

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day 1

Jeremiah 33:3 (ESV) "Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



Call to me and I will answer you...

If a friend invited you to call out to them, promising to answer you and tell you great and hidden things you have not known, would you respond? I know I would. This is the promise we are given from God, the One who knew us before we were formed in the womb. What He is inviting us into is something bigger than even the greatest friend could promise...prayer.

Prayer is simply calling out to our Father. Webster's defines prayer as "addressing God with adoration, confession, supplications, or thanksgiving." When we are unsure how we are to come before God in prayer, Jesus simply tells us that we are to "humble ourselves like a child." (Mt. 18:4)

When we allow ourselves to come to God as little children, pouring out our childish hearts to Him, we learn how to hear His voice. He brings comfort, healing and freedom as we still ourselves in His presence. Just as He promises, when we call to Him, He answers us. As we study His features, we grow in His likeness, as He continues to show us great and hidden things.

Spending time with our Father is like being given permission to climb up on His lap and simply share our hearts with Him.

Let's give ourselves permission to come to our Father as little children as we enter into 40 days of calling out to Him. He is longing for us to draw close, so He can tell us great and hidden things that we have not known!

Today's Prayer: "Oh, Father, I long to know you in ways I have never known you before. I am so desperate to call out to you. Today I come before you like a little child, excited to share my heart with you. I want to know your heart, so our hearts can beat as one. I know that You hear me, and will answer me, as I humbly lay my life at Your feet. Please show me great and hidden things that I have not known, as I call out to You today."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #2

Psalm 34:4&5 (ESV): "I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



Those who look to Him are RADIANT...

After Moses spent forty days and forty nights with the Lord writing the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments, we are told that all the Israelites were afraid to come near him because his face was radiant from being with the Lord. Keep in mind; he also went without eating or drinking for the forty days and forty nights. Yet, choosing to be in the Lord's presence filled him in such a way that he radiated.

What happens when we are in the presence of God? If we are willing, He delivers us from all our fears and fills us with all His radiance. One day I decided to tell God about the areas of my life that had held me captive for years. I figured He already knew them, since He is an all-knowing God. However, I had never considered humbling myself in His presence, admitting my fears and asking Him to deliver me from them. I was met by God's love and mercy as He set me free. I'm not sure how I looked, but I know I felt absolutely radiant!

The author of Hebrews reminds us that "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being." (Heb. 1:3) Since we are made in God's image, when we choose to spend time with Him, we become radiant. It's nothing we have to try to muster up, it's simply genetic: like Father, like child.

We have the promise that one day we will be presented to Him as a **radiant** church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish. (Eph. 5:27)

Today's Prayer: "Lord, I humbly come into Your presence. Lord, You have said that when I seek You, You will answer me. Today, I am ready to lay down my fears at Your feet. As I call out each fear by name, I believe by faith that You will deliver me from my fears and I will be set free from their hold on my life. I know that that when I look to You, I am able to lift up my face without shame. Today, may Your radiance permeate my being. Thank you, Father. I love You."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #3

James 4:8 (ESV): "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



Draw near to God...

I remember a time, many years ago, when I was experiencing a spiritual "drought" in my relationship with God. I didn't know what to do or with whom I could share the truth of my dire situation.

Finally, after a Sunday night service, I sought out a respected man of God and poured out my situation. He didn't shame me nor condemn me. I still remember his exact words of counsel. He looked me in the eyes and said, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."

I'll be honest. At first I was disappointed with his response. It sounded so simple. However, I took his advice, straight from the book of James, to heart.

"Draw near" is referring to us approaching God. God moves toward even the undeserving because God loves both more than we love and before we loved at all. It's a call to cleansing our hearts and our hands; a call to repentance.

As I knelt in God's presence that night, I repented of my sins and told my Father how I longed to have a clean heart. I didn't have to beg or plead. I realized in that moment that God had never been far from me, it was I who had walked away from Him.

From time to time, as we take our "spiritual temperature," we may recognize the the times we feel cold and far from God are the times we have stepped away from Him. God, who is rich in mercy, will gently re-direct our feet back to His heart when we draw near to Him.

