



Lent Devotional Plan

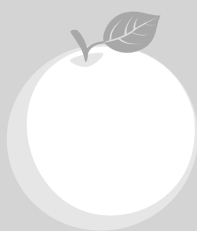
Adapted from Deron Spoo's
"The **Good** Book"

For Families

You will find a family specific devotional at the end of each booklet. Please choose whatever day and time to do them with your family (*over a meal, before they sleep, etc.*).



There is no specific day that each devotional corresponds with. **All devotionals have been tailored to be relevant for your children.**



week seven

Revelations 22

Romans 8

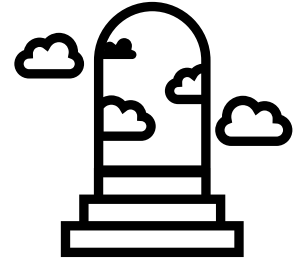
1 Corinthians 13

Galatians 5

James 1

1 John 3

35 | What Heaven Holds in Store



"And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." Revelation 22:7

Heaven. What comes to mind when you think about heaven? Where does your imagination take you? It's easy for us to think heaven will be the fulfillment of every dream or desire we may have on earth. In our passage, John gives us a glimpse of what heaven will look like. In doing so, we see both the mysteries and the majesties that await all of us who are saved.

Heaven has a river. The water of life, bright as crystal, flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb (v1). Deron Spoo makes the connection that water serves two primary purposes: drinking and bathing. Heaven will be a place where we can drink freely from the river of life and find eternal refreshment. It will fulfill the very thirst of our souls. Not only will it bring refreshment, but it will bring eternal cleansing. In heaven every sin, brokenness, will all be washed away.

Heaven has a street. All of us will walk through the streets of heaven. There will be nothing that separates us from one another. We will all live in complete unity and harmony. As we experience perfect communion with God, we will also experience perfect community with one another.

Heaven has a tree. In Genesis, the result of the fall is that we have all been banned from the tree of life. In heaven all of us will have complete access to the tree of life where we can experience the abundance and richness of God's love. It says from this tree we will experience true healing where the wounds of the past will no longer hurt us anymore.

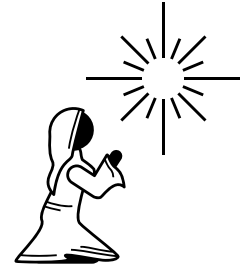
Heaven has a throne. If you notice, the throne is at the center of heaven itself. And upon the throne, God will dwell in heaven. This is the ultimate reward of heaven – we will experience his presence unhindered and uninterrupted. Heaven without Him would not be heaven at all. In fact some would define hell as the absence of God's presence for eternity.

The incredible truth is that we can experience a glimpse of heaven here on earth. Heaven gives us the proper perspective that everything we live for today is temporary. The good things in life will fade away, but also the painful things in life will come to an end. But more importantly, Jesus is coming back for us. For in heaven we will be with Him for eternity.

Reflection

A pastor once said that in the timeline of heaven, being eternity, our lives seem so short. Would you agree? If so, how would that change the way we live our lives here on earth?

36 | Is God Ever Mean?



"We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28

Romans 8 revolves around this one theme that God is bent on loving every person he ever created.

Romans 8:14 offers this promise: "All those led by God's Spirit are God's son." When we become children of God, the promise brings with it a promise: God will watch over us, leading us faithfully through the events and circumstances of this life. Because of our new status, we can have this assurance.

Romans 8:29: "Those [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." Two rich words from this verse deserve careful exploration: foreknew and predestined. Foreknew. The verb to know is often used as a euphemism in the Bible for intimacy—even sexual intimacy. If to know means "to love," then to foreknew translates to "fore-love." Before you existed, God had already made the decision to love you. The matter was settled. God sees no reason to reconsider this matter. Even in that time of your preexistence, you were preloved. Predestined. The prelove of God brings with it a benefit: he has granted you a predestiny. To become exactly like Jesus Christ.

Indeed, God isn't mean. His decision to love us and his desire to give us a destiny are clear evidence of his love for us.

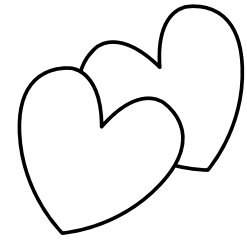
Perhaps one more passage from Romans will serve as proof of God's love for humanity. Consider the Himalaya Mountains. The Himalayas are the most majestic range of mountains found anywhere on our planet. Likewise, Romans 8 is one of the most beautiful depictions of God's love found anywhere in the Bible. If Romans 8 is the Himalayas, then verse 28 is Mount Everest. It's the high point of the high point. "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 28).

The best gifts of God are free. He offers us a place in his family. He gives us his guidance. He offers us a destiny to become like Jesus. And he guarantees that every event will result in our benefit. Paul said it best when he boldly proclaimed, "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39).

Reflection

As you read through Romans 8 again, what other evidence do you see that highlights the truth that God isn't mean? In what other ways does he show his love to you?

