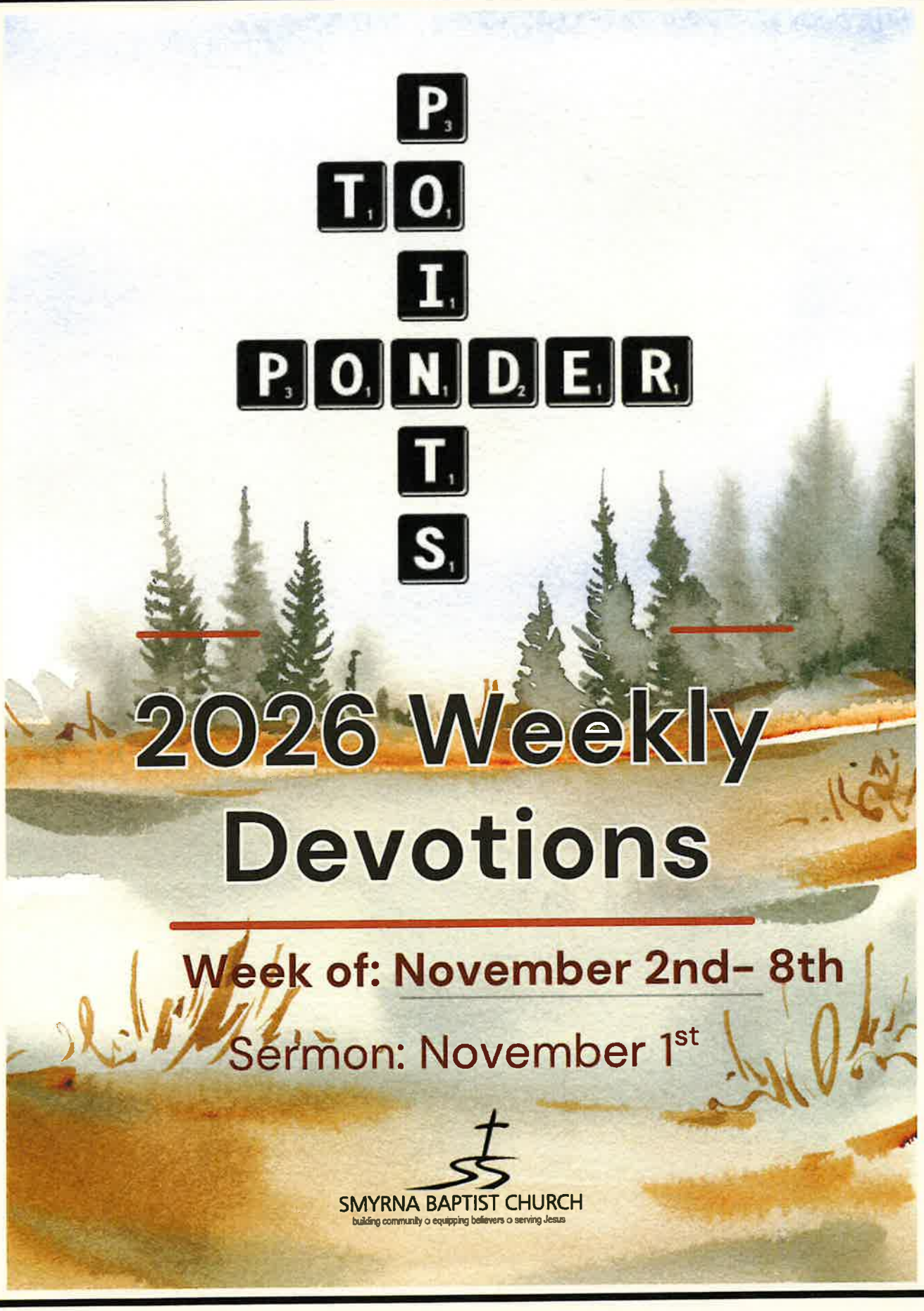


2026 Weekly Devotions

Week of: November 2nd- 8th

Sermon: November 1st

SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH

building community ○ equipping believers ○ serving Jesus

November 2

2 Timothy 1:8-10

I find it interesting that in our passage from Sunday's message, Paul wrote to Titus that "the grace of God has appeared." This makes me ask the question in my own mind, if this means it had not shown up or been actively impacting humanity until this point. The text is clear that the appearance of grace happened in the person and work of Jesus Christ. So, was this the first appearance of grace for the world to see?

