



# 2026 Weekly Devotions

Week of: January 12<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup>

Sermon: January 11<sup>th</sup>



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH  
building community ◦ equipping believers ◦ serving Jesus



January 12

**Luke 9:57-62**

When I consider how many times I have witnessed folks who show up to the church or who want to stop by to talk with me about a relationship with the Lord who quickly disappear, I am reminded of how hard following Christ can actually be. Jesus once said, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” This followed His lesson on the cost of discipleship. You might recall a more known verse found in Luke 9:23 where it is written, “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.” You see talk of self-denial and cross bearing on a daily basis. Without this commitment, a person cannot truly follow Jesus.

This is why He often encouraged people to truly consider how hard it will sometimes be to consistently and faithfully follow after Him. Jesus did not want people who would start the journey only to fall away when the journey became difficult. So, it is in Luke 9:62 that the potential pursuer is admonished to consider the sacrifices that will need to be made as well as the reorienting of priorities for a true disciple’s life.

As we dealt with the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Exodus, we discovered the Israelites were beginning to deal with the full hardship of desert life. Recall that they had enjoyed the newly transformed sweet waters in Marah under the palm trees of Elim where they were refreshed, restored, and encouraged. Now, 6 weeks into the exodus, every step they took was leading them farther away from the life they knew, the civilization they were accustomed to, and deeper into a land of desolation and desert. We know this was the path to the promised land but for them, it was a reality that smacked them in the face and proved to be more difficult and discouraging than they had presumed it would be.

This is the plight of so many today. People take a step towards Christ only to find that the challenges of obedience to Christ are immense. The feeling of isolation and the withdrawals experienced from giving up one’s past is not easy. Even when things of the past proved to be disappointing and destructive, they were familiar, which provided some strange level of comfort and security even if it caused pain and constant chaos.

The picture that we get from this portion of our walk through Exodus is indicative of the experiences often realized when a sinner attempts to walk away from the slavery and bondage of sin and the Evil One. The temptations to look back on our former lives and to imagine them as better than they actually were, is intense. The hardships cause us to remember our past with more kindness and favor than we should. Friends, we must know that we will experience the pains of the cross before the sweetness of the new life in Christ. We will have to grow in our ability to deny self and to allow the fruit of the Spirit to replace the “pleasures” of worldly and sinful habits of our past.

Transformation can be extremely tough. The reality that we are living in a desert and the sense that we are walking farther away from what we know can be disturbing and frightening. It may cause us to look back and be tempted because we are not convinced of the blessings of obedience to our Savior. We must know that what lies ahead is far better than what we walk away from. Don’t look back, you’ll plow a crooked row.

January 13

### **Romans 5:20**

It is so often true that before we can truly appreciate an act or demonstration of grace, we must first go through a place of darkness. Grace is never more beautiful to a recipient of it than when it follows in the dark background of sin. It is then that we understand that we don't deserve it, shouldn't have it, and stand grateful that we receive it rather than justice or punishment. We read about the grumbling, complaining, and demonstrations of faithlessness once again in Exodus 16. It will become an all too familiar pattern I am afraid.

Just when you think that God will unleash much deserved wrath on His people, He instead rains down mercy and grace upon them. Note that in Exodus 16:2-3, the whole congregation grumbles against Moses which is actually against God (v. 8). God knows that He has allowed them to experience the darkness of their circumstances so that His grace will be evermore beautiful. God actually says to Moses, "Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you" (v. 4). This is a clear example that God's grace is unmerited favor. The glory of it is even more clearly demonstrated against the unbelief and faithlessness of the people.

I am sure that Paul had examples like this in mind when he wrote Romans 5:20. It says, "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." Don't fail to see that the people were making godless declarations of wanting to be back in slavery in Egypt rather than where God had providentially led them. They were touting life in Egypt as something to be desired instead of life with God (vv.2-3). His wrath would surely be understood in light of all that He had already done to deliver them from Egypt and Pharaoh's army. One miracle after another and yet they grumbled in unbelief.

Even more sad to me is that in this case it wasn't just a few of them. The text tells us that the whole congregation was complaining and looking back to Egypt. They clearly demonstrated no faith, no trust, and no gratitude for all that God had already done on their behalf. Truly, sin abounded in this circumstance. Now, the truth that as sin abounded grace abounded more can be seen with jaw-dropping amazement.

