



2025 Weekly Devotions

Week of: August 4th - 10th

Sermon: August 3rd



August 4

Psalm 119:144

In just about every area of life we need instruction, teaching and information for us to properly and adequately grow. From the moment we are born we are growing and learning. God has designed us in this way. Throughout our lives we will grow in our knowledge, strength, abilities, confidence, faith, understanding, joy, perseverance, hope and many more areas. In this journey of life, we need to recognize that this is not random; it is God's intended purpose that we progress this way.

Psalm 119 can be seen as the "word" chapter of the Psalms. The reason is that the psalmist is constantly referring to the law, commandments, testimonies, word, precepts, instructions and statutes that God has given to His people. The psalmist recognizes that God has given His children divine revelation of His character in the Scriptures.

Notice what the psalmist says in the second part of verse 144. He says, "Give me understanding that I may live." What a request! What a prayer! What insight into what is necessary for him in his life. He recognizes that if he is left to himself, it will be impossible for him to grow, flourish and thrive in this life the way God has planned for him.

When this bold proclamation was made before God, the psalmist didn't just utter a few words for the sake of speaking. He wasn't just filling the silence with noise. He was recognizing God for who He is, and he was recognizing the testimonies for what they are. They are the revealed word of God. The psalmist is linking his progress in life, his growth in obedience, directly to the instructions of God. While it is true that we gain information from other disciplines: science, math, history, nature, etc., nothing is equal to the instruction we receive from the word of God.

Because the Bible is the result of the gracious act of God revealing Himself to us, we can have confidence that He will do what He has promised in His word. The psalmist is not calling to God from a point of desperation in this particular verse. He is crying out with exhilaration and hope. He knows that God has promised the way of life. He knows that God always keeps His word. He knows his need to depend on God. He realizes that his foundation for living is God, and not himself.

I pray that you may see God the way the psalmist does in this verse. Do you need understanding, confidence and hope for life? Run to the Word the way the psalmist did. See God for who He is in all of His power. Pray boldly that He would lead you in the way of life. Trust what you read in the Bible. Our God is faithful. He will teach us how to live.

August 5

Romans 8:12-14

When was the last time you marveled at what you read from the Bible? I hope that is not something you have to think long and hard about. The Word of God is unique compared to all the books that have been written and any works that will be written in the future. The reason is because the Holy Spirit is the author of Scripture. Today's devotion is not about investigating the human authors that physically penned the Scriptures; it is focusing on the source, the inspiration of the Bible, and that church family is the Holy Spirit.

On Sunday we learned that we are to be sowing to the Spirit, and not to our flesh, in order that we may have life. The chief way that we do this is by orientating our lives according to the Bible. The reason that the Bible is so important in our sanctification is because it is the only divinely inspired authority that we have. When we open its pages, we are reading the words that God has supernaturally given and preserved that we may know Him. When you engage in reading and studying the Bible you are encountering the very revelation of God Himself. That is why I began by asking you when was the last time you marveled at what you read?

In today's passage from Romans, look again at what verse 14 says, "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God". Over the last few Sundays, we have seen that God clearly shows us what the works of the Spirit are, as well as the works of the flesh. Pastor Robert, Pastor Aaron, and I have not just thought up these ideas from our own minds. We have seen them in the Bible and have preached them to you. One of our foundational beliefs at Smyrna is that the chief focus of worship on Sunday morning is the preached word of God. We do not gather to hear man's opinion; we gather to be instructed from the word of God!

Yesterday we learned that the psalmist recognized that he must be instructed by God if he was going to live rightly. Today we see that we are to be led by the Spirit. These two ideas are not competing against each other; rather they point to the same source. Being led by the Spirit is not some weird feeling we get. It is not babbling with crazy, made-up noises and calling it speaking in tongues. It is not some deep-down impression. Being led by the Spirit is living a life that is ordered and directed by the Bible. Since the Holy Spirit inspired the Bible, we can rest assured that living according to what is written in its pages is how we prove that we are being led by the Spirit. With that in mind, when you come to your time in the Word, come with reverence knowing that when you submit to what you are reading, you'll find that you will be led by the Spirit.

August 6

Mark 4:20

Today's passage is the conclusion of a parable that Jesus spoke to a large crowd by the sea. From this account we see that Jesus is speaking about the growth of the kingdom of God. That growth will come through the conversion of sinners as they become disciples of Jesus.

As we continue looking at the life of a believer, today's devotion adds important elements to what we have already learned. Three crucial aspects we can take from this parable are: evidence, certainty and hope.

Jesus said the thing that separates this last group of people in His parable from the other groups is that they truly believe the word of God. Jesus describes this group as the ones who, "hear and accept" the word. The truth of the gospel has taken root, and the evidence is that these people believe the word in all circumstances. Through trials, difficulties and worries, these people continually rest in the Word. They see happiness, celebration and joy as products of their salvation. Through times of uncertainty, they hold on to what God has spoken. In times of clear direction, they praise God for being able to understand His leading. In all of these situations, and many others, their faith is in Jesus.

