

Summer Lovin' Devotions

Week Six

July 16-22, 2017



Summer Projects

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: Just Do It! - Get a Firm Foundation

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall! - Matthew 7:24-27

We all have been given gifts. Some of the gifts help us discern the best course of action. When the foolish person built a house on the sand, they should not have been surprised when the wind swept it away. So, too, the wise person who knew to build on rock was not surprised to have the house weather the storm.

God allows each of us to be good at something. These are our talents. When we take our talents and use them to serve God's kingdom/ God's people, these talents become gifts. The trouble is, so many choose NOT to use talents for God. God calls us to JUST DO IT! (Not Michael Jordan and Nike, but do it...use your gifts for God.)

If you can sing or play music, are you blessing the congregation in worship or the people at the nursing home? If you are good at building, are you helping a neighbor with home repairs or serving at a Habitat for Humanity build? If you are good with money, do you provide financial help for those at the food pantry who are struggling financially? If you are good at administration, are you helping with office tasks at the church or school?

Do not just be a hearer of God's Word- be a doer. What is your foundation? What are your talents? What are you doing to make them gifts for God?

Prayer: God of Love, we thank You for giving me talents. Help me to use my talents as gifts that serve You and the people You love. Amen.

Day 2: Refinishing furniture - God's tabernacle

You shall make bars of acacia wood, five for the frames of the one side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the frames of the other side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the frames of the side of the tabernacle at the rear westward. The middle bar, halfway up the frames, shall pass through from end to end. You shall overlay the frames with gold, and shall make their rings of gold to hold the bars; and you shall overlay the

bars with gold. Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to the plan for it that you were shown on the mountain. -Exodus 26:26-30

Today's scripture is just a tiny portion of the instructions for the construction of the tabernacle recorded in the book of Exodus in the Old Testament. The tabernacle can be thought of as God's beautiful tent, the place where God would dwell while the Israelites lived as nomads. It was where God would meet with the people; where God's presence would dwell. God took great care to give very specific instructions for its construction.

Summer is a great time to tackle a project like refinishing furniture. It takes a lot of effort to complete such a project. There are steps to remove the old finish, repair broken pieces, clean up the hardware, apply new finish, etc. Instruction guides for projects like these can be rather tedious, but the end result is always beautiful. Refinishing projects hold a lot of meaning to us because they're often heirloom pieces and even if not, we feel a connection to the piece's past, and to the beauty and usefulness it will have into the future.

The tabernacle was constructed as a place for God to dwell. It was later replaced by the temple that Solomon built (see 1 Kings), and now it is replaced by us, *"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)*. If God cared enough about a fancy tent to take the time to give specific instructions for its construction, we can be assured that God also cares enough about us to give us instructions.

Wesleyan doctrine, including United Methodist, visualizes the way we understand God's instruction through a quadrilateral. We value Holy Scripture first, then Christian tradition, human experience, and reason. Together, these four elements are used by God to build a beautiful dwelling within us all.

How do you best hear and understand God's instructions? How do you know that God's Spirit dwells in you?

Prayer: Living and Present God, thank you for caring enough to give us instructions to guide our lives together. Continue to form us into your beautiful dwelling place. Amen.

Day 3: Deep cleaning - Hope in judgement

Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded [bad] grapes.... And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting; he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!...Ah, you who rise early in the morning in pursuit of strong drink, who linger in the evening to be inflamed by wine, whose feasts consist of lyre and harp, tambourine and flute and wine, but who do not regard the deeds of the Lord, or see the work of his hands! Therefore my people go into exile without knowledge; their nobles are dying of hunger, and their multitude is parched with thirst. People are bowed down, everyone is brought low, and the eyes of the haughty are humbled. But the Lord of hosts is exalted by justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy by righteousness. Then the lambs shall graze as in their pasture, fatlings and kids shall feed among the ruins.

- Isaiah 5:1-2, 5-7, 15-17

Many people spend time during the summer doing deep cleaning. Maybe it's deep cleaning the house, the garage, the garden, or the car. For most people, these jobs aren't particularly fun. Sometimes it's even dreaded, but it's a job that needs to be done.

Isaiah 5 is a laundry list of the sins committed by the Israelites. The prophet Isaiah is explaining that as a result of this repeated, unrepentant, blatant sin including selfishness, gluttony, redefining good and evil, taking advantage of the poor, and much more, God would be allowing them to go into exile. Exile wouldn't be particularly fun. It would be dreaded, but it was something that needed to be done to serve justice.

God uses the bad behavior of the "beloved vineyard" to show justice and mercy to those who were being abused. God uses this story to remind us to avoid these same systemic and generational sins.

And God uses it to bring hope: *“the lambs shall graze as in their pasture, fatlings and kids shall feed among the ruins.” Even in the ruins, God provides for the young, for the new generation.*

What do you see as systemic or generational sins of our time? Where do you see hope? How is God calling you to change your behavior and to influence change in others?

Prayer: Holy God, thank you for being just, even when it causes us pain because of our sin. Forgive us and cause us to truly turn from our sin. Show us how to live in your justice and mercy. Make us beacons of your hope. Amen.

