



the fruitful been life

WEEK 4

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Day 22

Soaked in Prayer

Mark 1:35

It is so easy these days to see what people value. If they are into sports they wear athletic clothing. If they are into music, they wear clothes to make them look like they are in a band. If they are into extreme sports, again they dress accordingly. We have even made it into a science of classifying people. Skater, prep, jock, and gamer, these are all names that we use to show what we value the most in life.

The things you value are what you spend the most time thinking about, talking about, and spend your time doing. They become your very identity. So the question you must ask yourself is, do I have the right values? Values are shaped by what gives us the most satisfaction, or what allows us to fit in, or by what we are taught. The problem is so often we value things that have little value.

When I was a kid I loved Ninja Turtles. I had the Turtle van, the Turtle boat, Leonardo, Michelangelo, Donatello, Raphael, Be Bop, Rocksteady, Etc... My whole room was a shrine to Ninja Turtles. I went to all the movies, I watched the cartoon religiously, and man there was nothing cooler than Ninja Turtles. Everyone I talked to knew that I loved Ninja Turtles because that is all I ever talked about. But by the time I hit the seventh grade you couldn't find a trace of my former obsession. My mom and other family had spent a minor fortune to give me all I wanted, and in just a few short years I had given or thrown away all of it. You see it is important that we value the right things.

What do you value the most?

As Christians we need to have value in things that are truly valuable. When I ask myself this question I think of Jesus, and ask myself what did Jesus value. The two things that stick out most that I believe Jesus valued were people, and His relationship with the Father. Both of these values were expressed by the way

Jesus prayed. Jesus prayed all the time. He would pray with people, He would pray alone, He even would pray before meals. The reason Jesus prayed so much is because He knew the value in it. He knew the Father could hear Him, and He valued their relationship. Jesus' example to us was allowing the Father's values to show through Him.

Have you ever wondered why your prayer life is suffering? Make a check list in your life and see what around you is the most valuable to you. Are you pursuing things that have little value? Do you value what God values? Are you putting the things you value before God? This can all be answered by your prayer life. Ask yourself these three questions:

How do I pray about these things?

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray He put the emphasis on God's values over human values. This is because human values change all the time and are often selfish, but God values the greater good. So when you pray check to make sure you are submitting to God's values.

Do I pray about the things I think about?

So often we pray to God as if He doesn't know what we think or care about. It doesn't work to give lip service to God. He knows what you are thinking, so just be honest with Him. Give all your concerns and cares to Him.

How much time do I put into praying about it?

Jesus gave an example of a woman that came before a Judge many times, and her persistence won the judge over. God knows the desires of your heart better than you do, so keep lifting things up to him in prayer if it is truly valuable, and in His timing He will answer. -J.W.

Day 23

Biblically Grounded - Say What?

2 Timothy 3:16-17

When I was in high school I joined the forensics team. We would travel to other schools and compete in different events like solo drama, or duet drama, or prose/poetry. It was pretty much acting or speaking for ten minutes to judges who would rate your performance, and whoever was rated highest would win. Every Saturday we would go to a tournament to compete. It was a great way to make new friends.

On one occasion I was hanging out with my friends and to pass the time I got out my little Bible that I took everywhere, and I told my friends to ask me a question. After they asked me a question I would open the Bible and without looking, point to the page and answer them whatever I pointed at. My friends would ask something like “Who will I marry?” And I would answer something like, “in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God.” (Ephesians 3:22). Something completely random would always come out. I’ll never forget what happened next. A girl from another school came up to me and with a disgusted tone asked, “Why do you read that thing?” Without breaking stride, I opened the Bible and pointed, expecting to give her the same goof ball answer that I had been giving my friends, but when I looked down and read my heart jumped. Under my finger these words popped out, “For man does not live on bread alone, but from every word that comes from God.” (Luke 4:4) My friend looked at me and thought I had said that to make a point, but when I showed him where my finger was his jaw dropped to the floor. I looked, and that young woman said, “I think someone is trying to get your attention.”

