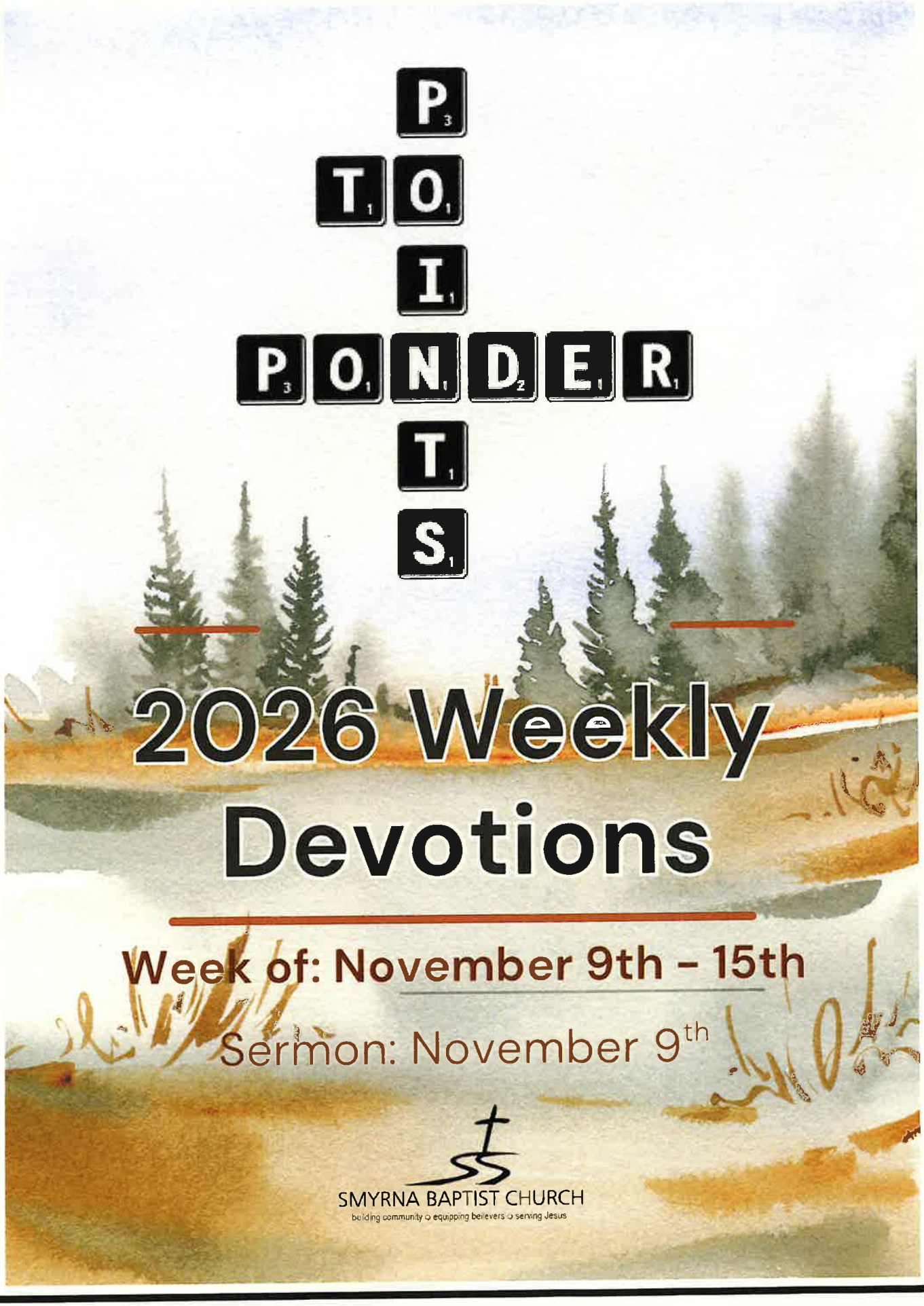



# 2026 Weekly Devotions

## Week of: November 9th - 15th

Sermon: November 9th

SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH

building community ○ equipping believers ○ serving Jesus

November 9

Ephesians 4:29-31

I want to try to focus our devotions on Titus 3:2 this week for the simple reason that I'm not sure how much time I am going to be able to devote to unpacking this loaded verse during the sermon. It may be that by the time you read this devotion we will have already covered a good bit of verse 2 in the sermon but... I doubt it! This being so, let us walk through the admonitions and exhortations contained in this sliver of chapter 3 together this week.

