

The Weekly Word
April 9-15, 2018

April showers bring May flowers. I hope God is showering you with blessings as you read His Word. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

Monday, April 9: Galatians 4- Father...

Father... to be able to call God, Father. What a gift. What a blessing. What a joy.

Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir (6-7).

The invitation to call God Father... "Abba, Father" –Daddy, Father is delightful, intimate, relationship.

Not only are we *no longer a slave* we have been adopted into God's family. We are *God's child*. And as a child, God invites us to call Him Father, to call Him Dad/Daddy/Pops, whatever is your affectionate term for Father.

God, our Father, is not merely some theological construct or some grand idea. God seeks to move from construct into relationship. God invites us to know Him even as we are known by Him (check out verse 9).

I savor this thought. How amazing that God, the creator of all there is, would be so interested and invested in me, in you, that He invites us to call Him Father, Daddy, Pops.

As I sit, I am blown away by this. I am marveling at the wonder of this. To be so loved, to be so connected is staggering as I sit with my Lord.

Blessed, amazed, loved, awed, and delighted are only a few of the words that spiral in my thoughts as I ponder the invitation to call God, 'Dad'.

Abba, Father, Dad, I am feeling so cared for right now. You love me. You care for me. You invite me to be Your son. Words are escaping me right now as I try to speak with You and express to You what this means.

Praise be to You, my Father, and my God. Amen and amen.

Tuesday, April 10: Galatians 5- FREEDOM...

So now what Paul has been writing about and arguing for finally comes into clear view.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love (1-6).

Some Christ followers were being duped into being circumcised. In other words they were accepting the Jewish faith as a means of salvation. Through the act of circumcision they were saying that they would keep the Jewish Law and thus become accepted as one of God's people.

No, Paul screams. Because with circumcision you moved from grace and mercy to law, moved from faith to effort and work. Since it is impossible to keep the entire law, one is damned by this switch.

Remember, too, that he already taught that the Spirit was experienced through faith not works, so by accepting the Law they are forfeiting God's Spirit within them.

Ok, so what does this mean for me? I am not considering converting to Judaism.

Where circumcision can be a bold action declaring a person's intention to earn their way to God, might there be subtle less dramatic actions that indicate a similar shift?

I have to tread lightly here but I suspect so...

When I put my trust in religious actions rather than the Lord Jesus, the Father and the Spirit who is the focus of these actions, I have subtly shifted to a works approach to God. Fasting, worship participation, Bible study, etc. are all excellent actions that can help me grow in faith. BUT if I mentally treat them as a checklist of my effort and work, they can become a lesser type of circumcision, indicating I am earning my way to God rather than accepting God's grace and mercy through faith.

Similarly if I have gobs of money and give big gifts to my church or favorite Christ-honoring charity, thinking this will endear me to God, I have slipped from faith to works.

If I serve here and there as a means of proving to God I am worthy and maybe even better than those who do not serve as much as I do, I have slipped from faith to works.

As I mentioned, I need to tread carefully here because a person could give gobs of money by faith or serve tirelessly by faith. So it is not the outward action in these cases but the inward intention/motivation that is determining.

Back to me... I need to examine my heart probing my motivation. I need to keep communications open between my Lord and me so that if He sees something in me I do not see in myself, I am open to His correction. I need to walk by faith...

So, Lord, I open myself up to probing... I will probe but please, Lord, I ask You to probe me. Should I slip off the way of faith, call me, nudge me, wrestle me back to You, to faith, I pray.

And, Lord, cultivate the Fruit of the Spirit in me...love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control that I might be Yours wholly and totally. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Wednesday, April 11: Galatians 6- Spread goodness wherever you are ...

As Paul's letter winds down, Paul gives a number of closing injunctions, any of these are worthy of meditation. I chose verse 9-10: *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

If I am honest with myself, sometimes I do weary from doing good. A selfishness wells up in me, sometimes disguised as 'self care'. Sometimes I'm tired and I just don't want to give myself away to others. Paul's simple word pierces me. I can be so selfish and so 'self minded'.

Paul's simple word pulses within me... *don't weary in doing good... as you have opportunity, ... do good to all people, especially... believers.*

How practical this is... just do good. Spread goodness wherever you are. Do good for those you know and those whose paths you cross. Imagine a world where all Christ followers lived this way. Our world would truly be a kinder, gentler world.

Lord, continue to remind me of this simple word today. Help me to see people who I can be kind to as I have opportunity. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Thursday, April 12: Job 1- Questions and trust...