Day 4: Roofing - Cover-ups Don't Pay

But a man named Ananias, with the consent of his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property; with his wife's knowledge, he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet. "Ananias," Peter asked, "why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You did not lie to us but to God!" Now when Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard of it. The young men came and wrapped up his body, then carried him out and buried him. -Acts 5:1-6

When shingles need to be replaced it is best to tear off the old ones rather than just putting new ones on top. Building code allows no more than 2-3 layers of shingles to be on a house. Each layer adds weight and seals less and less. It's best to just peel off the old layer of shingles and add the new. A few years back, a hail storm came thru town. Many house sustained damage their roof. Workers came to town by the truckload to fix rooves. Some of the companies took short cuts and did not remove the old shingles. It was about 5 years later that those rooves needed to be replaced. The homes where the shingles were all removed are lasting.

In the Acts 5 passage we discover this is a time to share with others, their resources. It was not required, just encourage. Ananias actually didn't do wrong in keeping some of the money, but he did do wrong when he lied and said he had given it all.

Ananias and Sapphira were taking a short cut with their money, hoping they will get away with it. As a result, God punished the sin, and both Ananias and Sapphira died also. God wants all of our encounters to be done with integrity and honesty.

What do you hide from other people? What do you think you're hiding from God? It requires humility and effort, but take time to be honest with God.

Prayer: Almighty God, to You all hearts are open, all desires known, and from You no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love You, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen. - *Collect for Purity, an ancient prayer of the Church*

Day 5: Coffee time - Break time to know God is good

O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him. O fear the Lord, you his holy ones, for those who fear him have no want. -Psalm 34:8-9

Coffee time (or tea or soda) is a much needed break from work. Growing up on a farm, I learned that it is important to stop mid-morning and mid-afternoon to rest, get some food, and rehydrate. Sometimes we would take a break inside in the air conditioning and other times we would stop in the field. It was a good time to talk, to look at the work we were doing, and to notice the progress that had been made.

In our spiritual lives it's also good to take much needed breaks. The Psalmist tells us to taste and see - God is good! As we pause we create time to talk to God, and look at our progress. In the day-to-day grind, we can overlook how much work God has been doing in our lives.

When was the last time you took a spiritual break with God? What is God doing in your life? How have you changed spiritually over the years? What spiritual projects are you and God working on in your life?

Prayer: Glorious God, thank You for the work we are able to do and the rest we are able to take. Whether it is a coffee break or a vacation, rest allows us to reconnect with You and with ourselves. Amen.

Painting doesn't fix cracks - What is on the inside?

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth. So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. -Matthew 23:27-28

When a person lives in an older home (or worships in a 100+ year old building, as we do), the walls develop cracks in the old plaster. One solution is to spread spackling mud over the cracks in order to smooth over the walls. Another is to drywall the walls and start with an new surface. Still another solution is to cover the cracks with paneling or wallpaper. The trouble with this method is that the cracks in the wall still exist, they are just covered up and forgotten. It might look lovely on the outside, but underneath the walls continue to crumble and crack.

What kind of façade are you putting on the outside? What sorts of things are you trying to cover up? Could it be that you are wasting away inside, but look lovely on the outside? It doesn't need to be like that. If you are willing obedient to God, *"though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool" (Isaiah 1:18).*

What areas of your life are you being tempted to just panel or wallpaper over? How might you make a permanent fix to the cracks inside? Let God wash you as white as snow.

Prayer: Lord God, Give me the courage to ask You to fix the cracks in my life. Help me to show the world the real me that You created. Amen.

Upcoming Summer Lovin' Themes:

Aug. 6 Pesky Faith (Gardening)

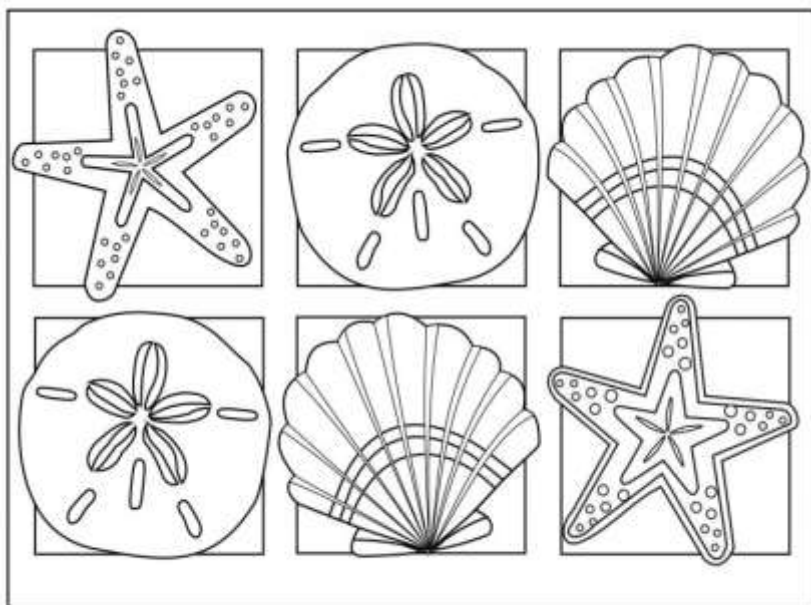
Aug. 13 A Day at the Beach

Aug. 20 Sunflowers and Solar Eclipses
Backpack blessing for kids going back to school

Aug. 27 The Last Days of Summer

Sept. 3 Life is a Picnic, Labor Day Weekend

Sept. 10 Sunday School and Adult Groups Resume



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