I have often been encouraged by God's promises to me. Back in Exodus 3:12, God had told Moses, and he told the people, that the day would come when they would worship God at Mt. Sinai. That alone should have been enough for them to know they were not going to die in the Wilderness of Sin. It is like when Jesus told His disciples that He would meet them on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. When the rough storm arose, they should have known they would make it through because Jesus said He would see them on the other side. The storm would not get them because He had more planned for them.

How did God respond to this awful outbreak of rebellious unbelief? Wrath? NO! He chose to "rain" down manna from heaven. He chose to bless them rather than punish them. He didn't rain fire and brimstone but sustaining bread instead. They deserved one thing and He gave them another. "Behold", He said. This is meant to draw our attention to grace.

January 14

### **Philippians 4:19**

For the next several days, I want us to drill down on the manna provided from heaven. What is the Holy Spirit teaching us about His provision to sustain us as His children? The manna which God provided for Israel is a beautiful type of the food which God has provided for our souls through His Word; both the written (Bible) and the incarnate Word (Jesus). I want us to look at many of the similarities between the manna and the Word of God as heavenly food meant to nourish and strengthen our souls for His glory.

As we begin, note first of all that the manna was a supernatural gift from above. God called it *bread from heaven* (v. 4b). The manna was not a product of the earth nor was it manufactured by man. Israel did not bring it with them out of Egypt. It came down from heaven as a sustaining gift from God. I am reminded here of Philippians 4:19 where it is written, "And my God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." The manna fed an estimated 2 million people for forty years (Exodus 16:35). This was a continual supply just like the Word is for us today. It has been estimated based on how much an omer would be that the Israelites gathered over a million tons of manna every year. I think it is safe to say that God had an endless supply of what His people needed. Just as miraculous is the Bible. The Scriptures are the supernatural spiritual manna for our souls. The Bible is a miraculous resource provided to us by the hand of God from heaven. It is a gift of God that came to man from His gracious heart.

The manna came to where the people were. They did not have to travel great distances to get it. The Bible says that the manna lay around the camp. It was right there and accessible to all who would have it. So it is with the Word of God. It is graciously accessible to all of us who would choose to pick it up. Sometimes I think we might appreciate it more if we had to work harder to have it. Regardless, the accessibility of the manna and the Word only add to our responsibility to get it. The manna lay on the ground just outside their tents. They had to deal with it. Either they would pick it up and partake or trample it underfoot.

I wonder today how many of us choose to leave our "manna" where it lies on the dresser, the coffee table, or the bookcase. We, like the Israelites must do one of two things: We can show our respect and gratitude by gathering it up and nourishing our souls with it or we can despise it, trampling it underfoot by constant neglect. You know, the manna was not large in size. It was a perfectly round small wafer that carried in it all that they needed to be sustained. Have you ever thought about how small the Bible is? It contains everything we need to know God, ourselves, our condition, and His provision to redeem and save us. The sum total of God's revealed truth in a single book that can be carried easily by each of us. It is relatively small, but it is packed with complete nourishment for our souls.

January 15

## Psalm 1

The manna was readily accessible but for it to make any difference in their lives, it had to be eaten. I know that is a “no-brainer,” but I am sure we all know how easy it is not to feast on the manna that God has given us from heaven in His Word. The manna, like the Bible, was not given to us to simply look at or to place on a shelf in your house to admire. It was to be eaten or in our case to be read and studied. Manna was God’s provision to meet the bodily needs of His people, and the Word is God’s provision to meet the spiritual needs of His people.

In order to derive from the Word the nourishment we need, we need to learn how to feed on it as the Bread of Life (Ps. 1:2). If we neglect a proper diet or adequate feeding of our natural bodies, we will end up with poor health. To neglect our spiritual food results in a sickly state of soul. There are three things for us to consider as we see the connections between the manna provided in the wilderness and God’s Word provided for us today.

First, there must be what is known as appropriation. This simply means that we must partake in it. If I sit down at an amazing spread of food at a banqueting table, it does me no good until I literally pick up the food and eat a portion. I know that may sound so simple and elementary, but dear ones, this is precisely where many Christians fail. I cannot eat everything on the table and nor should I, but I must take a portion for myself and consume it.

