

December 9 – Show Me, Help Me, Use Me

READ

Colossians 1:24-4:18

Colossians 3:23, *“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.”*

THINK

We have two choices every day: We can view our responsibilities as a gift from God and work heartily, or we can approach them with a “do what I’ve got to do to get through it” mindset. God didn’t create us just to get by. He had something far better in mind — a fruitful life of purpose, passion, and adventure.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. eloquently said, “Use me, God. Show me how to take who I am, who I want to be, and what I can do, and use it for a purpose greater than myself.” What a powerful prayer! Each morning, we, too, have the opportunity to say, “God, show me how to make the most of this day and use me to make a difference!” When we make ourselves available to Him, He’ll present us with numerous opportunities to get outside of ourselves and work for His purposes as we serve others.

Of course, we all have our days. Sometimes all we feel like doing is crawling back into bed. Other days we’re faced with numerous distractions, too many choices, and endless interruptions. How can we serve others if we can’t even complete the tasks at hand? We simply say, “God, help me!” When we are doing the will of God and we ask Him for help, He will deliver ten times out of ten. And as promised in Ephesians 3:20, He will do “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power at work within us.”

PRAY

Heavenly Father, In the words of Dr. King, "Use me, God. Show me how to take who I am, who I want to be, and what I can do, and use it for a purpose greater than myself." In Jesus' name, Amen!

December 8 – Suit Up

READ

Ephesians 5:15-6:24

Colossians 1:1-23

Ephesians 6:13, *"Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand."*

THINK

Legendary football coach Paul "Bear" Bryant famously said, "Offense sells tickets, but defense wins championships." It's exciting to make the winning reception or score the come-from-behind touchdown. But, if you aren't equally prepared to defend your own goal line, you can still lose the game. The same is true in the Christian life. Spiritual highs are exciting, but the lows can be devastating if you aren't prepared for the attack.

The proper equipment is essential to standing strong against the onslaught of our biggest opponent. Successful Christ-followers understand that a winning defense can only happen when they put on the full armor of God. Only then can we hold the line against an enemy bent on our failure and defeat. The uniform — the armor of God — consists of the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes fitted to spread the gospel of peace, the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Bible. Each part, equally important, provides the protection we need to stand strong. We are protected because we know Who we belong to and Who has our back.

So, don't be blindsided! Put on your full armor and be prepared for the opposition — when you do, the ultimate victory that lies ahead. Just picture yourself dancing in the end zone when you secure yet another win through Christ!

PRAY

Thank You, God, for the ultimate uniform made mine through Christ. Help me to put on the full armor every day so that I can hold the line no matter what challenge I face. In Jesus' name, Amen.

December 7 – Truth Way and Love Street

READ

Ephesians 3:1-5:14

Ephesians 4:15, *"Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ..."*

THINK

Do you ever avoid the truth to keep from hurting someone you love? Do you sweep the issue under the rug to skirt conflict? Do you drop subtle hints so they won't be embarrassed? Your love is keeping you from speaking the truth.

Conversely, do you ever speak the truth without love? Your child is struggling, and you trivialize the situation by offering a generic solution without taking their feelings into account. When your co-worker is tense and fretting, you blurt out an answer that — while it may be true — is not well-received and compounds the problem.

Truth and love are not parallel streets; they are an intersection. The Bible says that excellent communication can't happen with just one. Without truth, what we say isn't in love. Without love, truth is not easily received. Ephesians 4:15 tells us that when we unite truth with love, we look more like Christ — our ultimate goal as believers.

Christ modeled this for us. He was truthful about our sin, but He loved us enough to offer Himself as a solution. Relational victory and maximum growth happen in the shadow of the cross — at the intersection of Truth Way and Love Street.

PRAY

Dear Lord, I seek to grow more like Christ. I want to reflect His character within my relationships. Give me the courage to speak the truth in love, and the patience to understand before trying to be understood. In Jesus' name, Amen.

December 6 – Live Original

READ

Acts 28:1-31

Ephesians 1:1-2:22

Ephesians 2:10, *"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*

THINK

We've all heard the saying, "The grass is always greener on the other side." Isn't it true that, in our humanity, we naturally dare to compare ourselves with others — and often think what they have is better? But that's not what God wants! In fact, it's the enemy who loves for us to play the comparison game. He seeks our discontentment and wants us to feel as if we're lacking in various ways and, therefore, are less impactful than others — especially when it comes to our spiritual life. Do you find yourself caught in the enemy's game right now, trying to be someone other than who God created you to be? If so, STOP! Because Jesus is saying, "It's not fair when you compare! I need YOU to BE YOU!"

Comparison robs us of living a joyous, Spirit-filled life. That's why the Bible alerts us to not judge others by their outward appearance or what we see on the surface of people's lives but to look at what God looks at — the condition of their hearts. This helps us to live authentic, original lives.

How's your heart? Does jealousy or discontentment reign? Or, do you recognize that God created YOU to BE YOU? He's hand-designed you with specific gifts and abilities that no one else has. Think about it! No one else has your laugh, your fingerprints, your walk, or your experiences. You are unique! So, stop playing the comparison game or thinking others have it better than you — that the grass is greener on the other side. It's not. Live original in this one and only life. Remember, you are God's handiwork who He created to do amazing things before the beginning of time!

