

Devotionals for the Week of December 25, 2022

Our devotional section provides additional spiritual input for helping you go further and deeper in your journey with the Lord. It is our desire, our hope, and our prayer that this devotional section will be a helpful Spiritual Life tool for you to utilize on a regular basis. Each day's devotional will typically consist of Scripture, commentary, and a prayer response. Current Devotionals can be accessed each day online at www.capecodchurch.com/daily or by using the Cape Cod Church App. Be sure to check Saturday and Sundays for special postings of poems, stories, etc. Printed copies from the prior week are available at the Connection Desk.

Monday – Making Our Time Count – Choosing to Spend it on God

Don't be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant. Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit. So, let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up. Galatians 6:7-9

Today's thoughts from today's verses:

We are quickly coming to end of the time we were given for 2022 and we are fast approaching the start of the time we are being given for 2023. This week's devotional set is not a part of a series. It stands alone. It is hoped that it will help you wrap up this year and enter into the coming year in the best way possible.

Life is all about time. How easily our use of time gets out of hand. Our use of time could likely stand some improvement in the new year that lies before us. We all have a lifetime in which to live our lives. Each of us must ask the question, "what will I do with the time I have before me for living my life?" God wants our lives to count. It is for this reason he gives us his word and comes to us in it. He knows that on our own we will not use the time we have for living our lives in ways that count for eternity. So, he comes to us with his word both to rescue us from the plight of wasting our lives while we are here and to produce, in us and through us, a life that really does count for eternity.

Today's Scripture contrasts those who live to satisfy themselves with those who live to satisfy God. How we use our time will determine that harvest our lives produce. The outcome of using the time we have for satisfying ourselves is not a good one. The outcome of using the time we have for satisfying God is a good one. Whose time is it, anyway? Truly, it is God's time and we must spend it on him. "So, let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up."

Today's prayer response from today's thoughts:

Lord, I want a good outcome for my life, and I know that good outcomes come from you. So, I surrender the time I have for living my life to you. I know this is the key to making all my moments count and to having the final outcome be a life that counts for all eternity. I love you, I worship you, and I rest in you. Amen!

Tuesday – Making Our Time Count – Understanding What God Wants

So be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. Don't act thoughtlessly but understand what the Lord wants you to do. Ephesians 5:15-17

Today's thoughts from today's verses:

This week we are considering the "use of time" in regard to changes we can make as we transition from 2022 to 2023. Yesterday, we addressed the necessity of committing ourselves to a lifetime of using our time to live to satisfy God and not to satisfy ourselves. If you ask, "am I truly willing to pursue God's will for my entire lifetime?" and the answer is "yes," there is hope for making all your moments count for eternity. But there is something more that is needed. In addition to "wanting" what God wants, we must "know" what God wants.

Today's Scripture clearly speaks to this need and how it can be met. Let's work our way backwards through the passage. The need is stated with these words, "understand what the Lord wants you to do." If we just coast along, we will be in trouble. This is why the passage says, "don't act thoughtlessly." We must constantly give careful consideration to what we will do and what we won't do. Why? It is the same today as it was back then, we need to "make the most of every opportunity in these evil days." We always have the tension between the draw of the world towards evil and that which God wants.

Our moments are filled with this tension and herein lies the opportunity we have to look to God and his word for what he wants in each moment we face. If we respond properly to these opportunities, we will be heeding the admonitions, "don't live like fools, but like those who are wise" and "be careful how you live." Remember, that God is always present with you in the middle of all your moments. He is there with you, ready and waiting for you to look to him and the good word he has for you regarding what he wants for that moment in your life. This is how wanting his will and knowing his will go together so that evil is overcome, and we live out our commitment to live lives that satisfy God and not ourselves.

Today's prayer response from today's thoughts:

Lord, I want 2023 to be the start of a lifetime of living for your satisfaction and not my own. Please teach me how to seek you and your word in each moment I face so that I know what you want in that moment, and I do what you want in that moment. Help me to keep seeking you, depending on you, and living fully for you. Amen!

Wednesday – Making Our Time Count – Pursuing a Kingdom Lifestyle

So, don't worry about these things, saying, "What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?" These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today. Matthew 6:31-34

Today's thoughts from today's verses:

So, what are you actually thinking about in regard to making changes in your "use of time" in 2023? Have you ever committed yourself to a lifetime of using your time to live to satisfy God and not yourself? How has that been going for you? Have you ever embraced the challenging pursuit of discovering what God wants in each moment you face. How has that been going for you? We are talking about a lifestyle here. Today's Scripture depicts this same lifestyle through a consideration of our relationship with the "kingdom of God."

