



Summer Lovin' Devotions

Week One

June 11-17, 2017



Playground Fun

As you begin each day: Take some deep breaths and acknowledge that you are in God's presence. As you read, pay attention not just with your mind, but also with your heart. Are there words or phrases that stick out to you? If yes, take time to consider them. Carry the words with you throughout the day and let God continue to work with you on what has been brought to your attention. If you get distracted as you read, that is okay. Use the distractions as a reminder to thank God for those happy distractions and as a reminder to give to God those troubling distractions.

All scripture is from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Day 1: Red Rover—Maintain the Strength of the Chain

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.... We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love. -Ephesians 4:1-5,14-16

In Red Rover, a single child runs a short distance toward a chain of children holding hands. The goal of the child is to break through the chain, but the goal of the chain is to maintain strength. If the chain holds, the child who ran joins the chain. As members of the body of Christ, we are called to maintain strength through unity that comes from God. Together, all who believe in Jesus Christ form the body of Christ. We are different in many ways having varieties of gifts, opinions, practices, personalities, and passions, but we are called to peace and unity in the Spirit of Christ. There is only ONE body. That's the way it is. It's not optional. Look at the words used in Ephesians 4 to describe the maintenance of unity: humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with, love, effort. Those are challenging words. How are you doing? "Christian Conferencing" is the term used in Methodism to describe the act of choosing to listen to others and in doing so, to experience more of the fullness of God. Most recently the term has come to mean "listening to someone who disagrees with you about something controversial" but that definition cuts the meaning short. More broadly, "Christian Conferencing" is about spurring one another on, growing in holiness together, bearing burdens together, and watching over one another in love. In essence, it's maintaining the strength of our chain. Perhaps then, by God's grace, when forces attempt to break the chain, such strength and love will

be found that the body grows instead of dividing. Who do you watch over in love? Who watches over you?

Prayer: Unifying God, in whom we live, we confess that we often forget the reality that we are one body and you are the head. How do you want us to live in peace? Show us the way. Give us ears, minds, and hearts to listen. Give us mouths to speak in love. Let us live in the holy way you have shown. Amen.

Note: If you'd like to read more about the Wesleyan tradition called Christian Conferencing, read one or both of these articles: <http://www.interpretermagazine.org/topics/means-of-grace-christian-conferencing> and <https://vitalpiety.com/2013/07/18/holy-conferencing-what-did-wesley-mean-part-2/>

Day 2: Four Square—Give it Time

I'm so grateful to Christ Jesus for making me adequate to do this work. He went out on a limb, you know, in trusting me with this ministry. The only credentials I brought to it were invective and witch hunts and arrogance. But I was treated mercifully because I didn't know what I was doing—didn't know Who I was doing it against! Grace mixed with faith and love poured over me and into me. And all because of Jesus. Here's a word you can take to heart and depend on: Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. I'm proof—Public Sinner Number One—of someone who could never have made it apart from sheer mercy. -1 Timothy 1:12-16, The Message

One of the benefits of Four Square on the playground is that most children can play. The object of the game is to eliminate players in higher squares so that you can advance to the highest square yourself. A ball is bounced between players in squares until someone makes an error and is eliminated. Eliminated players leave the court, all players advance to fill the empty squares. It moves pretty quickly with children rotating in and out so everyone gets multiple turns. Kids with good hand-eye coordination are at an advantage, yet given time those who are out get in and those who are in get out. It's a reminder to all of us, that given time we are going to get it wrong. We will make errors. We will choose the wrong thing, and like Four Square, it doesn't take much time. Thankfully,

Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, ones just like me, ones just like you. As Paul says to Timothy, we are each “proof of someone who could never have made it apart from sheer mercy.” Thanks be to God. Holiness is a gift and a response. We don’t achieve it on our own; it is God’s gift to us. We can choose to live in holiness, meaning we offer ourselves to service with Christ, who makes us “adequate to do this work”. How will you give thanks for mercy today? How will you offer yourself?

Prayer: Holy God, We confess we need your mercy. There is no goodness apart from you. Forgive our sin; put the desire to live for you in our hearts and nourish us for holy living this day. Amen.

Day 3: Jump Rope—Bubble Gum, Bubble Gum, In a Dish, How Many Pieces Do You Wish?

The rabble among them had a strong craving; and the Israelites also wept again, and said, “If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.” ... The Lord said to Moses ... say to the people: Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wailed in the hearing of the Lord, saying, ‘If only we had meat to eat! Surely it was better for us in Egypt.’ Therefore the Lord will give you meat, and you shall eat. You shall eat not only one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, but for a whole month—until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you—because you have rejected the Lord who is among you, and have wailed before him, saying, ‘Why did we ever leave Egypt?’” -Numbers 11:4-6,18-20

Why is it that contentment is so difficult for humans? Wanting something different than what we have is so common. It’s everywhere: look in scripture, look at those around you, look at the news, look in your own heart. The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt and were freed by God’s action and yet began complaining because God was not a good enough cook! It’s no wonder God was angry - they were rejecting salvation for some cucumbers! So, God gave them what they wanted and it was enough to make them sick. They should have been

content. Many New Testament letters include instruction to be content: *There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment* (1 Timothy 6:6), *Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you"* (Hebrews 13:5), *Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong* (2 Corinthians 12:10). The key to contentment isn't what you have, it is who you have. You have Christ. In which areas of your life are you most apt to complain? Why? In what ways are you content?