When the faith that the people in verse 20 exhibit is the same faith that you have in your life, it should produce certainty in your life. Jesus said this group is the one that bears fruit. They give clear, visible proof that the gospel is changing their lives. This is great encouragement to know that we can see the power of the gospel working in our lives. The fruit proves that they are genuine believers. The fruit testifies to Christ-like growth. Jesus says there will be varying degrees of fruit. However, if there is no fruit, the testimony of the Bible is that you do not have salvation, you do not belong to Jesus. The presence of fruit shows that you are saved and belong to Him. What do you see in your life?

Finally, when we believe the gospel and see its fruit in our lives, we can have confidence that we belong to Jesus. God, in His grace, does not stop the blessing there. True fruit produces evidence, evidence produces confidence, and confidence produces hope. The hope is that when our lives show that we belong to Him here and now, we can trust that we will spend eternity in His presence after we die.

To bring it all together from the last couple of days we can look at it like this. The Bible instructs us in how we should live. The Holy Spirit gives us understanding of the Scriptures. As we are conformed to them, we can know that we are being led by the Spirit. When our lives testify to the reality of salvation, by the fruit we produce, we can rest in the truth that God has started a work that will lead us on in hope. This hope is that we can be sure of our eternity in heaven that God has prepared for His children.

August 7

Galatians 6:9

A few weeks ago, my bride and I walked into a restaurant on a Saturday evening. Like most dining establishments, we encountered a rather packed room and, as we expected, there was a brief wait to endure before grubbing could commence! As we sat patiently, something quite remarkable took place at least three times as multiple parties came in, heard there was a relatively minor wait (15 minutes) and left!

I don't relay the story to make any grandiose or moral judgments. If someone doesn't want to wait to be seated, that's certainly a biblically acceptable decision! Nevertheless, I think the occurrence sheds light on the mentality so many of us have about life. If you think about it for just a moment, it would take nearly 15 minutes to: leave the restaurant, get in my car, drive to another establishment, park and walk into the new dining establishment. What is it, therefore, that would cause so many to leave? The most plausible answer I could suggest is that we simply don't like to wait!

We live in a push-button culture. I can do more, at the drop of a hat, with technology and services than my parents and grandparents could have accomplished in hours. When I want to know the answer to a question I have, my recourse is to type a few letters into the Google machine (or your search engine of choice) and, presto, I have a response! If I desire to watch a new show, I have millions at my disposal. If I want to book a vacation, I can do so in moments. If I desire to have groceries delivered to my home, they will arrive within a few hours at most!

In all these things, there is great convenience and possibilities for good but there is also a danger. At some point, if we are not careful, we will lose the ability to endure things. The Bible makes it clear that our sowing does not result in instantaneous reaping. Instead, like the farmer, there is a period between planting and harvest. Sometimes, that period is relatively quick but, often, there is considerable lag between faithful action and the fruit that follows.

Church family, I pray that our faith is sufficient for such a waiting game! May we trust the Lord, knowing that that seed we are sowing into our children and grandchildren will, eventually, produce a harvest. May we trust that our ministry of the Word and our faithful service of our lost neighbor and our constant dedication to the Word of God will ultimately render great and enduring fruit. In order to arrive at such a harvest, we must dispense with our unwillingness to endure difficult and dry seasons, which means that even in trial we must not grow weary in doing good.

August 8

James 1:12

What would cause us to reap good things BEFORE we experience the harvest? The answer, of course, is faith. Faith is what looks forward to that which is not yet seen with sure conviction that what is promised will come to pass. True faith necessarily results in action and one of the foremost actions is sowing in conviction that future reward is indeed heading our way.

Today's text reminds us that steadfastness in trial is one component of sowing good seed. You will notice the similarity between James' words in this passage of Scripture and Paul's teaching in Galatians 6. In both cases, there is a promised reward that motivates future obedience. In Paul's case, sowing good seed will produce a harvest and in James' case, remaining steadfast (faithful and immovable) in the trial will render the wonderful joy of the crown of life.

What I want to emphasize today is that this steadfastness is not optional! James doesn't say that it would be nice if believers were steadfast or that believers would gain more if they are steadfast, instead he connects our faithfulness in the moment with the crown of life entirely. Stated in the inverse, those who are not faithfully steadfast in the trial should have no assurance that they are going to receive the crown of life in the end.

As we round the corner of this devotion, I want to speak for just a moment to those of you who are struggling. I realize that life is difficult, that trials can be severe and that simply putting one foot in front of the other can be a monumental task for the hurting. Nevertheless, be reminded that your steadfastness today will be rewarded with glorious blessings in the future. The farmer may not desire to get up early to plant his seeds but when he reaps a bountiful, beautiful, harvest, all of the work that was put into that moment becomes worth the effort.