It is that way with the Word. The spiritual manna that God has provided is laid open before me. There is far too much for me to consume at one time. It is properly stored in the pages of Scripture and will be kept for me. I need not worry about losing any of it or consuming all of it immediately. We must take some of it unto ourselves and make it our own. I must appropriate it to myself by receiving it and putting my name personally in the lessons. He died for *me*, and *I* must deny self and follow Him. *I* am healed by His stripes and so forth. We must see the promises as given to us individually. All of this is what it means to appropriate the Word. We must learn to feed on God’s Word and take it unto ourselves. When I am condemned by portions of the Scriptures, I must bow to it, repent, and change my ways. I am sure you get my point; take of it and apply it church family.

The next step in feeding on the Word of God, the manna, is to chew it. I know that sounds strange, but what I mean is very important here. Too many of us read chapters at a time and attempt to swallow all the “food” without chewing it up first. From a biological perspective, that is why so many people get indigestion. The stomach was never meant to do what the teeth do first. Swallowing food without chewing it up well first hinders digestion and actually causes a person to lose many of the benefits otherwise experienced from a good meal. If you try to swallow the truth of God’s Word before you have chewed on it and come to understand it, you will lose so much of its nourishing power. We should not expect our behaviors and habits to change if we have not been brought under biblical influence properly. A little truth thoroughly digested and understood will be far more productive than a lot swallowed almost whole. Do you understand my point?

January 16

**John 17:17**

As we ended our point to ponder yesterday, we were talking about “chewing” your food properly so that your body will digest it fully and will receive all the benefits from the nutrients and be nourished by what was taken in. Of course, all of this was meant to point to the lost art of meditating on the Word of God so that we can deeply come to understand the meaning and application to our lives. Arthur Pink says that meditation stands to reading as mastication (chewing) stands to eating. How do we do this practically?

Some days, take a single verse of Scripture, write it down on an index card, and carry it with you throughout the day. Refresh your memory as opportunities arise during the day by taking it out and rereading it often. Pray over it and ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate the meaning of the text to you. Ask Him for a blessing from the text and that He will reveal to you the beauty and precious nature of the verse. Do what pastor Aaron and I do often – ask questions of the text.

Now that you have done the work of meditation or chewing on the Word of God, you are ready for assimilation. This is honestly what you and I should be aiming for as we read and study the Bible. When I chew my food and swallow, it is taken up into my body and its various systems where it is converted into blood and tissue thereby affording health and strength. The food that I took, chewed and digested properly now appears as strength in my steps, in my arms, and the satisfaction on my face.

Now that my body is nourished and filled with the necessary ingredients for good health, I can better fight off disease, germs, and other viruses that attack my body – physically. The same can be said of the spiritual body. When I have properly nourished my soul by appropriating God’s Word and by chewing on the deep truths that it contains properly, this manna from heaven will build up my new nature. It will nourish faith in me and supply the needed strength for my daily walk with the Lord as I seek to serve Him.

The Word rightly handled and applied will also serve as a safeguard against the germs of temptation that attack me. The fiery darts of Satan will fall harmlessly to the ground as the full armor of God protects my mind, my heart, and my soul. The Bible is clear in Psalm 119:11 that as I treasure, or hide, His Word in my heart I will not sin against God. God’s Word my dear church family is graciously given to us to feed upon, and this feeding is for the purpose of nourishing, satisfying, and preparing our bodies for living victoriously in this world day by day. The truths contained in the Bible must be incorporated into my life in order to effectively sanctify and transform me. The Word of God has not been digested and assimilated until it becomes that which controls my life. In other words, how I walk, talk, and behave.

January 17

**John 15:5; Matt. 6:33**

Have you ever wondered what in the world some phrases mean that we speak all the time as if they are perfectly clear? We often say and even sing that we must “abide” in Christ for example. John’s gospel contains that famous verse that says, “Abide in Me, and I in you...whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4a-5). For me personally, there have been times when I have been strolling along through my day wondering, “Am I abiding in Christ?” What does that look like and what does it even mean?