The text that I have chosen for today's devotion is from 2 Timothy 1:8-10. There it says, "*Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord...who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of His own purpose and grace, which He gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus*." Notice that grace appeared through or was manifested (made known) in Jesus Christ. Also note that grace existed "before the ages began." This means that grace was active before it appeared.

Think about ways in which this would be clear. Grace was extended to Adam and Eve even after the fall. Grace was granted to Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and even a pagan like Abimelech in Genesis 20. We do not have to look hard to find evidence of God's grace before it appeared ultimately in Jesus Christ our Lord. I use the word ultimately because it was in His appearing that the opportunity for salvation was brought for all people (Titus 2:11). It was grace personified and exemplified in the work of Christ on the cross.

Paul describes Jesus as the One who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness (Titus 2:14). This is what we typically think about when singing Amazing Grace. We must not fail to realize that God's plan of redemption was not a plan B. He was not shocked or caught off guard by Adam and Eve's disobedience. 2 Timothy 1:9 reminds us that it was before the ages began that the plan was already in place for our redemption by the death of Christ. Titus 1:2 also contains the words, "before the ages began" in reference to the gift of eternal life. God graciously prepared a way, one way, back to sweet fellowship and kinship with Himself through Jesus Christ long before you and I were ever born. Grace was at work and waiting for the fullness of time to show up and take our breath away in the person of our Lord and Savior.

Think about how this corresponds to the teaching that our salvation is entirely based on grace and not at all in response to or grounded on our meriting it. Yes, indeed we must exercise faith, which is itself a gift of God (Eph. 2:8), but the plan was all God's doing. We will see this week, Lord willing, how there is an opportunity in Christ for all people (Titus 2:11), but the only ones who will actually benefit are those who believe and thus are changed by Christ. A question to ask as we close for today is who are the "us" in Titus 2:11-14? Is it "all" people or is it a "people for His own possession..."?

November 3

1 Timothy 4:9-10

I think we would all agree that there are places in the Scriptures that cause us to wonder exactly what God is saying. Some of these instances, taken out of context and in isolation from the entirety of the Bible, have led to poor teaching and even heresy for many. For example, in 1 Timothy 4:9-10 it says, "*The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe*." Could the Bible be teaching universalism which states that all people are eventually saved and that no one will go to hell? I think not! But it does say what it says so let us delve in a bit deeper and try to properly understand the truth of God's Word.

The phrase "especially of those who believe" is extremely important and provides a clear understanding when righty interpreted. The phrase narrows down those who are saved to a smaller group. It is undoubtedly true that God does lavish common grace on all people which means that everybody benefits in this world from His overall goodness. The food He provides, the beauty in creation, water, sunshine, etc. are all benefits that even lost people enjoy. In that sense, He is the Savior who blesses all people to some degree.

In a much narrower sense, He is the Savior in a redemptive manner only of those who believe in His sinless life, sacrificial death, and resurrection and who have received Him as Lord of their lives. You could translate the word "especially" in 1 Timothy 4:10 with the word "particularly" which may make it more easily understood. The task before the person who wants to read and study the Bible in an honest way is to use a passage like this one to help provide clarity and consistency to what we read in Titus 2:11-14.

Again, Paul wrote to Titus that grace appeared, "bringing salvation for all people." Is the "all" truly inclusive of everyone on the planet? When Paul continues in Titus 2:12 with the words "training *us,*" we should remember what he wrote to Timothy and with the two verses in view, determine that God is not communicating to us that all people will be saved. It is only those who will believe and those who submit themselves to training by the Spirit with the Word and other means of grace that God provides.