Today's devotional passage should be very familiar to those of you who join us for Sunday school. We spent a good amount of time studying the very specific commands that God gives us in Ephesians 4. This section focuses heavily on our words which, evidently, was on Paul's mind again when he wrote to Titus.

I want to call your attention to the fact that Paul specifies what kind of speech is to be avoided and that is "evil" speech. Some have mistakenly concluded that Paul is condemning any kind of rebuke or hard saying but that is a gross, unfitting generalization. The Apostle does not command Titus to remind the church that we are never to confront or speak the hard things, instead he wants Titus to remind disciples that they are forbidden from "evil" speech.

What is the difference between evil and hard? I suppose that the most obvious distinction lies in our intention, evil speech seeks to destroy whereas difficult truths presented in love seek to restore. The difficult thing is that sometimes evil speech is not evil in its content, instead it is recognized as evil in light of the environment and intent. Here's what I mean... I could correct my child in a righteous way or in an evil respect all the while utilizing the same words! The difference would be twofold. First, I would be correcting her in an evil manner if I did so in a public setting with the intent to embarrass her. Second, I would be correcting her in an evil manner if I did so to vent my frustration with no desire to see her sanctified.

As is always the case, the heart is the key to discerning the difference. A few weeks ago, I preached a passionate (and challenging) sermon that dealt, in part, with the proposed abortion amendment. This sermon included some very poignant, and straightforward, verbiage... was it evil? The answer is predicated on the condition of my heart. If my heart's desire is to be people harmed or shunned then it would be evil, if my desire is to see people repent and be spared the judgment and consequences of a truly heinous act, then my words are not evil at all. The point, dear friend, is that Paul is not advocating for a passive, totally non-confrontational church. He is exhorting believers to season their speech with a heartfelt desire to see our authorities and enemies blessed through repentance and faith in Christ.

Novmber 10

Colossians 3:8

Today's verse echoes much of the same sentiment that was presented to us in Ephesians 4 but the adjectives that Paul utilizes in Colossians 3 may help us put a bit more meat on the bone regarding our speech. Recall that Titus 3:2 commands us to "speak evil of no one". Nevertheless, there are times in which people are doing evil! Does Paul intend for Christians not to call out works of darkness? Well, in light of the teaching of Ephesians 5:11, it is clear that we are called to "expose darkness" so how do we reconcile the two? The answer is that we call out darkness and speak with zeal all the while earnestly desiring to see evildoers blessed by God's grace.

Today's verse shows us that the hallmark of evil speech is the disposition of the heart. Specifically, we learn that obscene talk and slander are often accompanied by malice, wrath and anger. Dear friends, we can rest assured that we have run afoul of God's design for us when our speech is an extension of our angry wrath. Should we be angered by sin? Absolutely! Should we desire to see our fellow sinner suffer? Only if we don't believe that God has called us to proclaim a Gospel of grace!

It is so easy to progress from righteous indignation (which is predicated on our rightful hatred of sin) to unrighteous indignation (which is motivated by a desire to see our enemies suffer). This distinction may seem obvious in theory, but it can be easily confused or unrecognized in practice!

There is a reason why Paul follows his instructions in Titus 3:2 with a reminder of God's grace towards Christians in verse 3. The reality is that we guard against angry, evil speech when we remember that we were once enemies of the cross as well. When we reflect upon the great grace that was made available to us in Christ and the desperate need we have of His atoning sacrifice and daily restoration through forgiveness, we are on the road to avoiding the kind of malice that bubbles to the surface when we only reflect upon sin without a Savior.

