



Week Twelve Devotions

Provided by the Ministry and Program Staff of
The Presbyterian Church of Stanley

Day 78

Scripture: Acts 6:8-Acts 16:37

Isn't it nice to know that Christians have always had dissension? The first century Church, the Pentecost Church was a powerhouse of Holy Spirit-led enthusiasm. Thousands were led to receive Christ. The multitudes were healed, sometimes simply by having the shadow of Peter pass over them. Missionaries were flung to the four corners of the earth--to Africa, India, Turkey and Western Europe. "Greater things than these will you do," Christ promised. And they did.

Still, the First Century Church, although powerful, was not perfect. Acts Chapter 15 teaches us that there was "no small dissension and debate with them." This controversy was over the matter of just how many of the Hebrew religion's new Christian converts, which were not already Jewish (Gentiles), would be forced to be adopted by the Church. How did the early Church handle this touchy subject? Did they talk behind closed doors? Did they meet in the corners of the Fellowship Hall and the parking lot? Did they play political games or begin a whisper campaign? Did they let the sun go down on their anger? No. They talked about it. They got all the opinions in the room, had a fair hearing, gave the matter to God, allowed the Holy Spirit to lead and agreed in one voice to show grace to the Gentiles. The matter was resolved for all time. What could have become a volatile situation and split the young Church, became a building block for unity.

Could that we do the same! Proverbs 6:19 teaches that the Lord hates "one who sows discord among brothers." That language should stop us in our tracks and urge us to work for oneness in Christ rather than dissent in the details.

Eric Laverentz, Senior Pastor

Day 81

Scripture: Romans 15:1-1 Corinthians 14:40

When we think about the book of Corinthians, most of us think about I Corinthians 13, the love chapter. We've heard it read at many weddings, so much so that the words have lost a bit of the impact. I love (pardon the pun) the way this chapter starts out.

13:1-3 "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."

It is easy to do all the right things but unless we do it from the love in our hearts that is a gift from the Holy Spirit, we are only going through the motions. There are people I know (you probably can think of some, too) that the love of Christ literally exudes from them. It is not so much what they do, but is the Spirit or the love in which they do it. It is something so genuine that it cannot be mistaken for anything else.

3:13 "And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love."

Jan Zimmerman, Children's Ministries Director

Day 82

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:1-Galatians 3:25

Maybe this is the week you decide to follow what scripture tells us, "It is this Good News that saves you if you continue to believe the message I told you-(you can almost see the wink here) unless, of course you believe something that was never true in the first place." Are you able to embrace and fully allow Christ's' message to fill your life? The promises that are shared cover every aspect of our individual lives. 1 Corinthians 15, "buried in brokenness, but raised in glory.", "buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength." and "buried as natural human bodies, but raised as spiritual bodies." This gives us confidence that whether broken, weakened or in our natural humanness that we have hope.

As we read on we are given increased encouragement, "That is why never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are small and won't last very long." Maybe you struggle to understand what Jesus means in your life or maybe you know someone who doesn't know the love of Jesus...You can cling to this, "This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun," 2 Corinthians 5:17. You have an opportunity to be new, to start over, to begin again and it starts by you asking Jesus into your life for the first time or renew an authentic relationship with Jesus.

Harlan Harper, Youth Ministries Director

Day 83

Scripture: Galatians 3:26-Colossians 4:18

Paul's letters to the churches are filled with encouragement—the gift of salvation, God's purpose of bringing redemption, how important it is to know Christ, to love others, and to receive the fruit of the spirit. These letters also include warnings about following wrong influences and false teachings. We quickly learn Paul's passion for teaching the gospel message, and his desire for unity in the faith.

This section of my Bible is marked with many underlined scriptures that I need to remember to put into practice in my life. As you read through these letters, you will find many familiar scriptures that you've probably memorized through the years. One of my favorites is "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men." (Col. 3:23) Paul gives great encouragement to always remember who we belong to, and that we should strive to live like Christ would have us live.

Now I don't pretend to know enough about Predestination so I'll leave that sermon to Pastor Eric—but it does tell us in Ephesians that God HAS blessed us, which to me means that it has already happened. It talks about "...the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding," which indicates that it, too, has already been done. We should be living in a way that shows we understand the incredible blessings that have been given to us!

In Galatians Paul talks about the fruit of the Spirit. I have noted in my Bible that these characteristics are all-encompassing. Love, joy, and peace deal with our character, or our inward selves. Patience, kindness, and goodness deal with our relationships with others, or our outward selves. Faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control deal with our relationship with God, or our upward selves. Which area needs work in your life? Can others tell that you have been "set apart?"

Debbie Miller, Finance/Stewardship Director

Day 84

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-Philemon 25

Paul continues his letters to the churches, encouraging them and warning them about false prophets. The letter to Philemon is the only letter written to an individual. Paul encourages the church leaders to continue to mature in their faith, to persevere through persecution, and continues to talk about the return of Christ. In this passage is also where we find instructions for choosing good leaders for the church.

Paul talks about how, even though he was the worst of sinners, God has used him to further the kingdom. It's a reminder to us that, no matter what we've done in the past, God has already forgiven us and wants us to continue to strive to do His work here on earth—teaching the gospel and encouraging each other in the faith.

2 Tim. 4:7-8: "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." When we're feeling lonely and battered because of whatever life has thrown at us, we need to remember this passage—and DON'T GIVE UP! These scriptures tell us that we will be persecuted if we are living as Christians. But the rewards are well worth the fight!

Debbie Miller, Finance/Stewardship Director