I have been writing the last few days about literally taking the Word, the manna, that God provides to sustain and nourish us, and meditating on it so that it truly takes hold of us and becomes the source that changes us and strengthens us for the Christian life. In a nutshell dear ones, this is what it means to abide in Christ. A simple way to think of abiding is knowing and obeying.

I say *knowing* because you can’t be faithful in obedience if you don’t know what is expected or required of you. Once we do know because we are reading and listening to good preaching and teaching, we must then walk in obedience to the truth. As we do that, we are abiding in Christ and He will abide or remain in you. This is also what it means to “walk in the Spirit.” If you continue reading in John 15, you will discover Jesus equates abiding in Him with abiding in the Word (v.7). He then says, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love. (v.8). This will be the means or resource to full joy in your own life (v. 11).

Another way to think of it is to live in view of what Jesus taught in Matthew 6:33. There it says, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Abiding in Christ will be true of the one who is seeking Christ and His kingdom first. This will become the means by which you accomplish the admonition of Hebrews 12:12 which says, “Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees.” Oh dear ones, the manna is right there on the ground next to where you are. Kneel down in humility and receive that which He has provided to accomplish all of these amazing truths in your life. Too many of you are starving to death with a feast on the table right in front of you.

Peter wrote these words in his first epistle: “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation – if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Pet. 2:2). As you long for the manna that He has provided to us in His Word, I promise that you will also come to realize He has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3). Brothers and sisters, put on the full armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil (Eph. 6:10-18). Take a moment to look at this passage and understand that putting on the armor begins with taking up the manna, chewing on it slowly, and living empowered by it. If you do that my friend, you will stand faithful for our Savior just fine. Enjoy the meal!

January 18

**John 5:39, 46**

Sometimes to save time and money, I wish I could eat one big meal on Monday and be filled for the whole week. Or maybe gulp down a glass of water and no longer thirst until the next week. That of course is foolishness and to be quite honest, I wouldn't actually want that to be true. I enjoy the moments around good food and beverages. The same is true for feeding our souls my friends. We must learn to partake of the bread of life on a daily basis. Note that in Exodus 16:4 God told Moses that He would provide the manna daily and the people would need to gather it every day. God made it so that the manna provided on one day would not be enough for the next day with the exception of what He provided on the day prior to the Sabbath. A new supply would have to be secured each day. The soul requires the same systematic attention as does the body. If we fail to do this and neglect our spiritual meals, the results will be disastrous for our spiritual health. It is ridiculous to think that you can stuff enough "Jesus" into your system on Sunday morning alone.

For many, the only time they get an adequate spiritual meal is on Sunday and they think that it will last all week. It is no wonder so many are spiritually weak and sickly. We are all in daily need of a good supply of the Bread of Life. We would be far wiser to leave other things undone rather than the feeding of our souls on a daily basis. The next thing I want to say is wise in my opinion, but I also know with work schedules the way they are in our culture today, it isn't always possible although the principle will still apply.

When did the manna appear for the Israelites? The Bible tells us repeatedly in Exodus 16 that the manna would be provided in the morning (v.13, 21). Morning by morning they gathered manna and when the sun grew hot it would melt away. Folks, you must see the connection with the value of feasting on the provisions of God in the first part of your day before the challenges of the day capture your focus, your mind, and your heart. The reason I said the "first part" of your day is because for some of you on shift work, the first part of a new day for you may be midnight or 7pm in the evening when a new shift begins. Regardless, you should develop the habit of spending time with the Lord and feasting on His manna before you jump back into the hustle and bustle of a new day and all of its demands.

It is early in the morning before other things occupy our minds that we are best able to zero in on what matters most as we get our hearts and minds ready to face the pressures of the day. It is then that we take our time to put on the full armor of God before we step onto the battlefield. How many of us go to work each day unprepared and ill equipped? You want to practice getting prepared for the duties that lay before us each day. Again, I remind you to seek FIRST the kingdom of God. Because we are out of time for this week of "Points to Ponder", let me be sure to close reminding each of us that the chief purpose of the written Word is to set before us the reality and beauty of the Incarnate Word – The Lord Jesus. The Word is written and given to us to reveal Christ to us and to lead us to yielding in full obedience to Him as Lord. It's all about Jesus dear ones (John 5:39,46). Study the Word to know Jesus and to be in relationship with Him.