Before we leave this topic, let me provide one word of encouragement through a reminder. Our world is full of entities (news, social media, etc.) that have discovered that the easiest way to garner attention is through stoking the fires of our rage. Whereas the content may or may not be accurate in the facts that are presented, the manner in which the "other side" is painted is geared towards evoking the very things that Paul warns us to guard against in Colossians 3. May we recall that we are commanded to speak the truth, we must speak boldly to the world around us and we cannot back down from what God says is right. Nevertheless, may we always do so with a desire to see our enemies saved and restored. This is the way of the cross and, by God's grace, many of us are evidence of the Lord's power to reclaim even the most wayward sinners.

November 11

2 Timothy 2:24

We move on in our clause-by-clause study of Titus 3:2 to the next characteristic that we are to avoid when Paul says that we should "avoid quarrelling". The term translated as "quarrel" means to be contentious. It does not describe the act of disagreeing only, instead it refers to the disposition of desiring to disagree.

We have all met people who are just quarrelsome. It's as if their entire goal in life is to call into question and contest everything. The problem with a quarrelsome person is at least twofold. First, those who are quarrelsome are not the kind of people that form good relationships! Who wants to be around someone who only wants to tell you that you are wrong? While there is a necessary place for correction in a relationship, the person who only wants to correct without encouraging and agreeing where possible is a true drag on any relationship.

Second, those who are quarrelsome tend to lose their voice over time. If you are constantly upset, outraged and contentious about all things then people tend to tune you out so that your voice amounts to nothing. If we are always offended and always disagreeable, there is no punch left for the moments where disagreement and resistance is necessary. Like the boy who cried wolf was largely impotent to warn the people of real danger, so the contentious Christian is rendered ineffective in contending for the faith because they are always contending for something!

The goal of the Christian life is not to be a jerk; the goal is to speak the truth... in love. This means that sometimes we are required to say the hard things, and in those circumstances we should. A preacher who never confronts the wicked and evil realities in the culture is not worth his salt and a Christian who is unwilling to speak up about issues that are biblically wrong are not faithful to the King. Nevertheless, there are other moments in which we simply can get along, and we should do that as well. Our desire should not be to fight for fighting's sake.

Sometimes the "issue" is merely one of preference. At other times, the request made to us by our superiors is not consistent with our sentiment, but it does not rise to the level of sin. In those instances, it is our job and responsibility to adhere to the instruction with the conviction that we proclaim the goodness of God by a life that is seasoned with grace and desirous of the good of our fellow man and, particularly, those who are in authority over us.

November 12

James 4:1

Some people might wonder how we balance yesterday's devotional text with other passages of the Bible which commend and even command us to be faithful in the battle. The question might go something like this, "Which is it? Am I supposed to put on the armor of God and stand against the forces of evil or am I supposed to avoid conflict?" This is a fair question and the answer, thankfully, is quite straightforward.

The simple truth is that we are to do both! We stand to fight against the powers of darkness, we are faithful to proclaim the hard truth and to resist any and every attempt to rebel against the Lord all the while avoiding endless quarrels. How do we accomplish this balance? I believe the answer is found, in part, in James 4:1. Notice here that James teaches us that the source of fights and quarrels amongst Christians are "passions" within us. The term "passions" here is meant to be understood as natural desires and the point then is that quarrelsome people are not biblically characterized as those at war with the devil but as those who are at war with anyone who doesn't accommodate their fleshly wants!

A quarrelsome person is one who will cause a stink over any number of issues not because the truth is at stake but because their own personal preferences or opinions are possibly overlooked. Faithful men and women stand for the truth of the Gospel and obedience to King Jesus. Quarrelsome people make an issue over any perceived slight or way of thinking that does not accommodate their own personal wants.

Additionally, quarrelsome people are those who are always looking for a fight. If you are hunting disagreement, you can surely find it! Conversely, those who are faithful to the Lord earnestly desire the good of all men through the grace of God which means they will stand to speak against those things that would harm others but they are not actively searching for a way to disagree with their contemporaries and the authorities at large.

