

## The Weekly Word

May 20-26, 2019

I love watching the world outside grow green and lush. A picture of God's world, which always restores me. Happy reading...  
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

### Monday, May 20 Galatians 4 – Simple circumstances...

I just never know what will strike my fancy: the verses or concept to meditate upon. I say that because it was a little tidbit of Paul's story today that caught my attention as I read. In verse 13 Paul notes that an illness caused him to first preach to the Galatians. *As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you, and even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself* (13-14).

The concept of illness being the door way to ministry arrested my attention.

How often does God use a seemingly simple circumstance of life to open a door for ministry or service? In my life God has used simple circumstances many times...

In 1976 I attended the Urbana conference and met some people I knew from my college. Attending Urbana put me on their radar and maybe two months after Urbana I was chose to lead the campus Christian Fellowship group, called RCC. I had never attended the group! Without the Urbana experience the leadership would not have even known I was a student at RPI. Another piece of that puzzle is that right before returning to college after Christmas break I broke my collar bone. That broken bone meant I couldn't plan lacrosse that season, which gave me the time to give to RCC leadership. An injury and Urbana opened a door to ministry, which became the first step in my journey toward the pastorate.

In 2007 I went on a church mission trip to Nigeria with my son. During that trip I spent a day at Jos ECWA Theological Seminary (JETS) and a 'chance' meeting with the provost that afternoon led to an invitation to return and teach that summer, something I did for 11 years.

I could go on and on. God uses everyday life circumstance to lead us in our journey of faith. I should add that in most of these situations I checked in with brothers and sisters in Christ to make sure I was sensing the leading of the Holy Spirit correctly. I can easily deceive myself, so I want to be sure that I am following the Lord and acting in faith and not acting out of mere human desire or whim.

What 'chance' circumstances might God lead me to today? Only time and life will tell.

*Lord, it was good to read that You used circumstances in Paul's life to lead him. It sparked many remembrances of how You have led me in similar ways. You are so good, Lord... I love You, Lord Jesus, Gracious Father and Holy Spirit. Amen and amen.*

### Tuesday, May 21: - Galatians 5 Faith expressing itself in love ...

Paul makes a strong plea for people not to return to the law as a means of salvation. It seems that some Galatians were being pulled from Christ, seeking instead to find salvation in circumcision. Paul reminds them that to do so means they must keep the entire law perfectly. *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 (3-4).*

Paul goes on to remind them that faith in Jesus is the only way to salvation. *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love (6).*

I am touched by that last sentence; *The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.* What a deep and powerful comment. The faith Paul speaks of is faith in Jesus.

Faith expressing itself in love is a pregnant phrase...

The faith Paul speaks of is an alive and active faith... a faith that makes a difference in a person's life. And the difference is love... how one treats others.

So as I sit, I have a plumb line with which to measure my life. Does my faith in Jesus produce love in me? Is my life more loving today than years past? Am I more caring, more kind, and more patient with other people? Am I? Do my words build up or tear down? These are practical questions that expose whether I am growing in love or not.

*Faith expressing itself through love... A powerful thought.*

*Oh, God, I pray that I am growing in love. Show me any, and I mean any, area that is lagging in growth or any place where I am blocked in my growing in love. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

### **Wednesday, May 22: Galatians 6 - Danger, the path of self-righteousness...**

This chapter is filled with practical wisdom for living the Christian faith. I had so many places where I naturally paused to give Paul's statement a little extra thought.

When I finally got through it... I returned to verse 14 for my morning deeper meditation. *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

One of the issues going on in this chapter deals with people returning to the law as a road to salvation. "Because I live right, God will take me into His kingdom" can be a subtle subplot of this behavior. Whether out loud or silently in the mind/heart, this type of thinking can lead to boastfulness, an 'I'm better than others therefore I deserve this' kind of thinking. I am not immune to these thoughts. As I write, a number of "I'm good" thoughts float into my mind. Even writing this daily devotion can sometime surface in my thinking as a boastful trap. After all I am so devout, I not only hold daily devotions, I write them for others to read.

It is scary how easily I can be led down the path of self-righteousness.

Paul's check for this kind of arrogant spirit, *I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Most often I think of boasting as a verbal advancing of oneself. But as a more introverted person, I don't speak out much of what I am thinking. As I sit today I am realizing that one can be boastful in heart if not with mouth. And this is a facet of my Christian life were I have to be very careful.

Paul's antidote would work for me as well. *I never (internally or externally) boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Christ alone is my salvation. Nothing I can do can add to it or supplement it in any way.

Paul continues noting, *the world has been crucified to [him], and [he] to the world.* Can I honestly say that with Paul?

Has the world been crucified to me?

Have I been crucified to the world?

Or do I continue to care too much what others think about me?

Do I care too much about living like everyone else?