We begin to see in Titus 2:11-14 the peculiar effect the truth of God's Word and actual justification and sanctification have on those who believe. God is clearly performing a work in a group of people whom He has redeemed and is purifying, so they can become a people for His own possession. We will take up some of those effects in the "Points to Ponder" to come later this week.

November 4

Titus 1:1-3

On October 25th, I had the privilege of preaching Titus 2:9-10. In it, I emphasized the need for us to "adorn the doctrine of God." I will not preach that sermon over again now, but I do want to remind you of that concept so that you will be able to see much of what Paul wrote in verses 11-14 is the practical outworking of doing just that. Yesterday I mentioned that God uses His Word and other means of Grace to train us and to do the work of justification and sanctification. Among those "means" is the preaching of God's Word by called men of God.

Paul wrote in Titus 1:1-3 that he was called to serve God as a preacher "for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth." God's plan was that His people would come to and grow in faith and knowledge of truth as a result of the means of preaching and teaching. This is one of the key means by which grace "trains us." Keep in mind that those who have not exercised faith in Christ or bowed the knee to Him as Lord, are not trained in this manner. There is a way that followers of Christ live that is different and peculiar to their having been saved.

The goal of Paul's ministry, as should be ours, is that through the preaching and teaching of God's Word people would come to faith in Christ. This faith, if it is genuine, must be grounded in the knowledge of God's truth. The effect of this means of grace is godly living. It was not Paul's desire, neither is it ours, to simply communicate information to people. The hope is that God's people would grow into Christlikeness and be able to adorn the doctrine of God so that He will be glorified and they be filled with contentment and joy. Let us consider today some of the effects of the grace that trains us.

First, Paul says that grace, the appearing of Christ, trains us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions (v.11). From a negative perspective, grace through Christ and the gospel, leads us to push away from various sins. It simultaneously trains us to pursue habits like self-control, uprightness, and godliness (v.12). Grace trains us to be zealous for good works (v.14). I believe that Paul makes a beeline to application in verse 12 because he is painting the picture of adorning the doctrine of God. We must not fail to see that this is what happens when grace appears in Christ in a believer's life.

Dear ones, you must stop believing that a person can genuinely believe in Jesus and be saved while remaining unchanged. These characteristics listed in this section of Scripture are not exceptions to a rule but are the normal application of a saving encounter with the risen Lord. We are brought to the place in our own lives, by grace, at which we renounce some things and live for and in light of many other noble and godly things. This is not an option, and it is not reserved for an elite tier of believers.

November 5

Jeremiah 31:33-34

The question that I would like for us to ponder today is this: How do we make the doctrine of salvation beautiful to those around us? One might say that we simply proclaim it with our mouths. I would argue that is only a portion of how we accomplish the task set before us. I am of the persuasion, and I am convinced that the Bible supports and informs my conviction, that we make the doctrine of salvation beautiful to others by living it out so that they can see how Jesus Christ frees us from the ugliness of ungodliness and worldly passions, and to redeem us from lawlessness and impurity. I believe that we are to live our lives so that they see how He produces self-control, zeal for good works, love, uprightness, and godly living. As I have said a couple of times this week, all of this is what it looks like to adorn the doctrine of God.

As we examine this transformational phenomenon at the hands of grace appearing in Christ Jesus, it will help to look at an Old Testament passage that prophesied what would happen at the appearing of Christ and the establishment of the New Covenant by His shed blood. Jeremiah recorded these words of God, "*For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write in on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people...for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more*" (Jer. 31:33-34). The house of Israel as we understand from Paul's writing in the New Testament is made up of those who by faith believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (Gal. 3:7).