Today's Prayer: "Father, there are times when it seems You are so far away. I realize that it is not You who has stepped away from me, neither are you hidden from those who seek after You. So today, I need to talk to You and repent from the sins that have blocked my view of You. Thank you for loving me, before I ever thought to love You. Jesus, thank you for dying

on a cross for my sins. It's because of Your blood, shed on a cross, that I have the privilege of being called a child of God. Please draw near me today, Father, as I draw near to You."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #4

Colossians 4:2 (NIV) "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



And be thankful...

When we go to God in prayer, it can be easy to present Him with our "list," kind of like a wish list a child puts together for Santa.

God's heart is that we would, instead, seek Him to know Him. As we pour out our hearts to Him with thankfulness, our needs are met. Just as many of us are attempting to raise thankful children, God longs for a heart of thankfulness from His children.

Paul reminds us in Colossians to "let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts...and be thankful." He goes on to tell us that whatever we do in His name, we are to do it giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Col 3:17)

As I remember God's great mercies in my life, thankfulness flows out of me when I pray. When I can't think of anything to be thankful for, I hold on to God's promises and repeat them back to Him. For example: "I thank You that You are before all things and that You alone hold all things together." (Col.1:17) This scripture reassures me that I don't have to worry about my life, I can rest in His plans for me. Not only does He tell the sun when to shine and the waves how far they can go, He also holds my life in His hands.

God's Word is His promise to each one of His children. When we pray, and allow God's promises to take root in our hearts, growing to their fullness...how can we be anything but thankful?

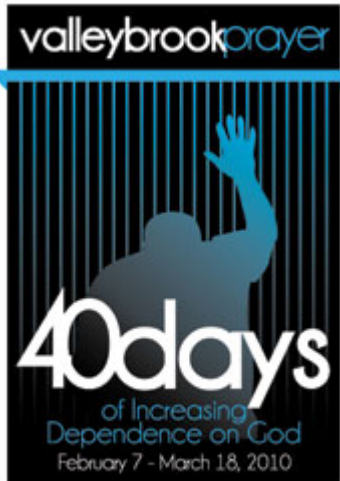
Today's Prayer: "Lord, when I think on Your goodness and mercy in my life, thankfulness overflows from my heart. Please forgive me for the times I have complained about my circumstances, unable to see Your hand in my life. I know that You will never leave me nor forsake me. I trust You with my life. I trust that even in the hard times, when I can make little sense of

my circumstances, You are in control. I trust that when I am unable to see clearly the path You have me on, my faith will give me great reason to rejoice and praise You for who You are. Today I am thankful."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God Day #5

Matthew 4:2 (NLT): "For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



Fasting: the best kept secret...

The scriptures are sprinkled throughout with examples and situations where men of God and entire nations fasted.

In the book of Judges (20:26), the Israelites are in a battle against the Benjamites. Daily the Israelites inquired of the Lord if they were to fight again the next day. The Benjamites were defeating the Israelites so badly that on the third day, not only did the Israelites inquire of the Lord, but they also wept before Him and fasted.

What was the Lord's response that evening when they inquired if they should go to battle the next day? "The Lord responded, "Go, for tomorrow I will give them (the Benjamites) into your hands." The next day, the Benjamites were defeated. Although the Israelites fought in the battle, we read in verse 35, "The Lord defeated Benjamin before Israel." When the Israelites fasted, seeking the right course for their lives, the Lord defeated their enemies and led them to victory.

Fasting is depriving our bodies of food so we can hunger in a new way for God. Fasting is not a form of manipulation to try to get something from God. Instead, it is us positioning ourselves and preparing our hearts for what is to come. We can fast for numerous things such as freedom from a stronghold in our lives, our children, our country or our nation.

Fasting is a time of setting ourselves aside and seeking the Lord for understanding, wisdom and guidance. Fasting also opens up deeper truths to God's Word and helps us come in line with God's priorities. When we fast, we are given clear communion with God.