Job is a strange yet interesting read for me, fraught with questions on subjects I regularly avoid. It presses me, but by God's grace, leads me to exclaim with Job, 'Blessed be the name of the Lord'.

As I begin my read, questions abound...

Consider verses 11-12 Satan challenges God to stretch His hand against Job. Satan speaking, *But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face. The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger."* Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

This begs the question, 'Who is it who smites Job'? Is it Satan or God? Is it Satan with God's permission? If God allows it, is that significantly different than if God causes it?

Another question, 'What's the deal with Satan being allowed in God's presence'?

The scene switches to Job's perspective; hearing reports of this entire family and wealth being destroyed, Job's response reignites the questions I had at first. *At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised"* (20-21).

Un-phased by any the theological debate about who caused his devastation, Job looks to the Lord... *"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised"*

What faith! What faith particularly in the face of devastation. Job inspires me to trust in the Lord!!!

Oh, God, I don't want to endure what Job endured. Still I am inspired by his faith in You and that is something I long for... to have absolute trust in You. Job trusted You when his life was charmed and he trusted You when the rug was pulled out from under him. I pray for faith to trust You always and in every situation Your providence allows. Through Jesus I pray. Amen.

Friday, April 13: Job 2- Questions and trust again...

Well, the torment of Job increases to personal pain, sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. Ugh, what a picture, scraping his sores with a broken piece of pottery was his only relief!!de`

The same questions I wrestled with yesterday surfaced again today... verse 3 includes the gamut of questions I wrestled with in chapter 1. *Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason."* God was incited by Satan??? Another huge question.

However, the place I paused to meditate upon was Job's exchange with his wife in verses 9-10. *His wife said to him, "Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!" He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.*

Job simply would not curse God. He would not speak against his Lord and Maker. More than that, the faith he displayed is remarkable. *Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.*

I am reduced to prayer by Job's words and actions. To have such utter faith is my hope and desire.

By any account I have lived a blessed life. Oh, I have faced trials, everyone does. However, the extent of my trials seems insignificant compared to Job. To watch this man of faith remain faithful in the face of tremendous loss and pain and hardship and devastation is so encouraging. If Job can do it... we all can do it. More personally, I can do it. NO matter the testing and trials God allows to come my way... I pray for the faith of Job. To stand strong in God –Father, Jesus and Holy Spirit –is my desire.

Oh, Lord, I do not know what Your will will allow. No matter, I surrender to it. To be Yours is my delight. And I pray that in all things I will live in a way that honors You and that You receive all honor and glory through my life and through Your church. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, April 14: Job 3- honest and faith-filled ...

Pain... acknowledging pain. I would never want to endure what Job endured. The relational and physical torment of chapters 1 and 2 are beyond my words as I write.

Here is Job living them. His words drip with honesty. My entire body resonates with Job.

Immediately I thought, here is a man who is honest and faith-filled. Never once does he curse God. Question God, certainly. How could one not have questions for God? And even more, every reference to God has an honoring tone. Job is a man who knows, understands his place and understands his God.

I have met too many people –sisters and brothers in Jesus –who are not able to be this honest with their Lord as they endure trials. Some plaster a false spirituality on their faces and their words drip with clichés but no substance. When I hear them, the word DENIAL scrolls in my mind.

Others lash out at God, which in my opinion, can be more honest than the former. However, their words drip with anger that teeters on or falls off the cliff of blasphemy and taking the Lord's name in vain. God can handle this but blasphemy and using the Lord's name wrongly is still sin.

Job somehow remains, between these two extremes, a model for me of suffering faithfully.

I am not in a time of suffering, so much of my gleanings is 'theoretical' but may they be stored till such a time as I need to lean on them to remain faithful to my Lord God.

Questions for God, absolutely. I will go so far as to say questions with an edge... Anger, too, is human, natural and okay. The word does say *"In your anger do not sin"* (Ephesians 4:26).

The text gives us Job's guard rail last chapter for not sinning, *He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said (2:10).* Job did not sin because Job did not curse God or take God's name in vain... in sound or in thought because sins of thought are just as much sin as sins of speech.

Well, Lord, I hope and pray that I never experience 1/10 of what Job lived through, but Lord that is in Your hand. I surrender to You. And I pray that in good times or horrible times I may be faithful to You and that my life, like Job's, might be a positive witness to You. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sunday, April 15, 2018, Sunday Worship

If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.

If you are reading along with me from the PCOG website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@pcogonline.org.

Click here for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.