37 | More Than A Feeling



**"Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant, is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs."
1 Corinthians 13:4-5**

Every time the word love appears in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul reflexively uses agape love. Agape love isn't based on attraction or natural affection or family connection or even emotion. Stripped of all selfishness, agape is the highest and purest form of love.

Genuine love isn't something complicated or sophisticated. Love, in fact, is quite simple.

Love is learning to say and mean certain words. If love is patient, then we learn to say, "I can wait, you go first." If love is kind, we teach ourselves to confess to others, "I'm sorry. I was wrong." If love knows no boasting or pride, then we strike the words "I told you so" from our vocabularies. If love isn't easily angered, then we develop the discipline to say nothing at all when we most want to retaliate.

Love is learning to say good things and mean them; love is also learning when to choose silence.

Love "does not keep a record of wrongs." If love keeps no record of wrongs, then it stands to reason that love likewise keeps no records of rights. Love doesn't keep a running tally of favors or sacrifices made for the purpose of holding another person in our permanent debt. To keep a record of all the rights we've done for someone else, only to use it later as a tool of manipulation or guilt, is far from agape love.

It's a helpful tool in Bible reading to notice repeated words and phrases. Typically these repetitions signal a main point in a particular passage. The NIV translation of 1 Corinthians 13:7 uses the word always four times: "always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." True love is on stranger to endurance. Love is sacrificial in its protection, optimistic in its trust, positive in its hope, and unflinching in its resolve. Far beyond mere emotion, love is a decision to will and work for someone's best interests—always.

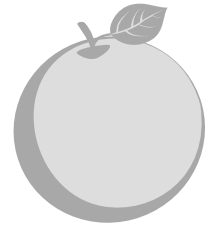
This is agape love: to will and work for someone's best interest. Great, strong, and deep indeed.

Reflection

Reread 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Each time you encounter the word love, substitute the name of Jesus. Jesus is the perfect expression of God's love for humanity. Now reread these same verses, substituting your name for the word love. How does it sound? Is it true? Where do you need to allow Christ to help you improve in your practice of love for others?

adapted from Deron Spoo's "The Good Book"

38 | Can God Change Your Character?



"...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control..." Galatians 5:22-23

Galatians is the angry letter of the New Testament. The apostle Paul, its author, was a passionate follower of Jesus and a bold leader in the early Christian community. Paul's teaching about the love of God was simple and direct. Paul used the word grace to describe God's act of initiating a relationship with humanity. And the term faith was used to describe our best reaction to the love of God. God reaches. We respond. The result is relationship.

God wants to produce something in your life. He's looking for fruit. You may attend church, join a community of people learning to follow Jesus, and even engage in service that improves the lives of others. All these activities are good and nice. Yet they're not the results God is looking for in a Christ follower's life. God wants to produce something more internal and external.

Galatians 5 details the character change the Holy Spirit will produce in the life of a Jesus follower when given permission: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." These nine character traits are the fruit of the Spirit.

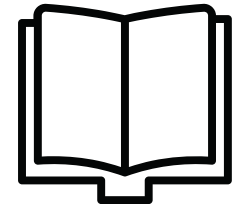
Spiritual gifts must not be confused with spiritual fruit. We aren't expected to have all the gifts of the Spirit. Yet a follower of Jesus is expected to have all the fruit of the Spirit—no exceptions. Followers of Jesus can never say that God doesn't expect them to have love or joy or kindness.

The Holy Spirit is the only one who can instill self-control as a permanent part of our character. The same holds true for every fruit of the Spirit. And this may be the best insight of all. We can't produce any fruit by our own decision or will. That's why these character traits are known as the fruit of the Spirit. God's Spirit is the source and sustenance of any lasting change in our personalities as we follow the person of Jesus

Reflection

Are you still growing? Reread the characteristics that the Holy Spirit wants to produce in your life. Are you seeing more of these traits with each passing year? In each area of your relationships with God, others, and yourself, are you continuing the ascent? There is no letting up. There is no relaxing. There is no relenting. We provide the willingness, and the Spirit provides the results of a changed character.

39 | Straight Talk



"But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer who works—this person will be blessed in what he does"

James 1:25

James is a short letter of only 5 chapters but comes rich with wisdom. It is a more intimate letter as it tracks his stream of consciousness flowing from point to point as if speaking to a loved one, rather than following the formal format of something like a school paper. James letter has been described as blunt and bold. It is here that he shares his truth in love.

James was the son of Mary and Joseph making him Jesus' half brother. Yet in his introduction in verse 1, he calls himself "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." James could have easily used his biological connection to identify himself with Jesus, but instead, he calls himself Jesus' servant. He saw this relationship as the more significant connection to Jesus.

James' letter is broken into two major topics: suffering and wisdom. We seem to have an abundance of one while always seem to lack the latter.