Even Jesus fasted. He did not live to please Himself (Rom. 15:3). It is recorded that when Jesus fasted, He became **very hungry**. He understood the importance of dying to the flesh and living in total obedience to His Father's will. Paul, the author of Galatians reminds us, "A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life." (Gal.6:8NIV)

Fasting helps us establish dominion and authority over our flesh.

Today's Prayer: "Lord, I long for deeper communion with You. I don't understand exactly how fasting works, but I trust You will show me. Help me to die to my flesh so I can live to please the Spirit. Jesus, when You fasted and Satan tempted You, God gave You strength to withstand the temptations. Please strengthen me as I allow Your Word to be my sustenance. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #6

Psalm 105:17(NIV) "and he sent a man before them - Joseph, sold as a slave."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



And He sent a man before them...

When we think on the story of Joseph, a young man of seventeen tending the flocks, his father's favorite son, donning a "richly ornamented" robe, confident and eager to share the dreams God had given him with his brothers, it's hard to imagine the journey he was about to embark upon.

Joseph's dreams, and his gift to interpret dreams, are a common theme that runs throughout his story. Joseph's life was tumultuous, yet we are told that it was God who sent him to Egypt, not his brothers.

Abandoned by his brothers, unjustly thrown into prison, forgotten by the king's cupbearer and baker after he interpreted their dreams and only asked in return that they would not forget him before Pharaoh, by all appearances Joseph was leading an unfortunate life. However, throughout his years as a slave and his time spent in prison, we are told over and over that God's favor rested on Joseph. Two years after the king's cupbearer was released from prison, Pharaoh had a troubling dream that needed an interpretation; finally, the cupbearer remembered Joseph.

I imagine there were many nights in prison when Joseph lay awake pondering his situation. I'm sure he ached for his father and felt the pain of his brother's betrayal. Yet, Joseph stayed true to the course God had him on. We are given a glimpse into the deep pain Joseph endured when he gave his second son the name "Ephraim," saying, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering." (Gen 41:52)

The famine that the Lord had shown Joseph, through the interpretation of Pharaoh's dream, came to pass. The famine led Joseph's brothers to Egypt to buy food. Eventually, Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve you for a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God." (Gen 45:4-8)

There are some choices we make in life outside of God's will that produce pain and suffering. However, there are also times when God's course for us includes great suffering and difficult trials.

Perhaps today you are aching within as you serve God faithfully, all the while holding onto a dream or a promise He has given to you. Although our timing is not always God's timing, Joseph gives us great encouragement of what it looks like to stay the course.

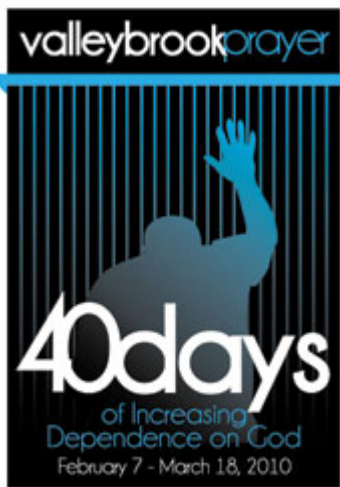
Today's Prayer: "Oh, Father, I want nothing more than to step into the dreams and promises You have given to me. Help me each day to stay the course You have set for me, for I am unable to see the picture of my life in its entirety. I trust that in the land of suffering, You will make me fruitful. I ask for Your favor to rest on me as I follow hard after You. Help me to be obedient to Your voice and teach me to trust that Your plans for me are for my good. I ask this in Jesus name, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #7

Matthew 15:24 (ESV) He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701

No one searched or looked for them...



Lost sheep were important to Jesus. Lost sheep were more important than hanging out with the wealthy, or wondering what people would think if they saw Him with a sinner.

When Jesus sent out the twelve disciples, He sent them to the "lost sheep of Israel." (Mt.10:6) Jesus never lost sight of His purpose.

