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Daily Devotional - Wednesday, June 19, 2024 - GOD'S PRESENCE IN RESTORATION

JUNE 19TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

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A symphonic band is comprised of musicians playing many types of instruments. There is the woodwind section with clarinets and saxophones. A brass section features trumpets and trombones. Joining them are stringed instruments—violin and cello. Each produces a unique sound. But when the musicians play together, guided by their conductor, they produce harmonious and beautiful music.

Matthew 18:15–20 stresses the importance of believers living together in beautiful harmony, but there is a powerful force that can make this work—the presence of our Lord Himself! “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (v. 20).

For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.

MATTHEW 18:20

Many have associated this verse with people gathering for prayer. And while prayer in groups is certainly a good thing, the central focus of this passage is about the process of restoring erring believers (v. 15). Jesus clearly wants His disciples to know that if we as believers go about the tough task of restoring others in the name of Jesus (v. 20) within the church, He will be right there in their midst helping to bring that to pass.

The goal here is reconciliation, not condemnation. We are called to resolve conflicts with grace and love, striving to maintain unity among believers. God is in the business of restoration, that is

why Jesus promises His very presence to assist believers in that difficult process. As we reflect on this passage, let's remember the words of Psalm 133:1: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!" Let us strive for creating space for our Lord's presence to move among us and restore those who are straying away. As we gather in His name, we can be confident that our Lord is guiding and blessing us with His divine presence.

Go Deeper

What guidelines do we find in Matthew 18 for biblical confrontation among believers? How can we make sure that God is present in these difficult conversations?

Pray with Us: Lord, Your promise to be with us in a special way when we gather together prompts us to strive for unity, reconciliation, grace, and love in our churches. Restore those who have strayed! Bring them back, we pray.

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Daily Devotional - Sunday, June 16, 2024

JUNE 16TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

Sometimes we act like following Jesus requires building an impressive religious resume. We make sure our calendar is packed with plenty of to-do items for Jesus. How many church committees have we served on? How many times have we read through the Bible? Do we have perfect attendance at church services? Do we look the part of a perfect Christian?

Matthew 15 contains a conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees about tradition and purity. The Pharisees were accusing Jesus' disciples of breaking tradition by not washing their hands before

These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

MATTHEW 15:8

eating (v. 2). Jesus highlighted the Pharisees' hypocrisy, emphasizing that it's not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of it (v. 11). Jesus was redirecting their focus from external rituals to their heart's condition. He declared that what defiles a person comes from the heart and is not caused by what a person consumes.

Jesus listed several unclean things that come out of our mouths that actually come from our hearts. From our hearts come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, and slander (vv. 18–19). The mouth simply reveals what has been in our hearts all along.

What lesson can we learn? It is critical to prioritize the state of our hearts over the performance of religious duties. Jesus said, "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (v. 8). God's presence is not dependent on our outward practices but on our inward commitment and love for Him. He desires hearts that are devoted to Him more than merely complying with tradition. It is critical to do some internal "housecleaning" to discover, through confession and repentance, what evil lurks in our hearts.

Go Deeper

How are we sometimes like the Pharisees? What behaviors do we consider unclean and clean today? Do we sometimes prioritize the performance of religious duties over the state of our hearts?

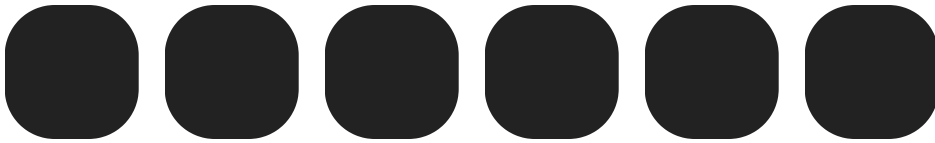
Pray with Us: How do we get rid of hypocrisy? Jesus, we confess we often resemble the Pharisees when we honor You with our lips, but our hearts are hardened. Draw us by

Your Spirit to love You with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength.

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Daily Devotional - Friday, June 14, 2024 - Seeds of His Presence

JUNE 14TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

Daily Devotional - Friday, June 14, 2024 - Seeds of His Presence

Have you ever tried to start a garden? The necessary ingredients are pretty basic: seeds, water, sunshine, and soil. But if any part of that equation is missing or less than ideal, the results can be disappointing!

In Matthew 13, Jesus tells a series of parables (the highest concentration in any single chapter of Matthew's Gospel). But Jesus is not just telling amusing anecdotes. He is using these object lessons to make an

important point. In His two previous sermons, Jesus introduced the idea of His kingdom—its ethics (chapters 5–7) and its mission (chapter 10). In chapter 13, He answers many of the objections and concerns the crowds had about the coming kingdom, such as why it would not come about quickly.

The seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it.

