward. We are called to leave the things we have made into our gods in the past and move forward with our eyes fixed to the One True God. We are asked to declare to the people around us, in words and actions, that we will serve God alone.

We were designed with free will; God is not going to force our hand and make us serve Him as if He were some sort of puppeteer. His desire is for us to be in relationship with Him, but that is our choice. He offers us everything we need for this life and for everlasting, eternal life with Him. All we have to do is accept the gift that His Son, Jesus, made possible through His own death and resurrection.

When we have a relationship with God, our desire is to be the person He created us to be. We want to live according to His plan and His expectations. On earth we will never be able to perfectly live in His Will, but each day we work to get a little closer. That happens through a daily, conscious decision to serve Him. Are you ready?

Discussion Questions

- Where are you willing to place your stake? Are you, like Joshua, willing to declare that you and your household will serve the Lord?
- What does that look like in practicality? We have explored many facets of this through the past six weeks. How does it apply in your daily life?
- We aren't to insulate ourselves from the world, but are to function as children of God in the world. How does that look for you and your family?

Close your time by praying together. You may pray on your own or use this one as a model:

God, thank You. Just thank You for who You are and what You have revealed to us about Your nature. Thank You for never giving up on us and always having our best interests at heart. Thank you for designing the world, and our marriages, to be orderly places. Thank You for communicating clearly with us and allowing us to communicate clearly with each other. Thank You for showing us how to be angry, but not sin. Thank You for planning for intimacy with us and for our intimacy with You. Thank You for putting people in our lives that we can impact so we can leave a legacy that points to You. In Your Mighty Name we pray. Amen.