These are penetrating questions that require more wrestling and thought... my initial response is that too much of the world lives in me and too much of me continues to live in the world.

*Oh, God, I am feeling like I am letting You down. I feel like I am falling so far short of Paul's words. Please, Lord, help me, strengthen me and lead me more and more to be crucified to the world. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

### **Thursday, May 23: Ephesians 1 - God's delight...**

It has been a tough week for me. I am physically tired (exhausted even though I slept for almost 11 hours the other day). And when I am physically tired I am most vulnerable emotionally. And I was stung this week emotionally. Like I said it has been a tough week.

The Lord has been my lifeline, as he usually is. God's tight hold on me has brought me through much worse. The readings this week have been helpful. God is so good.

I love Ephesians with its expansive statements, heartfelt prayer and practical teaching, so I looked forward to the lessons of this letter.

As I began to read I was overcome when I came to verse 5, *he [God] predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will*-. I almost couldn't read the rest of the chapter as my eyes filled with tears. They are tearing again as I muse and write. God determined in His mind before I was born to adopt me as His son. Me... God did this for me. Oh my.

Like cool water for a thirsty soul, like the glorious sunshine after a horrendous storm this thought burrows deep into my very being.

Memories of God's grace-filled refreshment loop in my mind. God is so good... He is so good to me and I deserve none of this. NONE not one drop.

I am adopted. I am wanted. I am loved. I am cared for. I am God's son... by His choice, His choice. God choose me. I can think of no reason why... still he chose me! He chose me *through Jesus*.

The conclusion of this verse adds additional lavish love upon my soul. God chose me *in accordance with his pleasure*. God was pleased, God was delighted, God was excited to choose me. Could it get any better than that?!

I still have some restoration needed from this tough week, but these words from my God to me have brought considerable restoration to my aching heart.

As David says of the Lord *my shepherd... he refreshes (or restores) my soul*. Yes, He does. Yes, He does.

*Father, thank You for this slice of grace... to be reminded that I am Yours is a gift I so needed to hear today. Thank You. Bless You. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

### **Friday, May 24: Ephesians 2 – Dead made alive...**

I was immediately captivated by the opening words and the idea that we were dead and made alive again. *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,... But... God... made us alive with Christ...* (1, 4-5).

My first thought was Jesus standing at the tomb of Lazarus calling his dead friend back to life and Lazarus walking out of the tomb still wrapped in his grave clothes. I imagine the 'oohs' and 'aahs' from the crowd and the talk spreading around town.

“Did you hear Lazarus, who was dead and in the tomb 4 days, is alive again?!” “It’s true, I went to his home and sat with the family after He died and now I’ve talked with Him... He is alive again!”

It must have been amazing to know Lazarus personally, know he died and was buried four days and then was called back to life. A true MIRACLE.

What hit me this morning is that it is no less a miracle that I am spiritually alive. Every one of us *were dead in our transgressions and sins,... But... God... made us alive with Christ...*

Just as Jesus called Lazarus out of that tomb, God called me (and you and all who believe in Jesus) out of our tomb of sin and transgression and breathed new life into our dead spiritual lives.

I’m alive!!! I wonder what Lazarus did with the rest of his life? We don’t hear from him.

I do know what God wants me to do with the rest of my life. Live for Him by doing the good works He has prepared for me, us, to do. (see verse 10: *For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*)

I guess I better get on to my ‘prepared doing’....

*Lead me, Father, today to do those things You have prepared for me to do. Help me to not skip a beat but to march in tune with Your cadence as I live for You. I pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

### **Saturday, May 25: Ephesians 3 - ...**

Paul explains that God’s call in his life was to preach the mystery of God, the gospel that Gentiles are heirs with the Jews and members of one body in Christ. And Paul was called to preach to Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ (see 1-9). After this comes an amazing statement. *His [God’s] intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord (10-11).*

Where Paul, and by extension, Peter and the other apostles were God’s agents to extend the gospel to the world, now that honor and distinction belongs to the church!

This statement then becomes a kind of plumb line against which to measure the Church and, at least in part, any local church.

Is this a fair statement? Through the Church (or through my local congregation) *the manifold wisdom of God [is being] made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Yikes, I am not sure we are living up to this calling. I am not sure we are even trying to live up to this calling.

I sit here confronted by this statement... not quite knowing what to do about it other than admit to the Lord how far short I am, and we are, falling of His intention for His body, the church.

*Lord, after 40+ years this should not be a new thought to me. Yet it is. I am humbled that I have missed this for so long. And I confess that I am not sure what I need to be doing to begin to live this truth in my life and within my church.*

*I need You, Holy Spirit, to lead and guide me. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

### **Sunday, May 26, 2019, 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 Living Hope website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at [office@LivingHopeCT.org](mailto:office@LivingHopeCT.org).*

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