

## **LOOKING UP DEVOTIONAL- January 18th**

### **“The Number of our Days” - Psalm 139**

There was once a lady I would visit regularly - each time I would meet with her she seemed consumed by a fear of death - worried that she could pass away at any moment. After several visits and several years of hearing the same complaints, I snapped back in frustration, “Do you realize you have spent the last several years acting like you were dying rather than living?” Not my finest moment as a pastor! What I wished I would have done was simply opened my bible and read her Psalm 139... In the Psalms we find the poetry of those who faced every situation of life and felt every emotion. In Psalm 139 David marvels at the divine design of our human frame. In this Psalm we see the entire scope of earthly life from the womb to the grave and how God is keenly aware of every detail. But there is a powerful statement that reveals just how fully God knows us. It says in v.16, “ all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” Amazing, he knows the number of our days!

It is a great mystery to us why God has allowed human sin and the suffering and disease it brings to the created order; why He allows our free-will lead to trouble and tragedy. When death comes we struggle with the mystery of it all because our perspective is limited and our need for control is tested. None of this is a mystery to God who knows us fully and invites us to put our confidence in Christ, the one who defeated death.

When the latest news fills us with fear of death, when we see the signs of aging, when we receive the bleak diagnosis, when our adrenaline rushes in the emergency; we can find confidence and ground ourselves in the One who has ordained the very number of our days. God invites us to entrust our whole being to him and find the strength to live each day ordained for us to the full.

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Heavenly Father, I thank You that I woke up this morning and that you invite me to seek You each day for daily bread and new mercies that fill my body and sustain my soul. Father, you know the number of my days and perhaps it is a good thing that I do not. Today I entrust my fearfully and wonderfully made self to You and ask for the ability to make the most of this day. May I walk in the peace of Jesus' redemption that covers my soul whether on this side of heaven or in eternity with You. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

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Steven Amorin - First Baptist Church Tillsonburg

## **LOOKING UP DEVOTIONAL - January 19<sup>th</sup>**

### **“The Key to Freedom” - Colossians 1**

A while ago I read a fascinating news story that took place in Guelph Ontario. A man was arrested for armed robbery. While in police custody it was Constable John Bolton who happened to notice the man was wearing a cross around his neck. This interested him because he knew the prisoner was not a religious man - yet, he was wearing a cross. He asked the prisoner, “Let me take a look at that cross”, and as he looked closer he noticed a little protrusion at the bottom of the cross. Confused by this odd feature he began to question the prisoner further. “It's nothing, just a design...” the robber nervously replied. Not convinced, officer Bolton took it off the man, examined it closer and discovered that this protrusion was part of a key that could unlock most types of handcuffs. It didn't take long for the prison staff to discover other prisoners had been making these keys to look like crosses!

There is a beautiful irony in this story. These prisoners believed that a cross was their key to freedom. Yes, there is a cross that sets people completely free, but it is the cross of Jesus!

In Colossians 1:19-22 we read, “God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in [Jesus], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.”

This is the truth of the gospel, that Jesus willingly came to bear our sin on himself so we could be reconciled to God. Because of Jesus' journey to the cross we can be confident that “If the Son sets you free, you are free indeed” (John 8:36). May you claim this freedom in your life today!

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Jesus, thank you for going to the cross for me. You stood accused in my place so I could be set free, you paid a debt of sin I could never afford, you died so that I could have eternal life. Today Lord, may I be filled with a deep sense of my worth in your eyes and the privilege I have to walk in freedom from my past. Thank you Jesus, Amen.

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Steven Amorin - First Baptist Church Tillsonburg

## **LOOKING UP DEVOTIONAL - January 20<sup>th</sup>**

### **“The Privilege of the Holy Spirit” - John 15**

How is your relationship with the Holy Spirit? In the Old Testament times most people could only dream of what it would be like to have the presence of the Holy Spirit upon their life. We find the Spirit working in the lives of a select few prophets, priests and kings. We find the Spirit upon artisans like Bezalel and Aholiab who were tasked with crafting items for the tabernacle (Exodus 31:1-11). In this era, the work of the Spirit seemed very mysterious and exclusive. David, in his Psalm of repentance was even concerned that the Holy Spirit would be taken away from him! (Psalm 51:11)

Then comes a powerful promise near the end of the Old Testament from the prophet Joel:  
“And it shall come to pass afterwards, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all people; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit. (Joel 2:28,29)

In the New Testament this prophetic promise would be finally realized through the redeeming work of Jesus. He opened the way for us to have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It is the Spirit who comforts us in our challenges (John 14:15-18) and convicts us of our sin (John 16:8). It is the Spirit who enables us to live a fruitful life (Galatians 5) and who endows us with spiritual gifting to build the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 12:1-11). It is the Spirit who enables us to respond to our adversaries (Luke 12:12) and helps us to pray when we cannot find the words (Romans 8:26).

