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Daily Devotional, Friday, July 21, 2017 - Courage in the Lonely Hour

JULY 21ST 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Deuteronomy 31:6-8

Loneliness is a powerful emotion. It can lead to despair, or it can draw us closer to the Lord. It is also a condition for which we were never designed. From the very beginning, God said that it was not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18). So, He created Eve. Then came sin, the separator.

Ever since, we have been trying to regain the intimate fellowship that was lost in the Garden of Eden. Most of us start this journey to recovery by seeking healthy connections with other people. Friends and family can help enormously, but their presence is no substitute for fellowship with the heavenly Father. In fact, our best friends can sometimes impede our efforts by appearing to offer what God alone can give. Falling for such pretense is idolatry—allowing something to take God's place.

That is why you see godly individuals throughout the Bible put to the loneliness test. We find examples in the story of Jacob wrestling alone with an angel (Gen. 32:24-32), Elijah standing alone on Mt. Sinai (1 Kings 19:1-21), and even Jesus praying alone in the garden because His friends had fallen asleep (Matt. 26:36-46). In all three cases, the picture is essentially the same.

Such heartrending experiences in our life are designed for one purpose: They bring us to the point where we can discover for ourselves that God is real. The learning process may take a

while, but it is much more likely that we will rely on God if there is no one else to hang on to. When we experience utter loneliness, we can cling to the promise, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you” (Heb. 13:5)

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Daily Devotional, Thursday, July 20, 2017 - Partners in Suffering for Christ

JULY 20TH 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Acts 19:23-31

In the book of Acts, Paul stands out as the most prominent preacher and apostle. That's why we tend to pass over the names of other individuals who are mentioned only briefly. An example is Aristarchus—one of the men dragged into the theater of Ephesus during a riot. Paul was the target of the dispute, but Aristarchus was also on the receiving end of the hostility.

Who was Aristarchus? Though not well known, he is actually mentioned five times in the New Testament. We know he was from Thessalonica and that he joined Paul on his third missionary trip as the apostle was going to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). The next time he showed up in Scripture (Acts 27:2), he was boarding a ship with Paul, who by that time was a prisoner on his way to Rome. At sea, Aristarchus and Paul suffered through a great storm that resulted in shipwreck. The last mentions of Aristarchus are as a fellow prisoner with Paul in a Roman jail and a fellow worker (Col. 4:10; Philem. 1:24).

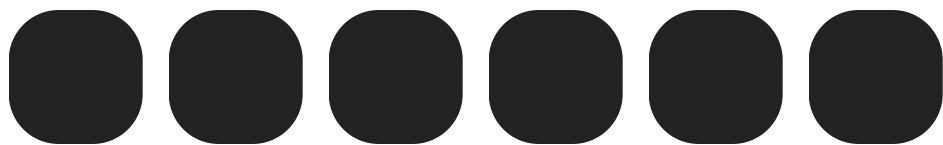
Almost every reference to Aristarchus involves suffering for Christ. Yet this isn't a popular concept today. We want a Savior who will make life easy, comfortable, and prosperous. But that's not the message Jesus preached, nor is it the example Paul and Aristarchus set. As the apostle wrote, "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12).

Although most of us probably won't experience the hardships Paul and Aristarchus suffered, we must be willing to stand for Christ in the face of rejection, ridicule, misunderstanding, discrimination, and even hostility. Are you willing to suffer for Christ?

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Daily Devotional, Wednesday, July 19, 2017 - Partners in Ministry

JULY 19TH 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

Daily Devotional, Wednesday, July 19, 2017 - Partners in Ministry

Acts 20:1-6

No one can dispute that the apostle Paul played a foundational role in the establishment of the early church. We generally think of him as the man who took the gospel to the ends of the civilized world of that era. But Paul never worked alone. Throughout the book of Acts and the Epistles, we catch glimpses of people who partnered with Paul in ministry.

In today's reading, we meet a small missionary team—including Luke, the author of Acts—who accompanied Paul as he journeyed through Macedonia. Although we know little or nothing about most of them, each played an important part in the formation of the church. From God's perspective, there are no insignificant people or ministries in the church of Jesus Christ.