PRAY

Dear God, Thank You for creating me to be one-of-a-kind. Help me see the unique plans You have for my life. I want to do my best to live an original, authentic life without comparing myself with others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

December 5 – Peace. Comfort. Joy.

READ

Acts 27:1-44

Acts 27:20-22, “When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved. After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: ‘Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed.’”

THINK

Every Christmas, the words "peace, comfort, and joy" are plastered on cards, wrapping paper, and various decorative items. They're strung up in lights, used in commercials, and sung in classic carols. But what about seasons that seem anything but that — when our hearts remain troubled, we feel discontent, or we're overwrought with sadness or suffering? Is it enough to merely cry out to God? He hears and can definitely handle every burden! But at some point, we must shift our focus from the "Why is this happening..." to the "How can God use this?"

Our Heavenly Father gives us rest when we've grown weary, soothes our troubled hearts in the face of fear, and comforts us when we're brokenhearted, but He never promises us a comfortable life! In fact, as Christ-followers, we can expect to deal with times of difficulty, opposition, and displeasure. Think about Paul, God's faithful servant who boldly proclaimed the gospel to all who would listen, who endured numerous beatings and imprisonment. In Acts 27, he's seemingly destined for doom on a prison transport ship as hurricane-force winds threaten the lives of everyone on board. Instead of focusing on the discomfort, succumbing to fear, or questioning God's motives, Paul prayed and encouraged those around him. Through his leadership and God's provision, not a single person on the ship died.

Just as God used Paul to bring hope to others on a sinking ship, He can use us and work through our difficulties to produce strength. No struggle is wasted when we offer it to God for His glory. Jesus, our Prince of Peace, lived, died, and rose again so that even amid our troubles, we could have "tidings of comfort and joy" this Christmas and in the days to come!

PRAY

Lord, Fill me with Your peace in this season. Remind me to replace, “Why me?” with “What can God do with this?” I find comfort and joy in knowing that You are in control! In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Heavenly Father, Thank You for the abundant life You have to offer. Help me to not shrink away, but instead seek Your kingdom. I know there's a cost, but it leads to the greatest of rewards — seeing Jesus face to face in eternity! Amen.

December 4 – Maybe Later...

READ

Acts 24:1-26:32

Acts 24:25, *"As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, 'That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.'"*

THINK

Have you ever been offered something that sounded really good, but then realized it came at a cost? It may have sounded like:

- "Want this promotion that has better pay? Great! You'll have to work 10 hours extra each week."
- "Want to get married? Great! You'll have to sacrifice your time, money, and energy for the rest of your life."
- "Want to lose 30 pounds? Great! You are going to have to work out daily for 30 minutes and make good food choices."

Suddenly, that thing may not sound so good anymore, and you end up saying, "Maybe later." Because when it comes to the small print, to the nitty-gritty of acquiring anything worthwhile, it always costs something! And when it comes to living God's best for our lives, it's often easier to push away than make necessary changes.

Felix was amused by Paul's passion. But as the apostle spoke — and got a little up front and personal about his lifestyle — the Roman governor of Judea experienced a shudder down his spine; he was afraid. It was easier to get out of Dodge than to actually confront the truth behind Paul's words. Felix gave Paul the ultimate "maybe later..." The man was an outright opportunist — but the opportunity to come clean and surrender his life to God was one he hurriedly declined!

Don't be a "Felix"! You can't afford to address your spiritual life with an "at a more convenient time" mentality — convenience may come too late! Accept God's offer of a rich, abundant life here on Earth and a treasure-filled eternity with Him in Heaven. It won't be easy; you'll pay the price, but it will be worth it! After all, Christ paid an immeasurable cost for your salvation. And, in the end, when you receive your reward in Heaven, you'll be happy that you didn't say, "Maybe later, God."

PRAY

December 3 – Mission Possible

READ

Acts 21:37-23:35

Acts 23:11, *“That night the Lord appeared to Paul and said, ‘Be encouraged, Paul. Just as you have been a witness to Me here in Jerusalem, you must preach the Good News in Rome as well.’”*

THINK

“Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is...” Do you recognize this quote? If you’re a Mission Impossible fan, you likely guessed correct!

You can almost hear God Himself saying this to Paul in one of his numerous calls to action. And even though Paul often found himself in precarious positions, he refused to keep quiet! In fact, Paul’s tireless efforts to spread the gospel kept him in hot water with the Jews who eventually imprisoned him for it — yet he was undeterred.

As we read through Acts, it often leads us to wonder, “How will he accomplish his mission now? He’s in chains! Surely he’ll never get to his next intended destination.” But through each perceived barrier, Paul remained mission-minded and took every opportunity to preach to the Gentiles along the way.

In our daily lives, it’s easy to think we don’t have a mission to accomplish — but nothing could be farther from the truth! As Christ-followers, we are tasked with showing and sharing who Jesus is and what He’s done in our lives. That means YOU are vital to the work of furthering the gospel!

So, your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to make Jesus famous and point others toward salvation — even when it seems impossible to reach those really far from God! Trust that, through Christ, all things are possible!

PRAY

Heavenly Father, Help me to remain mission-minded in sharing You. Open my eyes and heart to those You have put around me to share the Good News of Jesus, never forgetting that all things are possible through You! In Jesus’ name, Amen.