No longer just for a select few prophets, priests, kings and artisans - Joel's prophecy is now our reality and the Holy Spirit is now available to indwell even the elderly, children, women, servants - in other words, everyone! What a privilege!

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Spirit of the Living God - fall fresh on me today! Through the redeeming work of Jesus, I am like a cleansed tabernacle and you now dwell within me. Thank you for the comfort, conviction, fruitfulness, gifting and help you provide as I live this life. Thank you Holy Spirit that you are here now, working within each child of God - even me. What a privilege, what a blessing! Amen.

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## **LOOKING UP DEVOTIONAL - January 21<sup>st</sup>**

### **“Facing Failure” - Luke 5, John 21**

How do you handle failure? Most of us carry a weight of guilt and shame over wrongs we have done or wrongs done to us. We replay the memories in our mind and say, “if only I had \_\_\_\_\_ this wouldn't have happened”.

Consider two encounters that the apostle Peter had with Jesus. Once when Peter had been out all night fishing in Luke 5 - he came back to shore dejected, with empty nets and an even emptier sense of self-worth. Jesus asked him to do something odd - to go and cast his nets again; to go back out to the place he had failed! The difference this time would be that Jesus was watching and his blessing was waiting. When Peter's reluctance gave way to obedience, he would haul in the catch of his life. Peter fell at Jesus feet a broken man, ashamed of his doubt - but Jesus would restore him by pointing him to his life's purpose, “I will make you a fisher of people”.

Another encounter... On the night of Jesus' arrest, Peter vowed he would never forsake Jesus - yet he would deny Jesus three times before the rooster's morning call. Several days later in John 21 after another miraculous catch, Jesus appeared to Peter and asked him three times, “Do you love me Peter?” - each time Jesus asked, Peter would relive the triple failure of his denial. Broken Peter would then hear Jesus' restorative words, “Now, feed my sheep”.

Both encounters began with a profound sense of failure but ended with restoration. Jesus had the power to take a story of failure and give it a glorious ending!

Failure has a way of isolating us, making us feel unworthy and alone. But Jesus invites us to face our failures with him at our side. When your memories take you back to the shame, when your mind replays the failure - let me suggest something to you - don't try to ignore the memory or medicate the pain - rather, invite Jesus into that very moment with you. Don't go it alone, be aware of his presence that brings grace, mercy, forgiveness and full restoration. Only Jesus can take the tragedy and make it a triumph!

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Jesus, I don't know where to begin. I have tried to manage my failures, trying to forget, even trying at times to numb the feelings. I have replayed past memories more times than I can count. You never meant for me to go at life alone, you never meant for us to be dogged by our past - so Lord, when these memories come, may I invite you into them - to take these moments and write your story on them. Help me to release my past and take hold of my future with you. Amen.

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## LOOKING UP DEVOTIONAL - January 22nd

### “Speaking in Tongues” - Romans 8

I find it amusing that one of the most controversial subjects in the Christian faith concerns the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues. Some Christians believe this gift was only for the original apostles and has since ceased - others believe it is the primary evidence for the Spirit's presence in a person's life. For the record, I don't agree with either position!

What the bible seems to indicate is that this gift can be seen in several ways. For the sake of simplicity I will call them; Proclamation, Prophecy and Private:

**Proclamation** - On the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) the disciples received the promised Holy Spirit and began to go out and **proclaim** the good news of Jesus in the various languages of the foreigners visiting Jerusalem. People marvelled at the miracle of hearing the gospel in their very own language!

**Prophecy** - In 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:6-12 Paul writes about the occurrence of **prophetic** speaking in tongues when Christians are gathered. In these instances it is necessary to have an interpretation of the message to verify its genuineness. It appears that God has gifted some with tongues and others with interpretation; when this occurs it is meant to strengthen the Church not cast it into confusion.

**Private** - Sometimes we struggle to find the right words to pray to God, and that is actually ok. In Romans 8:26 we see that when we do not know what to say to God, the Spirit intercedes and takes control with, “groanings, too deep for words”. In 1 Corinthians 13:1 the indication is that there is an angelic language and that it is possible to speak it. This occurrence of tongues seems to be reserved for private prayer. Whatever this speaking in tongues is, however, means nothing without love.

Currently the Webster's English dictionary has a little over 173,000 words. In ancient Greek, the language of the New Testament there is an estimated vocabulary of 450,000 words. This might explain some of the challenges in developing English bible translations and the necessity for careful study of the biblical languages. Anyways, here's the point, however large our linguistic lexicon, however verbose our vernacular - it don't mean nothin' to God!

As I played with my ten month old daughter the other day I marveled at the fact that she doesn't let her limited vocabulary get in the way of communicating with her father. So eager to communicate and so excited to express her budding love, she speaks from the overflow of her soul and it is so beautiful to me. I think I will follow her lead today and strive for the same with my Heavenly Father.

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Heavenly Father, \_\_\_\_\_ ! Amen.

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