Within the New Covenant, there is the forgiveness of sins, the placing of the law within us and written on our hearts, and the promise that we would be made His people. Think about the prophecy of the New Covenant that we now know God promised to establish through Christ and His blood, with what is written by Paul in the book of Titus. What I am certain you will see is the application of that Covenant and its transformational reality in the life of those who are among the "us" being trained and changed. It was the blood of Jesus that purchased for us both justification as a means of our forgiveness and the power of transformation by the means of grace appearing to train us to live out our new reality.

This means that if we believe God kept His promises concerning the New Covenant itself, we must not choose to believe the promises of the covenant aren't necessary to prove genuine salvation in our lives today. Again friend, I simply want you to give an honest assessment of your own relationship to the Lord. If you are not experiencing the effects of the "grace that has appeared," you need to reevaluate your salvation. Being saved is a wonderful, life-changing event that is meant to bring us joyful hope. Paul said, "We, the ones being trained, are waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of Jesus Christ" (v.13). That hope dear one is a joyful hope because all hope is. There is anticipation and excitement because some day our bridegroom is coming back to us. What a day!

November 6

Ezekiel 36:25-28

I hope that going back into the Old Testament once more today will help you see the incredible fulfillment of this prophecy from Ezekiel in the book of Titus. Of course, my hope is that you will be encouraged by it, hopeful because of it, and determined to be sure you have experienced this incredible reality and transformation in your own life. It is written in Ezekiel, "*I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove your heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules...and you shall be My people*" (Ezek. 36:25-28). Like Jeremiah 31, this is what will take place once Jesus has done His redemptive work and the Holy Spirit has come to indwell God's children.

Now, if you take a stroll back into the book of Titus and land in chapter 2:11-14, you will be amazed at the similarities between these passages. This is true dear one because what God promised, He fulfilled in redemption by the blood of Jesus Christ. It makes sense that this is what we would see in the lives of the redeemed. Similar to yesterday, let's take a look at the impact redemption has on a saved person's life.

First, Ezekiel says that we will be cleansed (v. 25). Paul writes that we will be redeemed from all lawlessness and be purified by and for Christ (v.14). Ezekiel says that God will literally give us a new heart that is tender and responsive to His Word and ways. He called it a heart of flesh not of stone. Paul says that as a result of grace appearing and training us, we will renounce ungodliness and worldly passions while embracing a new way of living because we will have been given a new heart with new passions. Please don't miss that Ezekiel writes that God will Himself ***cause*** us to walk in His ways. Paul says that we will pursue uprightness, that we will be zealous for good works, and desire to live godly lives. God will give us this heart friends.

I desperately hope and pray that you will hear my heart and my desire for you as I type these words. I am so burdened that many who think they are saved have yet to experience these incredible promised, and life-changing realities. It isn't enough to simply say you believe in Jesus or even said the sinner's prayer in the past. If it was real, then Ezekiel 36 should have taken place in your life. Certainly, there will be varying degrees of sanctification along the way, but you must not sleep well knowing that your heart hasn't really changed, and that you are still the same person you were before you were supposedly saved. Do you look and act like the "people of God?" Remember that Titus 2:11-15 provides us a picture of what it looks like to adorn the doctrine of God because we have been changed by Him for this purpose.

November 7

Luke 1:69-70

We will wrap up our "Points to Ponder" week with an interpretation of what Paul meant when he said that Titus should "let no one disregard you (him)" (Titus 2:15). Think of verse 15 as the conclusion of this section of the letter. Paul tells Titus to declare all that he has written to him in regard to putting the church in order, selecting elders to oversee the congregation, to instruct the older men and women how to teach and train the younger folks respectively, and now how to adorn Christ regardless of your station in life.