David resisted Saul's attempts to take his life but he didn't actively look for ways to rebel. Daniel refused to eat unclean food in Babylon but he didn't make a show of his resistance. Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego would not bow down to the king but they did not needlessly insult him either. Peter refused to heed the council of the Sanhedrin when they forbid his speaking about Jesus but he didn't create a campaign to shame those in charge. In the same way, Christians must stand for truth but they also must seek and desire peace. Paul said that we are to be at peace with ALL men "if it is possible" (Romans 12:18), oftentimes it is more possible than some would like to admit!

November 13

Philippians 4:5 & James 3:17

The Scriptures were not initially written in the English language. This basic fact carries some very important implications for us as we seek to study the Bible. The simple truth is that our language is a more than adequate match for Hebrew and Greek (the original languages of the Old and New Testaments respectively) but there are times in which a word is much richer or at least fuller in the original language than it may be rendered in our translations.

I believe that we have one example of this in Titus 3:2. The term "gentle" is one that we often utilize in common conversations today. It typically means to be careful and tender with another. This idea is certainly in view here but I believe that the term has a more well-rounded meaning than simple meekness. Oftentimes, the way that we can see the full orbed meaning of a Greek word is to study the other passages in the New Testament that utilize the same word and see if the term is translated differently.

In our case today, we will find that this indeed is the case. Philippians 4:5 translates the same word rendered "gentle" as "reasonableness". We see the same concept alluded to in James 3 when the Bible instructs us that the gentle person is "open to reason".

The point here is best understood in contrast with the subject of our previous devotions. We are to avoid being quarrelsome and, instead, be open to "reason". Why? Well, the simple answer is that, sometimes, we simply don't know everything there is to know about the circumstance and, in light of the fact that we know we are finite creatures, we should always be open to the possibility that there is more to a situation that may change our opinion.

For instance, is it possible that a law has been changed or a policy has been altered for a good reason that you and I simply don't know? If so, then it is wise to seek to understand before we seek to resist! Obviously, there are times in which government policies are simply evil (take Amendments 1 and 2 which just passed as examples) but there are other times in which our governing authorities might make a controversial decision for reasons we do not know. What should our posture be in those circumstances? We should be gentle! This means that we should be reasonable and, therefore, we should seek to understand before we criticize.

As I close this devotion, I want to remind you who wrote these words. The Apostle Paul did plenty of standing up to governing authorities and he knew that fact about himself when he penned these words! Paul was not being a hypocrite when he resisted, he was walking in the truth in instances of resistance and submission. The difference in large part was the posture of his heart. Paul did not DESIRE to resist just to resist. He desired to see his governing authorities utilize their power in a way that honored the Lord and benefited the people. This desire prompted him to be gentle and to avoid quarrels and this should be our desire as well. Would you commit, before God, to being a person of the truth? Would you seek to understand and reason with others prior to flying off the handle? If so, I believe you are walking in the truth of this particular passage of Scripture.

November 14

1 Peter 3:9

Interestingly enough, Titus 3:2 utilizes a separate term that is often translated "gentleness" in other passages but it is rendered "courtesy" in Titus 3. The term means to be meek or concerned with others over self. Paul's goal was to exhort the Christians under Titus' watch to remain focused on loving neighbor and serving those who would consider themselves to be our enemies.

The Bible says quite a bit about how we should treat those who oppose us. What we are going to see in our final two devotions is that biblical instruction is intended both for the wellbeing of our enemies and also for their frustration! God is not blind to the fact that we have people who hate us and He prescribes a specific way of dealing with them so that He is honored and they are put back in their place.