Think of it this way: God is the King, and we are members of his kingdom because we have put our faith in Christ for forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation. As members of God's kingdom, we have an intimate love relationship with God our King. Through this relationship he is transforming us into people who live like kingdom members (Christlike) and do not live like those who are not kingdom members. Kingdom members help each other in the following ways: becoming good at having and maintaining an intimate relationship with the king; sticking at the process of being transformed into Christ-like kingdom members; and blessing those outside the kingdom in ways that help them enter into the kingdom as well.

Having a lifestyle where we make the "kingdom" our top priority is the key to "using our time" in ways that count for eternity. It doesn't mean that we have a total disregard for the basic human needs of life and the "use of time" associated with them. It just means that our priorities have been put in order, our trust is in God, and we are learning to manage well the tension of seeking to live life as a member of God's kingdom in the middle of all the things associated with living life here on earth.

Today's prayer response from today's thoughts:

Lord, your kingdom come, you will be done in my life here on earth. Give me this day my daily bread and deliver me from overdoing it with the time and concern I invest in such things. Lord, truly yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen!

Thursday – Making Our Time Count – Partnering with Fellow Kingdom Members

Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end. Hebrews 3:12-14 (NASB)

Today's thoughts from today's verses:

In our quest to make good improvements in our lives for 2023, we have been tackling a very important matter this week: our "use of time." Yesterday, our focus was on managing well the tension of seeking to live life as a member of God's kingdom in the middle of all the things associated with living life here on earth. We saw that making the "kingdom" our top priority is the key to "using our time" in ways that count for eternity. But we also saw that this doesn't mean we have a total disregard for the basic human needs of life and the "use of time" associated with them. It just means that kingdom members must be very careful about not overdoing it with the time and concern they invest in such things.

We introduced today's focus yesterday when we talked about the help that comes from fellow kingdom members to support us in our pursuit of living our lives with God's kingdom as our top priority. We said that kingdom members help each other in the following ways: becoming good at having and maintaining an intimate relationship with the king; sticking at the process of being transformed into Christ-like kingdom members; and blessing those outside the kingdom in ways that help them enter into the kingdom as well.

Today's Scripture is a great follow up to this statement. This passage is essentially a mandate to the members of God's kingdom collectively to succeed at being a support system that helps everyone individually succeed at putting God's kingdom and righteousness first. The passage speaks for itself. Go back over it carefully and you will see the following: the mandate - "take care, brethren (the church)"; the problem - "an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God"; the solution - "encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today'"; and the goal - "we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end."

Staying close to God is the key to succeeding at everything that goes with being a good kingdom member and staying close to fellow kingdom members (small groups) is the key to staying close

to God (assuming the kingdom members you associate with are seeking to stay close to God as well). The good "use of time" really is all about the "priorities" and "partners" we choose for ourselves throughout our lives. The more we follow the pattern of the kingdom we have been considering and the less we follow the pattern of the world in regard to the time and concern we invest in the basic human needs of life, the more we will be able to live for the kingdom during our time here on earth.

Today's prayer response from today's thoughts:

Lord, I choose to put you and your kingdom above all else. Continue to teach me how to get close to you and stay there. Provide that circle of fellow kingdom members that will provide the support I need for staying on track with you. Teach me more fully how to support others in ways that really count for the kingdom. Help me bless the lives of those outside the kingdom in ways that help them enter into the kingdom as well. Lord, thank you for your amazing plan and your commitment to seeing it come about in my life. Amen!

Friday – Making Our Time Count – Growing up together in Christ

But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. Ephesians 4:15-16 (NASB)

Today's thoughts from today's verses:

Let's begin today considering the word "into." When someone is "into" something, it means that they have a very strong connection with that thing and have devoted themselves to it. This devotion will consume their time, energy, and affection. If it does not, then they are really not "into" it. Perhaps, it would be reasonable to say, if there is not a considerable consumption of our time, energy, and affection in our relationship with Christ, we are not really "into" him. Notice the use of the word "into" in today's Scripture: "we are to grow up in all aspects "into" Him who is the head, even Christ."