Later, Jesus tells a parable about lost sheep, "What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off." (Mt.18:12&13)

The message is clear, Jesus cares for each one of us individually and is not willing that any should perish. Just as He sent out His disciples to tell the lost sheep of the hope they have in Jesus; our purpose is the same. We are given a vivid picture of how we are to not turn our backs on the lost in the book of Ezekiel when the Lord says, "My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them." (Ezek.34:6)

I will never forget what it felt like when this lost sheep was found. The Good Shepherd carried me in His arms and called me His own. Now He is asking us, the found, to be His hands and His feet as we strengthen the weak, bind up the injured, bring back the strays and search for the lost. (Ezek.34:4)

Today's Prayer: "Lord, I was a lost sheep, and You found me. I was wandering aimlessly in life, trying to find my own way, when I heard You call my name. You searched for me and found me and called me Your own. How can I ever forget Your goodness to me? Father, please give me Your heart for lost sheep. May my heart break in anguish for those who are injured, straying and lost. Please help me to show Your love to the world. Help me to be obedient as You teach me how to be Your hands and Your feet to reach the lost. I ask this in Jesus name, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #8

James 1:22 (ESV) "But be doers of the word, and not

hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



Do not merely listen to the word...

When James speaks of the "Word," he is referring to the gospel as taught by Jesus, then practiced and proclaimed by His followers.

The Word was read out loud to them. James instructs them that they are not to just hear the Word with their ears, but they must also allow the Word to enter their hearts and their minds.

This instruction is for us too! Jesus asks us to walk in true obedience as we follow His Word.

James goes on to give us the example of a man who looks at himself in the mirror and quickly forgets what he looks like. He is warning us against taking a hasty, quick glance at the Word instead of observing the Word and allowing it to take root. We are being instructed to pay serious attention to His Word, as if our very lives depend on It - because in actuality, they do!

I remember some required classes in school that did not spark any interest in me. I listened to the teacher, but didn't really hear what he or she said. However, when test day arrived, I took a sudden interest in observing my notes and paying serious attention to what would be presented on the test. I was deceiving myself to think I could understand a subject when I had only taken a hasty glance at the material.

Since we are all followers of Jesus, let's allow the Word to enter our hearts and our minds as we entrust our lives to Jesus.

Today's Prayer: "Lord, today I long to meditate on Your Word because my very life depends on It. Help me not to simply glance at Your Words, and soon forget them. Instead, I pray that Your Word would be embedded in the depths of my soul, where It will be deeply rooted in Your truth and Your love. Help me to be prepared in season and out of season to speak Your Word with boldness and confidence. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #9

Psalm 91:4(NIV) "He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



His faithfulness will be your shield and rampart...

I remember going through a dark season, when I stumbled upon the 91st Psalm. As I read it, I felt God whisper, "This is My promise to you." I began to weep as God gave me permission to be weak and broken.

The book of Ecclesiastes reminds us that "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven...a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance." (Ecc.3:1&4) I had never realized that it was alright to weep and mourn. So, instead, I had spent years putting up walls and pushing down feelings.

When I read that I could find refuge under His wings and that although I was unfaithful, His faithfulness would be my shield and rampart, I felt a spark of hope ignite.

A "rampart" is a protective barrier. If God promises that His faithfulness will be our shield and rampart, we can trust that we are truly held and cared for under His wings. In our times of anguish, He is our Divine Protector.

I had spent so many years trying to be strong in my own strength, now I was being invited to trust God; to rest in the shadow of the Almighty. For the first time in a very long time, I was not afraid.

Perhaps right now, your season is not one of laughing and dancing, but rather one of weeping and mourning. Your Father is longing to cover you with His feathers and hold you close as you find refuge under His wings. Though you may not see the end of your dark season, take comfort as the Psalms encourage us that "weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning." (Psalm 30:5b)

Today's Prayer: "Father, I thank You that I don't have to be ashamed when I am walking through the valley of the shadow of death. Even though I may not be able to see through the darkness, I trust that You are holding me. Thank You for being my strength. Thank You for Your unwavering

faithfulness to me both in times of mourning and in times of dancing. I will stay under Your wings and rest in Your shadow. I know that You promise to answer me and deliver me in times of trouble, so I will not fear. I rejoice in Your goodness. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God Day #10

Philippians 2: 3&4(NIV) "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



Do nothing out of selfish ambition...