Before we get to that point however, I want us to take a day to consider Peter's words regarding dealing with those who oppose us. Today's passage is extremely straightforward, we are to repay good with evil. Specifically, the verse mentions our response to "insults". I couldn't imagine a more pertinent topic in our world today! It seems that the world is awash in a constant exchange of barbs and biting words. You cannot turn on the television, computer or smart phone without observing some kind of conflict and yet Peter tells us that our response should not be to return fire in kind. This is hard! It feels so good to say what you want and to fight fire with fire but the result of such a tactic is a conflagration that is much larger and consumes more people!

Instead of exchanging hurtful words, Peter says we are called to extend blessing to those who persecute us. Now, this might sound a bit foolish and certainly the instruction does not appeal to the flesh! Why would we do such a thing? Well, the end of verse 9 tells us! We offer blessing to those who persecute us in order to gain a greater blessing from the Lord. stated differently, we offer blessing to realize something far more fulfilling and satisfying than insulting someone.

The Christian life is a life of faith. Specifically, it is a life of faith in what is unseen. This means, among other things, that we are called to believe and trust that God is going to deliver on promises that we have not perceived to this point. In the case of today's passage, the motivation to be courteous is grounded in a desire to enjoy blessings that the world knows not and this grounds and inspires us to be faithful in the moment with the future in mind.

Dear friend, we are courteous and gentle today because we have full confidence that God will make all things right in the near future. It is undoubtedly true that this is hard but, through the eyes of faith, we live in light of seeing the Lord face to face. On that day, He will provide us with an ultimate blessing that will make the fleeting fulfillment we might receive from insults pale in comparison to the beauty and fulfillment of the riches of our great King.

November 15

Romans 12:20-21

I can almost hear the objection to yesterday's devotion, "Pastor, are you saying that we should just let people walk all over us? Surely they can't just get away with insulting us! We have rights!" If you finished yesterday's devotion with a bit of angst in your spirit, I hope that today's passage will remind you that God's plan includes a response that will have an effect on our enemies in the moment even as we look forward to eternal riches.

If we were to be frank, the pursuit of exchanging insults with others is pretty unsatisfying in the end. I have rarely (if ever) walked away from a carnal "war of words" thankful that I participated! Typically, nobody is changed and, very rarely, does anyone feel as if they have won or put the other person in their place! The truth is that both people leave arguments bitter and unfulfilled. What should we do?

Well, Peter reminded us yesterday that we shouldn't return evil for evil but we should bless our enemies. This might sound like a simple surrender. If we refuse to return fire, aren't we guilty of being passivists? Again, where does the idea of a spiritual war come into play in such a scenario? The answer is that God has ordained that our kindness actually has an effect on our enemy. In fact, our kindness brings them more frustration than our anger.

The picture in Romans 12 is fascinating as Paul reminds us what the Word teaches elsewhere, namely that when we serve our enemies we are "heaping burning coals on their head". The picture is one of increased heat (pain) and frustration! There is nothing in the universe that causes more angst than a person who refuses to lower themselves to the level of their opponent. The thing that will actually cause your interlocutor the most angst is your kindness.

This means that our faithfulness to the word is not akin to a spiritual forfeit. We are not giving ground to the enemy with our love, we are actually utilizing a weapon that they know not and, therefore, it is a weapon that is incredibly effective.

Have you tried humble service and kindness lately? I know many Christians who are quite bitter because they are attempting to fight the Lord's battles with the world's weapons and it just isn't working. Christians are no different than the lost when we exchange angry emails or post inflammatory messages online. Conversely, when you and I choose to heap burning coals on the head of the world through gentleness and courteousness, we are fighting in a way that will ultimately prevail and we are doing so all the while rightly representing our Lord and Savior.

Folks, there are times when it is necessary for us to stand and proclaim "thus says the Lord". We must be bold in those moments but there are other times when we simply have to follow God even after the world has rejected our message. May we continue to accurately embody His kindness and grace even as we continue to demonstrate His Lordship. This combination of prophetic warning and gracious living is an effective weapon in the hands of the Lord. Some of us need to work on our conviction to stand while others need to ensure that we are standing for the truth without being needlessly quarrelsome and prideful. The balance between these two is crucial to find and, when we do, the Lord gains glory and we find joy.