James takes the time to put our suffering in perspective. Usually in our suffering, people will tell us what we want to hear, but James tells us what we need to hear. That God is using our suffering to develop us spiritually so that we may be "mature and complete and lack nothing." This leads us to ask for what God wants us to get out of our period of suffering rather than asking for Him to get us out of our suffering. Through this experience, we gain wisdom that helps us to grow in spiritual maturity.

Wisdom always seems to be lacking when we need it most. It takes time and a lot of experience to develop and still we may not feel fully equipped. But don't be afraid, for in verses 5 and 6, we can ask God, who gives generously and without grudge. All we have to do is ask. Knowing this, in our moments where we feel we lack wisdom, all we have to do is ask and He will provide in His divine ways. So let us not be afraid but be at peace that He is on our side.

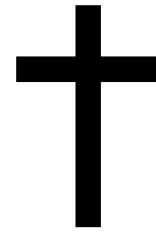
James goes on to list many other practical topics. Towards the end, James highlights the value of Scripture. First is Scripture challenges us to listen. Many people are great at talking, but how many are great listeners? The second is that we are not only to hear, or read, Scripture, but we must also follow what it says. Jesus has many challenging commands in the Bible. Once we hear them, we are to put them into practice. Once we are able to follow through on what we hear, we "will be blessed in what he does" (v25).

Reflection

If you are suffering, pray v4 over yourself. "And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing." Take heart knowing that God is in our suffering.

adapted from Deron Spoo's "The Good Book"

40 | Becoming Your True Self



"Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he appears, we will be like him because we will see him as he is." 1 John 3:2

John was the youngest of Jesus' twelve disciples, supposedly just a teenager. He wrote his trilogy of letters, much after Jesus' earthly life, when he was an old man. John writes of God's great love (v1) for us as a promise of God.

In verse 2, we see God's promise broken down: He will appear, we will see Him, and we will be like Him. We know that Jesus was lifted into heaven at the Ascension. We also know He came back down in the form of the Holy Spirit. Yet His second coming is to be determined. For some it may seem like a scary time after reading Revelations. But we know that when we look upon Jesus' face when we see Him return, we will be reassured that everything is good in His hands. And once He comes again, we will be fully cleansed, purified, "just as he is pure" (v3). We will finally be free and complete in His presence and God will rejoice seeing us, His children, becoming exactly like His Son. Until then, we continue to become more and more in Christ's likeness.

When John talks of Jesus' arrival, it seems to deal with sin in our lives (v5 and v8-9). From this we see that Jesus takes sin very seriously. The question is, "do we take sin seriously enough?" We must be very intentional in removing sin from our lives. On the other side of this, we have guilt. It is all too often that we find ourselves holding onto our guilt too tightly, so much so that we can't let go and repent, heal, and be freed. But guilt isn't a bad thing. It is actually a gift of God. It helps us sense when we are in the wrong and that we need to change our ways. We need to repent in order to deal with the guilt and not let it linger.

Once sin is dealt with, and we have repented of it, we may let it go. We see that we can have confidence in God, if our hearts don't condemn us (v21). We see this very evidently that God did not send Jesus to condemn the world in John's gospel chapter 3 verse 16 "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." Let us take confidence in v20, that even when our heart condemns us, that God is greater. Come and bring your guilt before the Lord so that we can come to repent and be clean. That is how we grow in becoming more like Christ. That is how we find our true selves.

Reflection

What are some long-standing guilts that you hold onto today? Have you repented of them? If so, do you still hold onto this feeling of guilt, why? Share these guilty feelings with God, and let His grace wash over you, allowing you to be set free. "This is how we will know that we belong to the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows all things." (v19-20) Surrender these things to Him for he already knows them and conquered them through Jesus' resurrection.

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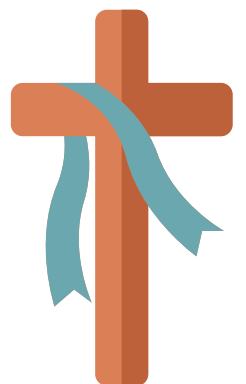
1 Corinthians 13

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.





The Greatest Love

In today's bible passage, we are reminded of what Godly love looks like. For some of us, we may think love looks like our parent's marriage or even a Disney movie! There are many things in this world that try to tell us what love is **but what is true love from God like?**

When we turn our Bible to 1 Corinthians 13, we learn that love is patient and kind. This kind of patience and kindness clearly doesn't come from us. It can only come from God who helps us to love in this way. Jesus is the perfect example of this kind of love. He has always been patient and kind to us. Even though we make mistakes and sin against Him, Jesus still chose to die on the cross for us. And the reason is quite simple, Jesus loves us so much.

Just as Jesus shows His patience and kindness to us,
let's share His love with those around us.
Remember, you don't have to do it alone!

Ask God to help you and to have His love overflow from your heart to others.

Reflection/Prayer

1. How would you describe love?

2. What does God say about love in 1 Corinthians 13?

3. Who is God calling you to love? Share with your family.

Prayer: "Dear God, Thank you for dying on the cross for our sins and for displaying what kindness and

patience look like. Jesus, can you help me to display your love in my life by how I love others?"