

life groups discussion guide

12.11.16 – expect God to use you



LIFE GROUPS
doing life together

In preparing for today's lesson I had the typical short bit of info from which to work. In that bit of info were two seemingly contradictory ideas. First, "Live in a way that anticipates God to have an impact through you.", and Secondly, "God uses unexpected people to have the greatest impact on the world." See the dilemma here? If God uses unexpected people to impact the world, how then can anyone anticipate that God will work through them. It's either anticipated, or unexpected. Right? How can it be both?

To further the theme of contradictions...I like to start the study guides I write with a couple of thought-provoking quotes. However, when looking for "unexpected" quotes almost all of them had the words (or at least the idea of) "expect the unexpected" as a part of them. I suppose as we serve a God whose ways of operating in our world, and in our lives, are unfathomably higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8-9) that we shouldn't be surprised with how He chooses to move – but we usually are, aren't we?

Q :: What does it mean to "expect the unexpected"?

Q :: Describe a significant thing in your life that happened unexpectedly. Would have knowing that it was coming changed how you lived in preparation for it?

Q :: How can you prepare for something that you don't know is coming? And does it make a difference if you know something may be a *possibility* but you're just not sure what form it will actually take when it happens?

Before moving further, I want to lay the framework for the remainder of this study by introducing a page from the tremendous new book "The Book of Mysteries" by Jonathan Cahn. The book is setup to also be used as a daily devotional for a year. Here's is the content from Day 5:

DAY 5

APPOINTING YOUR DAYS

WE'VE SPOKEN OF the year before you," said the teacher. "Today we will speak of the days before you. What will the days yet to come bring to your life?"

"How could I know that?" I replied. "I don't really have a say in the matter."

"But what if you did?"

"How?"

"It is written, 'Teach us to number our days.' What does that mean?"

"That our days are limited, and so it's wise to number them."

"That's correct," he said. "And it's the first meaning of the Scripture. But in the original language is a secret. And this secret can change your life, the days of your life. In the Hebrew it says, 'Teach us to *manah* our days.' The same word, *manah*, appears in the Book of Jonah where it is written that God manahs a fish, a worm, and a wind."

"Then *manah* must mean more than number."

"It does. It means to prepare and to appoint. So you must not only *number* your days, you must learn to *prepare* your days, to *appoint* your days."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that you're not just to watch and wait passively to see what your days will bring. You're to prepare them."

"How can I prepare my days before they happen?"

“How did the first days happen in the beginning? They didn’t just happen. Before they existed, God prepared them. He appointed them. He purposed them. So if you’re a child of God, you must do likewise.”

“How?”

“Prayer.”

“Praying for days that don’t yet exist?”

“Prayer isn’t only for what is, but for what is not yet.”

“But I can’t determine what will happen.”

“It doesn’t matter what happens. You appoint your days in God to bring what is good. You consecrate them for the purposes of God. And then you use your days to accomplish those purposes. Don’t let your days determine your life. Let your life determine your days. And don’t just let your days go by. Prepare them, that they might become vessels of blessing and life. Appoint your days.”

The Mission: Prepare the days ahead. Set them apart. Commit them into God’s hands and appoint them for the fulfilling of His purposes.

Psalm 90:12; Acts 19:21

In Christian circles, we often talk about intentionality – and for good reason. Leadership guru John Maxwell says “Growth is not automatic and it doesn’t happen by accident. You need a growth plan. You need to act with a purpose and intention.” I agree wholeheartedly. However, reading Cahn’s words above leave me with the impression that what I need is intentionality on steroids. You see, when I think of intentionality I think of doing something on purpose. Usually this is some spiritual discipline that I determine to practice whether I feel like it or not. That seems more like a recognition of God calling me to do certain things faithfully because I’m in a relationship with Him. That’s different than appointing and purposing all of our days. That begins to feel a bit more like preparation for God to do the unexpected in our life.

Let’s think a bit deeper on the idea of “appointing” our days, and what things look like when they are appointed. A couple examples spring to mind...

Right now in our country we have a President-elect who is working with his transition team to determine the people he **appoint** to various positions of leadership within his government. He is examining track records, conducting interviews, and weighing the actions and lack of actions of each person under consideration. Because each appointment will carry with it an enormous amount of responsibility, great care is going into making sure that the right person is selected and that there every reason to have faith in them that they can do what will be required of their appointment. The people under consideration have demonstrated – **before their appointment** – that they are ready for what waits for them when they are moved up to the next level. How they lived prepared them for the appointment before an appointment was even on the table. These are not people passively waiting for a phone call to something higher – they’re living a life that prepares them for it when it comes.