It is not exactly the use of "into" we have been talking about, but with a minor play on words we come out with something like this: Unless we are "into" Christ, we cannot expect "to grow up in all aspects 'into' Him." Here we are facing the issue of "priorities" again. Yesterday's passage said this: "we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end." Partaking (tomorrow, we will take a closer look at what "partaking" means) of Christ is the key to our growing up in all aspects "into" him. Notice the time frame: from the "beginning" when we first put our faith in Christ until the very "end" when we are done with our lives here on earth.

So, the one who is truly "into" Christ is the one who has made him the top priority in their life. The one who has this kind of devotion to Christ will allow their time, energy, and affection to be consumed in "partaking of Christ" and "growing up in all aspects into him. Today's Scripture wonderfully connects the "priority" of Christ with "partners" in Christ. Partnering with other believers who provide a "support system" for us is vital. Our passage, however, takes it way beyond the idea of a "support system" when it spells out the connection God has in mind for us as "partners" in Christ.

When Christ is our top priority and we are seeking to partake of him and grow up "into" him, it is a very personal and spiritual experience. However, it is not an entirely private matter. There is also a kind of "partaking" and "growing up" into Christ that we do in conjunction with others. Notice that our passage speaks of Christ as "the head." Christ is our "head" individually and collectively. Together, we are the body of Christ, and it is his presence and work in our "midst" that makes all the difference for his body.

Notice in our passage the two words that link Christ with his body: "from whom." Everything that follows these two words in the passage comes from Christ: "from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." The body of Christ as described here is a Divine arrangement that is deeply spiritual and is so much more than mere collective organizational ministry.

Every one of us needs a circle of fellow believers who share the priority we have of "partaking of Christ" and "growing up in all aspects into him." Together as partners in Christ, when you welcome him together into your "midst" to provide to you, his body, all the passage says can come from him, Christ and his provision will come to your circle of support. This is the truth spoken in love and it is God's game plan for his church here on earth. What a glorious privilege and blessing it is to be a part of it.

Today's prayer response from today's thoughts:

Lord, I am so thankful to be on your team and to be a part of your game plan. Continue to help me be "into" you fully and completely. Teach me more of what the "body of Christ" is all about and oversee my partnering relationships with others so that they become all they can be. I bow before you in worship and I praise you for all that you are doing in my life today. Amen!

Saturday – Making Our Time Count – Wearing the Yoke of Christ

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. Matthew 11:28-30 (NASB)

Today's thoughts from today's verses:

We have been talking about the "use of time" this week in our quest to make good improvements in our lives for 2023. We discovered that establishing priorities and finding helpful partners is essential. Rather than looking at "priorities" and "partners" in general terms for managing the use of time in our everyday lives, we have looked at them from the spiritual side and the use of our time for that which counts for eternity. Like the world, we overdo it with the time and concern we invest in the basic human needs of life and the "use of time" associated with them. Consequently, we allow the spiritual side and that which counts for eternity to get squeezed out of the equation.

Today's passage continues with this spiritual side, and it begins with an invitation from Christ. He simply says to us, "Come to me." Jesus knows the toll that is taken on the life of a person who gets it all wrong in terms of priorities and partners. People everywhere are weary and heavy-laden and desperately in need of rest. It is to the weary and heavy-laden that Jesus extends the invitation to come and find rest in him. When we respond to his invitation and come to him, we come into his presence. It is in his presence that he begins the process of bringing us to a place of rest.

It begins with accepting and taking upon ourselves his yoke (my yoke is easy, and my burden is light). This means that we place ourselves under his authority and control. This makes it possible for us to learn from him. He shows us his gentle and humble heart and we are changed forever. Being in his presence and truly experiencing him, is what "partaking" of Christ (Thursday) is all about. The more we partake of Christ day in and day out, the more we grow up in all aspects into Him (Friday). This is how rest for our souls comes about. This is how our lives become transformed into a "come to me" lifestyle where we rest in Christ, and he becomes the one who lives his life in us and through us.

Today's prayer response from today's thoughts:

Lord, I come to you with all my weariness and all that has made me into a heavy-laden person. Release me from this yoke and grant me rest. I willing take your yoke upon myself. Show me yourself and help me learn from you. Teach me how to be in your presence and to experience you in the fullness of who you are. Lead me into a lifestyle of coming to you so that my life is your doing and I truly become one who finds ongoing rest for my soul. Amen!