In conclusion, remember these truths and live by them. The reward of the crown is the reward of those who sow the seeds of faithfulness. Just like a farmer ought not expect to harvest corn if he sows weeds, so the supposed believer should not expect to harvest a crown of life if he sows faithlessness. Conversely, we can trust that our faithfulness to sow endurance will be rewarded with a harvest with the same conviction that a farmer brings to his efforts to cultivate a harvest from a few small seeds.

August 9

Acts 2:45

Verse 10 of Galatians 6 is a very important reminder of the “earthiness” of the Christian faith. What I mean is that God is concerned both with our spiritual condition AND our physical wellbeing. Beginning in verse 6 of Galatians 6, we are told that God has instructions for the church regarding how to take care of those who serve the church by teaching. The requirement to study in order to rightly divide the Word of God takes time, so much time in fact that it is right, and good, for a church to compensate those who are pouring over the Scriptures in prayerful study so that they can provide for their households and feed the household of faith.

Now, as we move to the closing portion of this section of Galatians, we are reminded again that the Christian is to concern himself with the wellbeing of others. This is what is meant here by “do good unto everyone”. The good in view certainly includes the good of sharing the truth (this is the point of tomorrow’s devotion) but it also entails meeting the physical needs of the family of God and others.

We see a picture of what this might look like in Acts 2. If you have attended Smyrna for any length of time, you know that this is a favorite passage of mine for the precise reason that it provides such a marvelous glimpse into the life of a healthy church. Luke describes the life of the church by detailing how these men and women sold their possessions in order to provide for the needs of their fellow believer.

Now, before we move forward, let us point out what should be obvious but is nevertheless often neglected about this particular passage of Scripture. This is not a picture of socialism. Socialistic thought includes the forced forfeiture of personal property which is to be rendered to the state (or some authoritarian structure) for the provision of others. In this case, the church itself was voluntarily giving to those who were in need which means that those who chose to give a little or serve in some other capacity were not penalized.

What Luke describes in Acts 2 is an illustration of the principle that Paul has in mind in Galatians 6 regarding doing good to others. Please note that this act of service had real ramifications! These were true sacrifices that were made, nevertheless they were sacrifices that were undertaken joyfully because of the love that was shared between members of the congregation.

Make no mistake, doing good to others will cost you but it will also bring great reward. As we do good to others, as we joyfully sacrifice our temporal goods and time for the wellbeing of our fellow man, we should remember that our momentary sacrifice will pale in comparison to the beautiful and abundant reward that is coming.

August 10

Matthew 9:36-38

Those of you who are familiar with Scripture will note that the idea, or metaphor, of a harvest is used in multiple contexts within the Bible. Galatians 6 uses the picture to describe the reward that is coming to those who are faithful, and Jesus employs the same picture to talk about the fruit of sharing the Gospel.

As we pause for a moment on this Lord's Day to consider this final devotion of the week, may we remember that the ultimate way we can sow good seed and the best way we can love those who are not yet in the household of faith is through Gospel proclamation. In fact, the love of God demands that we share the truth with those who need it and, if we are faithful, we should expect the Lord to move in a powerful way to bring about a great, and eternal, harvest.

You will notice in this portion of Scripture that Jesus' compassion moved Him to speak as He saw the lost crowds. These people are described as those "without a shepherd" meaning they were left to their own devices and devoid of those who would teach them the truth that leads them in holiness. The Lord loved these people, and He was compelled to exhort His disciples to share the truth.

The point is relatively obvious but sometimes the obvious requires our attention... Christ is connecting our love for others with the message of truth. He is training up His disciples in order to send them into the "fields" (the place where the lost and rudderless people live) so that they can share the saving message of the Gospel. His expectation is that His disciples would "do good to all men" and this good is, chiefly, the good of telling them about Him and His death, burial and resurrection.

I state that to remind us that the greatest good we can do in the world is to share the life-changing message of salvation. As we said yesterday, the Bible does speak to the topic of meeting the needs of others. There is certainly a place for a cold drink of water, a roof over the heads of those who need it and income, but those things pale in comparison to the Kingdom oriented work of telling others about Christ.

So many churches connect faithfulness to Christ with social ministry. I've heard people attempt to condemn our church because we "don't do enough for the community". While I would certainly take umbrage with that remark in many ways (i.e. we do help many people), I would also mourn at the presupposition that underlies this remark which basically separates "doing something for the community" from preaching and teaching the Word. Make no mistake, the greatest good we can do is boldly, and clearly, preach and teach and proclaim the Gospel of Christ and this is not my idea instead when Jesus was moved to compassion for the masses, His mercy prompted Him to this very task!