The other thing that comes to mind in terms of something being appointed are the *moedim*. That is the Hebrew word for what are commonly referred to as the Lord’s Feast Days. The word literally means “appointed times”. These are God’s appointments with mankind and include the feast days of Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement and Tabernacles. Because they are appointed times of God each has both a purpose and a fulfillment – God doesn’t make an appointment and not keep it. We see that the first four feasts were fulfilled in the first advent of Christ, while the remaining three still await future fulfillment. One thing that is often overlooked in the study of the *moedim* however is the reason that the Jews were told to make these appointments and annual observance. Wrapped up in the meaning in the word *moedim* is the concept of a dress rehearsal – the participation in the feasts were to be a rehearsal for their fulfillment. Again, the idea here is that there is preparatory work happening **before** the appointment is fulfilled. Israel was not to be passively waiting for their Messiah, they were to be living in a way that prepared them for His coming.

And isn’t that really where we find Mary at the beginning of her story? She has found favor with God – she has caught God’s eye. God could have chosen anyone in all of the world to bring forth the Messiah, and He chose Mary. While we

aren't told specifically what Mary was doing in her day to day life, I think it's safe to assume that she was not living passively. While we certainly see every evidence that she was NOT expecting God to use her in this way, we see in her responses the heart of someone ready to trust God at a ridiculous level, and willing to be used of Him even though she couldn't begin to fathom how in the world He was going to do it. To channel John Maxwell a bit, I don't believe it's possible to get to a place of that level of trust and faith with God automatically because you love God, or by accident. I think that only happens by living with intention that is driven by purpose.

Q :: There is a difference in a call and an appointment. We all have a general call on our lives as followers of Jesus, but many, if not most of us, haven't received an appointment yet. There is a level of specificity in an appointment that is not in a call. How else might you differentiate between a call and an appointment?

Q :: Since inherent in the concept of an appointment is that it carries with it a very specific purpose (a presidential appointment will have a specific role to fill, God's appointed times have a very specific fulfillment in Jesus), how does that impact the idea that we are to "manah", or purpose and appoint our days?

Q :: I had this thought: How you respond in your calling can either qualify or disqualify you from an appointment. Do you agree with that thought? Explain.

Q :: Even after receiving an appointment, there is usually a time of waiting before the appointment is fulfilled. This is true in the natural world as well as the spiritual. If I make an appointment to see a client it has a future fulfillment, even though it is on the calendar and certain to happen barring a cancelation. We see the same with Mary. She is appointed to bear the Son of God, but there is a period of waiting before the promise of the appointment is manifest. So, after receiving an appointment, what are we to do while awaiting the appointments fulfillment?

Q :: As we see in Mary, an appointment may be unexpected, but receiving it initiates action on our part. There is an expectation that we will prepare an advance for our appointment. What other biblical examples do we see of someone receiving an appointment and then taking specific steps to prepare for it's manifestation? What we can learn and apply from these biblical examples?

I wanted to share some closing thoughts about Psalm 90:12, the verse that asks God to teach us to number our days and is the basis for the devotional from The Book of Secrets. There are many things worth noting and really we could build an entire study just on this verse, and it's context within Psalm 90.

First, the entirety of verse 12 reads: Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom (NIV). I find it interesting that the psalmist ties the idea of appointing and purposing our days to gaining a heart of wisdom. I think most of us greatly desire to have a wise and discerning heart, and God seems to be pointing us to a key for obtaining one. I believe it just adds great spiritual weight to the idea.

Secondly, notice that it's a request for God to teach us to do this. As Maxwell might say, this will not happen automatically. It's not something we innately know how to do – in fact I think it runs counter to how most Christians live their lives (non-Christians too, for that matter). The idea that we should not let our days determine our life, but that we should let our life determine our days is frankly backward from how most people live.

Lastly, the context of Psalm 90 shows us why learning to do this is so important. The larger context, from verse 9-12 looks like this: *"We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan. Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away. If only we knew the power of your anger! Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due. Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."*

It's because we are sinful, God sees our sin, and one component of God's nature is wrath against sin that it becomes vitally important to live with purpose and intention. And THAT is the biggest reason to celebrate Christmas – that God's wrath against sin was satisfied through Jesus dying under that wrath instead of us. Jesus was born with – and AS – an appointment. While awaiting the fulfillment of that appointment he lived purposefully in preparation for it's manifestation. We received what no one could have expected – God on a cross. Our sins forever washed away. Merry Christmas indeed!