The overwhelming evidence of the authenticity of the Bible has baffled scholars, yet there is a growing trend of those who attack the Bible saying that it was made up, or it was manipulated through different writers. People feel indifferent about the Bible saying that it doesn't apply to our culture now. Worst yet there are Christians who profess to believe in Jesus but neglect their Bibles on a daily, monthly or even yearly basis. All of this is accumulating into a culture that is moving away from God. We see it in the television shows we watch, we hear it in the music we listen to, and we feel it when we are in groups of people. It is becoming so hard to be a good apple, when the apples around us are rotting.

To have a fruitful life we must break this trend. When we feed our minds with bad images, words, or thoughts, it is like putting poison in the soil of a plant you are trying to nurture. The Bible on the other hand is miracle grow to the soil of life. It nurtures our spirit, and revitalizes our soul. To produce fruit in your own life you must be rooted in good soil.

Again when I look at Jesus I see a man who valued the scriptures. In the desert He used the scriptures when faced with temptation. When the teachers of the law confronted Him He used the scriptures. And even when He was young, He knew the scriptures. It is so important to be Biblically grounded. Every day we are being shaped and influenced by the culture we live in. We must take time to let the Bible shape us, or we will see the fruit in our lives become choked out.

The Free Will Dilemma....Being God-Led

Proverbs 3:5-6

I bet you will never forget where you were on September 11, 2001. That day will forever be in all of our memories. After the fear and the anxiety wore off there was one question that I heard over and over again. How could a good God allow something like this to happen? Where was God? It was not the first time this question had been raised. Every time a child is killed, every time justice fails, or life seems to be too much to bear, the question is asked, either verbally or in the depths of our heart. Where are you God? Why did this happen?

When God created human beings He created them with free will, or the ability to make independent choices. He did not want robots or puppets; He wanted beings that would love Him. Now we all know that love is a choice, love cannot be forced. If I had a friend that I thought really liked me and found out later that they were only being my friend because my parents were paying them I would feel hurt, not loved, because I understand that someone only truly loves you when they choose to love you, not when they are forced.

When God created human beings with free will He made us with the capability to do amazing good. He gave us the opportunity to do amazingly cool things like take care of the whole planet, take care of the animals, be a loving husband, and a great father. But with free will, God also made humans with the capacity for great evil. Man could disobey and turn from God and do things that hurt others and themselves. This of course is not what God wanted; in fact He made it very hard to choose disobedience. He gave Adam and Eve only one thing that they could do to disobey Him. Unfortunately we all know what happened next. Even though God warned them that if they disobeyed they would die, they still chose to disobey. At that time God had every right to abandon His creation, for that creation rejected Him and chose sin instead, but God in his great mercy and love decided not to give up on man, but to redeem us.

When humans reject God and choose evil they are capable of the most horrific things, like 9/11, or the holocaust, but this is not God's will. God allows men to make these horrible decisions because He is continually working to redeem us. If God did not do this we would all be in serious trouble, because any time we sin (no matter how great or small in our own eyes), the penalty is death. That means that when you were five and you stole from the cookie jar, God could have struck you dead right then and there. Since we can choose to steal from the cookie jar, we can also choose to fly an airplane into a building, killing thousands of people. God doesn't want us to do anything to hurt others, or ourselves but that is what we do when we sin.

God has continued to talk to man despite our disobedience. God has sent so many things for us to allow us to listen to Him so that we can follow His will for our lives.

First He sent us the Prophets, to write down the Law, and give us the scriptures, letting us know how we can live according to His will. Second, He sent his Son to be an example for us; so that we could know what it looked like to live according to His will.

Third, He gave us the Holy Spirit to continually speak to us and guide us to follow God's will. So in every situation we should go to scripture and see what the scripture says about it. We should also look to the example of Christ in scripture and ask ourselves what Christ would do in that situation. And third we should ask God to send His spirit to guide us, and convict us of what we should do in these situations. That is what it is to be God-led. You have the choice to make, but God wants to guide you and lead you, so that you can have the most productive life. -J.W.

Day 24

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Day 25

There is no I in T.E.A.M

Junior High was one of the loneliest times of my life. I remember wanting to fit in and be accepted more than at any other time in my life. No matter how hard I tried I just couldn't find the acceptance and love that I so desired. Then I went to a youth camp and there I found people who accepted me for me, and for the first time I felt what friends and community are all about.