In a world of "survival of the fittest," this scripture goes against everything our culture tells us. We are taught to look out for #1. We get passed over as we watch ruthless co-workers get promoted. If we don't move fast enough, we fear we might get trampled, as people elbow and claw their way past us to get what they want.

Somewhere along the way, we have given ourselves permission to not feel and not see each other. Instead, at times, we limit our view to our immediate wants and desires.

I know I have grieved God's heart many times as I have put my own interests above the interests of others.

This humility that Paul expresses, in considering others better than ourselves, is for the church. It infers that we are to care for each other and put his or her needs above our own. It's not so that others in the community are to be thought of as "better than I am," but rather as those whose needs and concerns "surpass" my own. True humility is not to be confused with false modesty. Rather, it is us understanding our condition of being utterly dependent and trusting before our Creator. True humility is others-focused, not self-focused.

Who has God placed in your path for you to see and care for? Perhaps he or she has a gift that you are able to speak life into as you, in turn, give the gift of your time.

Today's Prayer: "Oh, Lord, today I pray for true humility. Help me to see

others in my community. Teach me how to care for the interests of others and not just my own interests. I am very selfish at times. I have been unaware that in my attempt to fulfill my own interests, I am not helping others to fulfill the dreams You have placed in their hearts. I lay my own will at Your feet. I long for my heart to match Yours, Father. Please show me the truth of who I am as I humble myself in Your presence today. In Jesus name, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #11

Luke 22:46(NIV) "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



Get up and pray...

After the Last Supper, Jesus' disciples followed Him to the Mount of Olives, a familiar place where Jesus often prayed. Luke records that the disciples were exhausted from sorrow, yet Jesus tells them to "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." (Luke 22:40)

Although the impending suffering of Jesus was on His mind, He was still caring for His disciples, knowing the temptations that would soon confront them.

Jesus knew the only chance they had to stand against the schemes of Satan was prayer.

Taking His three closest disciples, Peter James and John, a stones throw away from the other disciples, knowing His very life must soon be sacrificed, Jesus said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." (Mt. 26:38) Each time Jesus went back to the disciples, they were asleep. "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation." (Luke 22:46)

The second time Jesus tells them to watch and pray with Him, the focus is not on "with me," but rather is referring to the need for vigilance in future threatening situations. They are to "watch and pray" so that they won't fall into temptation.

Jesus lived a life of total dependency in prayer to His Father. Prayer is so important to Jesus that He teaches us how to pray and tells us to "always pray and not give

up." (Luke 18:1)

Jesus had first-hand experience in dealing with Satan. He warns us to "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (1 Pt.5:8)

There's much at stake. However, the roaring lion's insatiable appetite has no power, when we devote ourselves to our Father in prayer.

Today's Prayer: "Father, because Your Son, Jesus, was devoted to You in prayer, Satan was not able to tempt Him. Satan had no power over Jesus because of His intimate, dependent relationship with You. I long for intimacy with You, Father. Help me to not grow weary in praying. Please help me to be self-controlled and alert and to pray without ceasing. I ask for protection against the schemes of the enemy. Help me to devote myself to prayer. I will be watchful and intentional as I give all of myself to You. In Jesus name, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #12

Esther 4:16(NIV) "Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



And if I perish, I perish...

Esther was a beautiful young lady, adopted and raised by her cousin, Mordecai.

King Xerxes issued a decree to search for a beautiful virgin to become his new queen. Esther was taken to the king's palace, instructed by Mordecai not to let anyone know that she was a Jew.

As the story goes, "The king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen." (Esther 2:17)

This is the part of the story where we want to sigh, imagine how romantic that moment must have been, and assume that the king and the queen lived happily ever after. However, Walt Disney didn't create the story of Esther, so we enter back into the story, and the true purpose, of Esther's favor and reign as queen.

The king's highest ranking noble, Haman, was enraged because Mordecai refused to kneel down and pay him honor. Haman convinced the king to issue a decree to kill all Jews.

Mordecai sent word to have Esther approach the king to "beg for mercy and plead with him for her people." (Esther 4:8) The law stated that unless a person was summoned by the king to approach him, he or she would be put to death. Esther feared for her life.