Prayer: Generous One, Thank you for what you provide. We give thanks that you promise to never leave us, no matter our circumstances. Help us to contemplate the ways in which our richness contributes to the poverty of others and respond as you lead us. Especially empower us to share our greatest treasures: love and faith in you. Amen.

Day 4: Touch Football—Stick to the Basics

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

-Matthew 22:34-40

It's been said that touch football is best when you stick to two basic plays: "Everybody Go Deep" and "Everybody Go Out". And yet, there is usually at least one player in the game who is convinced that an elaborately drawn play will work better. And the play might work, but with amateurs who mostly play to have a good time, it's likely most will forget the play right after it's drawn up. There is wisdom in sticking to the basics. What are the basics of our faith? Jesus summarized all of the law and the prophets, that is, Jesus summarized much of what is written in our Old Testament, by saying two basic things: Love God and Love People. While love is basic and

everyone can get started, love is not simple. It has layers of complexity, allowing for a lifetime of growth. What can loving God look like for you today? Tomorrow? Next month? What does loving your neighbor as yourself look like today? Tomorrow? Next month? And, how can love for yourself increase?

Prayer: Good Teacher, thank you for the many ways you help us grow in love. Today, show us a way to love you and love someone else. May we grow in love, guided by the example of Christ and empowered by the Spirit.

Day 5: Monkey Bars– Determination and Blisters

Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away. As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance. -Luke 8:11-15

If you want a lesson in endurance and determination, watch a child working to get across a set of monkey bars. When they're beginning, children often work for days or weeks to be able to go all the way across. It's amazing! In Luke 8 Jesus tells the parable of the sower who scattered seed all over but only the seed in the good soil produced a harvest. Jesus further explains that the good soil represents people who "hear the word and hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance". Good soil is the heart that sticks with it. The heart that is honest and patient. Like the child on the monkey bars, good soil is the heart that keeps on working with the Word even when it is difficult. Often endurance on the monkey bars causes blisters. Blisters end up making the skin tougher but they're painful! We will be

exposed to spiritual blisters too, those things that don't make sense, like pain even when we obey. Practicing patient endurance with our faith isn't always easy or safe. But, we are well cared for. Just like a parent who treats the blisters, God takes care of us. Psalm 147:3,10-11 says, *God heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds... His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner; but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.* The Lord takes pleasure in seeing us learn to hope in the steadfast love of God. Like a child who made it across the monkey bars for the first time, may we take joy and delight in the accomplishments of faith achieved through God's grace. If God is pleased, we should be too. How have you grown in faith? How have you hoped in God's steadfast love? How have you endured? Spend some moments celebrating your accomplishments through faith.

Prayer: God of Steadfast Love, Thank you for your enduring grace to us! You are faithful. With delight we give you glory for the fruit you have produced in us. Continue to care for us as we grow through pain. By your grace, may our faith continue deeply rooted, branching out, and bearing fruit for your glory. Amen.

Day 6: Listen for the Whistle—Come when you're called

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. The Lord called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So

Samuel went and lay down in his place. Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

-1 Samuel 3:1-10

If you want a sure way to lose future recess time, keep playing when the teacher blows the whistle calling you to line up. When you hear the whistle, you line up to go inside. Obedience is a basic expectation. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are to listen and obey too. We are to come when we are called. It is a basic expectation that we are taught. Young Samuel learned to hear and obey God's voice and was used by God as a great prophet to Israel. On God's behalf Samuel anointed both King Saul and King David. Beyond that, he also spoke God's word to the Israelites and instructed them based on what he had learned. During one of the times King Saul was being rebellious, Samuel told him, *"Does the Lord want entirely burned offerings and sacrifices as much as obedience to the Lord? Listen to this: obeying is better than sacrificing, paying attention is better than fat from rams, because rebellion is as bad as the sin of divination; arrogance is like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected what the Lord said, he has rejected you as king."* (1 Samuel 15:22-23). It is wise for us to remember to listen to what God is saying: read Scripture, pray, pay attention in worship, talk to those in your small group or to other believers, be quiet and wait on God's voice. And when we hear what God wants us to do, we need to obey. It's an expectation. How can you listen to God today? What do you already know God is saying to you? How can you obey?

Prayer: Present and Speaking God, we give thanks that you are among us and speak to us through your word and your people, our circumstances and our experiences, and through your still small voice. Help us listen and obey, even when we think we would rather not. Amen.