There is so much that God wants to teach us through other people, and sometimes people only get a chance to see Christ through others. There are also extreme dangers to hanging around the wrong people if you do not guard your own heart. Again the best example we have is Christ. So we need to answer these questions.

God has designed us to be in community. Today we see people that are starving for community. We search the web, we go to coffee shops, we start dressing and talking a certain way because we crave community, and there is nothing wrong with that. But the people that you choose to make community with will have an effect on you. You will be influenced by them, and vice versa. In this we have a huge opportunity and responsibility.

- 1) How did Christ live in community?
- 2) What role did Christ play in community?
- 3) How did Christ balance community with solitude?

Christ lived in all sorts of communities. First, he grew up in a family with brothers and sisters, and learned how to be a part of family. Second, He surrounded Himself with twelve guys who did ministry with Him. And third, Jesus was a Jewish man who grew up in a Jewish community. So Jesus knows what it feels like to be both not accepted and accepted. He knows what it is to have sisters and brothers who bug you. He knows what it is to have social pressure from the community.

We also find when we study about Jesus' life that He was active in His community. At a young age Jesus got right in there with the teachers in the temple and got engaged in the conversation. He was at feasts and parties with the people. I mean here is the Son of God here on earth. If anyone had the right to be stand-offish it was Him, but no, Christ was with the people. He was even accused of being a partier by the Pharisees. So even though we don't feel accepted, sometimes we should follow Christ's example and love on people.

There is a balance though. Christ also made being alone with His Father a priority. As busy as He got, He always found time to be alone. This is another example that we need to learn. When we crave others' company and approval more than God's we are living an unbalanced life. So yes, it is important to get out there, live in community and to be Christ to others. But it is also important to find the time to get alone with our Heavenly Father. -J.W.

Day 26

The Fruit of Joy - Encourage

Yesterday I talked about wanting to be accepted and not finding it. The rest of the story goes like this. I went to youth camp the summer before my freshman year of High School. There I met friends that I still have to this day. But I also realized the contrast of the friends who treated me so badly back home. I got bitter. I locked myself in my room and thought of all the hurtful things people said to me, and I thought of the things I could say back to hurt them. Needless to say I got good at it.

I tell you this to confess that I am not the best encourager. I spent a lot of time finding ways to get back at people for hurting me, and not finding ways to build people up. Maybe you are a lot like me and people have hurt you, so you find it hard to encourage because you don't feel encouraged yourself. Take heart because God has the solution.

The great thing about all these fruits that we have been talking about is that they come from your relationship with God, not the circumstances of your life. God can always heal the broken hearted, and He values you so much. The story of Christ dying on the cross is screaming the fact that your value is huge. God loves and values you so much that He was willing to go through torment to spend time with you. We should be encouraged by the love that God has for us.

It should also allow us to value and encourage others. There is a parable in the Gospels that tells of a servant that was forgiven by his master of a huge debt that he owed. But after being forgiven he went and found a fellow servant that owed him a lesser debt, and had him thrown into prison. The master hears of this and goes and gets the wicked servant and has him thrown in prison. Christ shows us on the cross that all humans have a huge value, so we should treat them like it. God has freed us from our debt to Him, so we should give that same forgiveness to those who hurt us.

This is what allows us to have joy even when others hurt us. This is what allows us to encourage others even if we are not encouraged by others. We don't have to let others set our value because God has already set it. It is not found in our popularity or our success, it is found in the love that God has for us.

I wasted so much time in high school trying to get back at people for hurting me because I let them determine how I felt about myself, instead of trusting in God. Please learn from me, and let go of all the debt (unforgiveness for what people have done to you) that you hold over other people. When you do this you will feel a joy that you can't explain. You will feel a freedom that is awesome. And you will be Christ to those who need Him desperately. -J.W.

Day 27

The Trust Fall

Hebrews 11:6; 12:1

When I was a sophomore in high school I was elected to be a part of Natural Helpers. This was a group of kids that was elected by the students of the school to go out for a weekend to get training on how to help others. It was a great time of team building games and trust walks. One of these games was called the Trust Fall. There were these big wooden boxes that would be staked on one another and one person would climb to the top, put their back to the rest of the team and fall back. The boxes kept getting higher and higher, and less and less willing people climbed them. Finally it was a high as it could go. Somewhere in the vicinity of twenty, to twenty-five feet, and I watched as everyone looked up but no one started climbing.