MATTHEW 13:23

Jesus tells of a farmer who scatters seed on various types of soil (vv. 3–8). Some seeds fall on the path, eaten by birds. Some fall on rocky ground, sprout quickly, but wither without deep roots. Some fall among thorns and are choked out. But the seed that falls on good soil flourishes, producing a bountiful harvest. This parable teaches us about God's Word and the power of its presence in our lives. In Mark's version of this parable, he states that the seed is the Word of God, and the soil is different levels of people's receptivity to that Word (Mark 4:13–20). God's Word is ever available, ever potent. However, the condition of our hearts determines how well we receive and cultivate His presence.

Just as a farmer prepares the soil before planting, we must prepare our hearts to receive God's Word. This involves eliminating distractions, seeking forgiveness, and approaching God's Word with openness and expectancy. When we allow His Word to take root in our lives, it not only transforms us but also produces fruit that benefits others.

Go Deeper

What can we do to prepare our hearts for God's Word? What type of soil is *your* heart and how has that affected your time in the Word?

Pray with Us: Dear Jesus, thank You for the parables You told while You walked on earth. They reach out to us centuries later with power and wisdom. Give us understanding and humility to learn from them and allow Your Word to dwell in us.

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Daily Devotional - Thursday, June 13, 2024 - His Presence Drives Away Darkness

JUNE 13TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

Daily Devotional - Thursday, June 13, 2024 - His Presence Drives Away Darkness

You are probably familiar “tug of war,” a game where two teams pull on the opposite ends of a rope. All members must work together, straining against the opposition. However, if any one team member decides to let go or starts pulling in the opposite direction, their team will begin to lose.

So it is in our relationship with Jesus. You are either with Him or against Him. Just as in tug of war, there is no neutral position because there are forces of darkness aligned against Him. You must choose which side

Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

MATTHEW 12:30

you are on. Matthew 12:30 says, “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.” If you are not working for Jesus, you are actively working against Him.

In Matthew 12, Jesus heals a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute (v. 22), prompting various reactions from the crowd. Many marveled at the miracle (v. 23), while others questioned His being the “Son of David” (that is, the Messiah, v. 23). Sadly, others outright accused Him of using demonic power (v. 24). Jesus responds to these accusations with the assertion that His power is divine, saying, “But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (v. 28).

God’s presence, embodied in Jesus, is not only a beacon of light in a world cloaked in darkness, but He is also “present” in its midst! His power over evil, sickness, and death assures us of His divine authority and His commitment to overturn the effects of sin and keep dark spiritual forces in check. Jesus’ point is that there is no way He could be aligned with demonic forces to do what He does because His teachings and work are in direct opposition to what Satan wants.

Go Deeper

Whose team are you on? Do your values and actions align with Jesus? In what tangible way today can you demonstrate your allegiance even in the face of the spiritual darkness around us?

Pray with Us: Merciful Lord, Your presence drives away darkness. You’ve brought us from slavery to sin into Your wonderful light. May we cling to You, with the desire to do Your will, even as we face the spiritual darkness of this world.

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Daily Devotional - Tuesday, June 11, 2024 - Sent Out with His Presence

JUNE 11TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

Daily Devotional - Tuesday, June 11, 2024 - Sent Out with His Presence

Do you remember the first time you were asked to do a task around the house, like mowing the lawn or doing a load of laundry? Initially the task was beyond your capabilities. Maybe you even resisted due to your inexperience in handling such a duty on your own. But everything was made easier if you had a parent who helped you through those first steps. The guidance of someone with knowledge and experience made all the difference.

In Matthew 10, the disciples were sent out on an intimidating mission. While the road before them must have seemed daunting, they were encouraged by the promise of God's presence if they stepped out in obedience.

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves.

MATTHEW 10:16

In this passage, Jesus first calls His twelve disciples, and entrusts them with His authority (vv. 1–4). Then He sends them to proclaim the kingdom of heaven (v. 7). It is a daunting task filled with all kinds of uncertainty and danger and concerns about financial support and even what they should wear (vv. 9–10). However, Jesus reassures them, “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves...do not worry...for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (vv. 16, 19–20).

Sheep are vulnerable to wolves, but not when the shepherd is guiding and guarding them! These words convey two powerful truths: God's Spirit and presence empowers His servants for mission, and that same presence comforts us during trials and persecutions. God does not send us into the world unequipped or alone; His presence is our strength, our guide, and our comfort. When we step into challenging situations, God goes with us.

Go Deeper

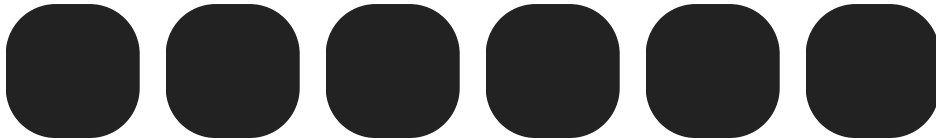
You are not on your own! How does knowing that God is present with you change your ability to undertake a task, whether it is sharing the gospel, serving in some form of ministry, or making ethical decisions at work?

Pray with Us: Jesus, You have taught us that we show love by serving others. You promised to be with Your disciples wherever they went. Give us faith to trust that this promise is also for us and to serve people with wisdom and courage.

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