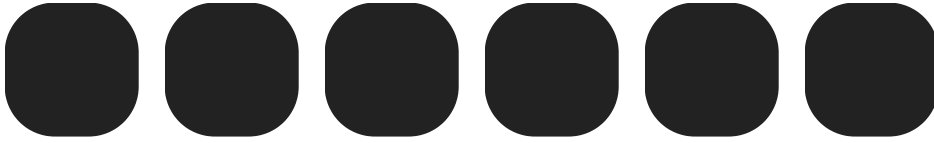
In 1 Corinthians 12:1-31, Paul likens the church to a body, whose health depends on the proper functioning of all its various parts. The Holy Spirit gives each believer a special ability for service within the church. Although people like Paul, who have a more visible role, may seem more necessary, in reality every believer is essential. Behind-the-scenes services rendered by less visible people are never forgotten by the Lord.

To God, the issue is not who sees our service or knows what we've done; He's interested in our obedience, attitude, and motive for serving Him. He doesn't want us wallowing in self-pity or low self-esteem because our work isn't noticed or appreciated. Instead, we should aspire to glorify the Lord and be faithful in whatever we do, knowing that He promises to reward our service and will not overlook our obedience

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Daily Devotional, Tuesday, July 18, 2017 - Saved and Sure

JULY 18TH 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

Daily Devotional, Tuesday, July 18, 2017 - Saved and Sure

Hebrews 11:1

To help you understand the concept of “saved and sure,” here are three truths that indicate what the Lord wants for all people:

1. God wants everyone to be saved. He calls all men and women to Himself, but there must be a response to His invitation. When we answer His call to salvation, the Father makes us part of His everlasting family (Rom. 10:9-13). If we decide to reject the Lord, however, then we will eternally remain outside of His redemption plan for mankind.

2. God wants everyone to be saved by grace through faith. Ephesians 2:8-9 declares that our salvation is 100 percent the work of the Lord. It is His plan, His work, His gift. We have no responsibility whatsoever, other than simply receiving the free gift that He lays at our feet.

3. God wants everyone to be saved by grace through faith and sure of salvation. Lack of certainty can absolutely destroy faith. If you are not sure that you are saved, then the devil will use that seed of doubt to

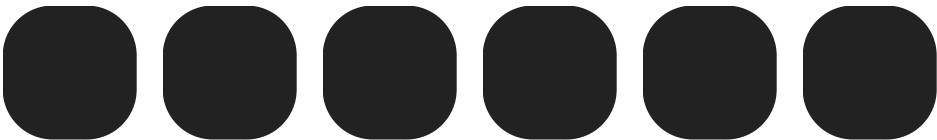
plague your spirit every time you feel you have done something unforgivable. In the Lord's eyes, though, there is no such thing as unforgivable. He has already established the plan by which every one of us can join His eternal family, and He wants us to have confidence in our salvation.

Passages like John 3:16, 1 John 5:13, and Ephesians 1:13-14 all point to the complete certainty with which we can embrace our salvation. Does your faith fluctuate with your feelings and circumstances, or is it firmly grounded in Scripture?

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Daily Devotional, Monday, July 17, 2017

JULY 17TH 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

Daily Devotional, Monday, July 17, 2017

1 John 5:13

One of the main reasons many Christians fail to serve God joyfully is their uncertainty about where they stand with Him. They don't understand the basic nature of their relationship with the Lord and, as a result, hold back from dedicating themselves fully to His service.

You probably have seen similar types of hesitancy played out in day-to-day life. For example, perhaps you're acquainted with a man and a woman who are known as the "on again, off again" couple—the pair who seem to dance around the idea of relationship but somehow never quite seem able to commit. It's difficult to make that life-changing decision when you're not sure how the other person feels about you, isn't it?

The same thing holds true in your life of faith. No one wants a spouse—or a Savior—who might leave at any time, for any reason. No, we want certainty. And when that is missing, the whole context of the relationship is out of balance.

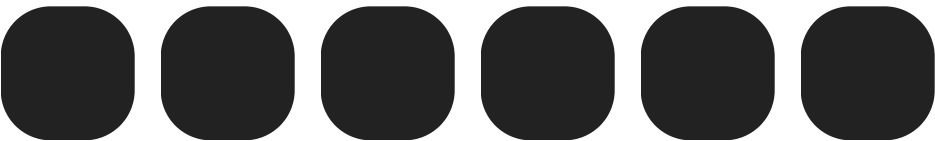
The apostle John was surely thinking about this as the Holy Spirit inspired him to write the beautiful word of encouragement we find in 1 John 5:13. What was his purpose in writing? "That you may know that you have eternal life" (emphasis added).

John was writing to bring certainty to uncertain believers. He wanted them to know that there was no "off again" time for anyone who had engaged in a relationship with the Father. Because God is your constant companion, you can trust that He is faithful—eternally.

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