Finally I went forward and started the climb up the boxes. When I got to the top, I realized how small of a group was at the bottom that was my only cushion from the ground. I turned around, stood there for a couple of seconds, and fell back. It was awesome.

It is so hard for us to put our trust in others. In fact in the culture that we are in it is hard to put our trust or faith in anything. We are constantly tricked or manipulated in the name of commerce, or by those that we want to trust in the most. The more that we have been hurt the harder it is for us to trust, but again there is a solution.

Trust does not happen overnight. In any good relationship there is a process of building trust. When people believe in us we feel the value of being trusted, and we do our best to keep their trust. Again we must find our value in God. When we realize that God believes in us it changes everything. Throughout history God has worked with humans and trusted them with huge responsibility. He gave Moses the responsibility of leading millions of people. He gave the David the responsibility of being a King over His people. And He gave the disciples the responsibility of starting the Church. God is in a relationship with humanity, and you and I are a part of that relationship.

When we realize that God can do amazing things through people like us, it also lets us see the value in other people. If God can use me He can use anybody. We need to start believing in others and ourselves, but we can only do that if we truly believe in a powerful, awesome God. When I look at Moses, David, and disciples, I don't see perfect human beings with super powers. I see weakness and imperfection. Seeing what they accomplished through their faith in God is amazing.

God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things all the time because He is an extraordinary God. When we trust Him with our lives, He can make our lives extraordinary. We should never treat people like God can't do amazing things through them, and we should never limit God to do amazing things in us. When we truly trust God with our lives, we will have extraordinary fruit.
-J.W.

Day 28

Consuming Love · The Pursuit of
Passion

Philippians 1:9-11

In physics there is a law known as the Second Law of Thermodynamics. It states that things go from order to chaos. In other words, things always break down. I build a house. After time the house gets older and more decayed until one day someone has to come along and tear it down. The house went from something of order to something chaotic. It seems these days that relationships work in this way as well. For some reason we start out “in love”, but before we know it we are fighting and becoming chaotic.

We are in a scramble these days to find love. On TV you see “reality” show after “reality” show that deals with dating and the pursuit of love. For all of our pursuit of love, the actual statistics tell another story. More than half of all marriages don’t work out, and we jump in and out of relationships like we are trying to win a prize for who can be in the most relationships. All of this is leaving us empty, and it is draining our passion for true love.

Every time we have a relationship that doesn’t work out it seems that a part of us is taken. This type of love consumes us and in the process takes a part of us. But the love that God has for us consumes us and does not harm us. It is an amazing thing. The best way to describe it is the example of Moses. Moses, while in the desert shepherding for his father-in-law, came upon a bush that was on fire but was not being destroyed. God spoke through the bush to Moses and changed the outcome of the world by using this simple shepherd to get his people out of slavery.

Growing up on a farm, I have seen a lot of fires in my day. Each year my dad would burn off the wheat stubble so that the soil would be richer the following year. Watching those fires was amazing. You couldn’t get within fifty yards of it and not feel the pain of the heat on your face. When my dad would burn the fields after harvest he was burning away all the weeds that would grow with the crop, and take away the nutrients from the soil.

God’s love for us is like a fire, but it does us no harm. The Bible’s number one theme is God’s love for us. You can’t read the Bible and not be amazed by God’s willingness to continue to suffer with rebellious human beings, and love us so much that He would send His son to die in our place. God’s love is passionate and consuming, but in no way harmful. God wants us to be consumed with his love. Only when we understand His love can we know the truth and have the faith to let Him use our lives for His glory. God’s love makes us righteous. He is the one that forgives us and sets us free from the burden of sin. The more we understand God’s love the more we are able to live in righteousness.

When we let God’s love consume us we prepare our heart to be richer soil that is ready to produce much fruit. Our Father is burning away all the weeds that take away from the richness of our lives. He is preparing us for a better life. Let God’s love consume you and see what awesome fruit will come out of you. -J.W.