Paul tells him to exhort and to rebuke the believers with authority. To exhort is to teach with gentleness or tenderness in hopes to train and aid in one's transformation. To rebuke is a much harsher word and carries with it an attitude, in this case, of protection against false teaching or attempts to lead the sheep astray. To rebuke is to stand up to someone to stop them from doing what they are doing. In Titus 1:9, Paul wrote to Titus that he must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he can give instruction (exhort) to the hearers. Again, as I mentioned above, in this same verse Titus 1:9, it is also written that he must teach sound doctrine and rebuke those who contradict it. He is to do this with the confidence and conviction that comes from speaking God's Word as an ambassador of Christ.

The word "*speak*" is important at the beginning of this verse. Some translations use the word "declare" which is fine. The leader is to speak to stop the one opposing the truth. An example of what Paul may be referring to can be found in Luke 1:69-70. There it is written, "The Lord God of Israel...has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old." This was in reference to the prophet Zechariah. What I want you to see in this example is that there is a category in the Bible for God speaking authoritatively through His chosen vessels. In this case it was to be Zechariah and in Crete it was to be Titus and then the other elders that would be chosen to shepherd the churches. In our day we need to speak His truth.

Let me try another passage to assist in our understanding of the use of both exhortation and rebuke from the mouth of God's messenger. In the short letter Paul wrote to Philemon in the book by that name, he said in verse 8 that he could use the means of rebuke to command Philemon to do what is required in the given situation but would much rather use exhortation for love's sake (v.9). Paul understands there is a time and place for both approaches in speaking God's Word to others. A good leader will know when to utilize both means.

For our purposes today, my goal is that we understand the necessity of speaking truth into the lives of those near to us. To do this we must be able to not only say what is true in an appropriate manner, but we must also live out in front of them what is appropriate and pleasing to God as well. More on that tomorrow.

November 8

1 Timothy 4:11-16

What did Paul mean when he told Titus, "Let no one disregard you" in Titus 2:15? How does one make people regard them? As I mentioned yesterday, there is a call on his life to be both gentle, kind, and loving and bold, courageous, and stern as he exhorts and rebukes as appropriate. He was to say the necessary words to keep the truth in front of them and the people walking in it. We all know there is another level to good and influential leadership and that is actions that are exemplary of the words spoken. In other words, our walk must match our talk.

Paul is telling Titus that he must live and lead in such a way that no one is likely to circumvent him, go around his teaching, or ignore it. Imagine Pastor Aaron or I, conducting ourselves in such a manner as to nullify or undo everything we say from the pulpit. You would consider us hypocrites and unworthy of your trust or confidence in our leadership and words that we say; and you would be right. Paul is in essence telling Titus to be a model of what he preaches and teaches. He is to set the pace in holiness, obedience, self-denial, and love for the Lord and His people. Titus should be able to say look at me for an example.

It reminds me of what Paul wrote to his protégé Timothy. He said, "*Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity...Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save yourself and your hearers*" (1 Tim. 4:11-16. I imagine you see the connection between this admonition to Timothy and the one to Titus in our passage from Sunday. We must not undo the words we preach and say we believe by our behavior and our actions.

Dear ones, my hope for this week of "Points to Ponder", has been to encourage you to give thought to the evidences of true conversion. The devil did a masterful job years ago convincing people in the church that all they had to do was say they believe in Jesus and acknowledge at a surface level that they knew they were sinners and that would be enough. There was no emphasis on life change, holiness, taking up the cross, and sanctification. The Bible clearly teaches that when given the chance, sanctification always accompanies justification. The faith that saves us is the same faith that sanctifies or changes us.

Titus 2:11-14 has been a look at what God intends a person's life to look like after the grace of the Lord Jesus appears in their lives. He promises to do the work of transformation in a true believer. The New Covenant contains the promise of a new heart and the God-given ability and impetus to walk in a manner worthy of your new life as His child. Please know that I am not trying to make anyone feel bad or judge you harshly or unfairly. I am simply asking you to evaluate your life in light of this biblical teaching. He appeared and began to train and purify His people as His own possession who are zealous for good works. He wants us to adorn Him so that others will see His beauty and come to Him so that He can bless their lives like He wants to bless yours. Be the example for them to see!