Mordecai, a man of wisdom, said something that made Esther remember who she really was, "And who knows that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14) Esther realized that her life was not her own. Esther also understood the power of prayer and fasting.

With great courage, Esther sent word to Mordecai saying, "Go, gather together all the Jews and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." (Esther 4:16)

Desperate people are hungry for God and hungry people are desperate. Esther realized that the life or death of an entire nation rested on her shoulders.

Fasting opens us up to receive all that God has for us. He is longing to reveal Himself to us when we surrender our lives to Him, desperate and hungry. Perhaps you and I are alive for such a time as this. Perhaps the life or death of a nation rests on our shoulders as well.

Today's Prayer: "Father, thank You for giving us the story of Esther, a woman of courage. Just like Esther, I know that my life is not my own. As I fast and seek You, would You please reveal Yourself to me today? Show me the purpose that You have created me for. I ask for courage to say "yes" to whatever You ask of me. I trust You. I am desperate and hungry for Your will to be done. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #13

II Corinthians 12:9(NIV) But he said to me, "My grace is

sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



When I am weak, then I am strong...

A common theme with the men and women of the Bible was that though some were used mightily, they were also familiar with afflictions.

Paul talks openly about what he refers to as a "thorn in his flesh", an affliction. We are not told specifically what his thorn was, only that it caused him great suffering.

An affliction is something that causes persistent pain, distress or great suffering.

Paul was being tormented, and pleaded three times with the Lord to take his thorn away from him.

Three times is the same number of times Jesus pleaded "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." (Lk. 22:42) Imagine what compassion the Lord must have had for Paul, knowing full well the battle he was facing.

Paul was persistent in asking the Lord to take away his affliction; but his answer was "No." The Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (II Cor. 12:9) Amazingly, Paul didn't rebel, but rather he submitted to God's plan. Neither did he sigh in frustration, wanting his own way; he eagerly welcomed God's answer to his prayer without reservation.

Paul understood that his heavenly Father only gives good things to His children. He understood that to not receive what he was asking for, did not mean not to receive at all. He trusted that God was able to make light shine in dark places. Paul realized that the greater his weakness, the greater the power and grace of God within him. Paul's affliction humbled him.

The affliction Paul faced was not self-induced; it was given to him (vs.7). Along with the affliction, was also given grace to triumph through a power not his own, so that God could be glorified and not himself.

Rejoicing in God's power, Paul eagerly states, "I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (II Cor. 12:10)

Perhaps you are struggling with a thorn in your side. God is faithful, His grace is sufficient. If you are willing, He is able to make His power perfect in your weakness.

Today's Prayer: "Lord, I have been asking You to take away the thorn in my side, my affliction. Today, I am asking that Your will would be done in my

life. I ask for Your grace to be sufficient for me right now in my weakness. I am not strong enough to stand on my own. I am powerless to change myself. I pray that my life would bring glory to You. I lay my affliction at Your feet, trusting You to reveal Your light in what feels like a very dark place. Please make me strong in You. Thank you. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #14

John 1:11-13 (ESV) "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



I am a child of God...

Imagine what it must have felt like to be the Son of God, yet to be rejected by your own people.

God's own people, the nation of Israel, rejected Jesus, God's Son.

Jesus had authority to execute judgment, but instead He says, "Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." (Jn 5:24)

Although all people are referred to as God's sons, because He made all people and provides for them; full sonship comes when we respond to what He did for us through His Son, Jesus. Once we receive the gift of His Son, and place our full trust in Him, we are born again and become God's children.

This is not a physical birth, but a birth that comes from God. We cannot be born into the heavenly family any other way than of God. This new birth is a sheer miracle. There is nothing we can do to earn our way to heaven; it is a gift He freely gives to anyone who asks.

To be born again and become a child of God one must "confess with our mouth "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead. For it

is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." (Romans 10:9&10)

God's children are those who believe in Jesus' name.

I can think of no greater honor than to be called a child of God.

Today's Prayer: "Father, I will never forget the sacrifice You made when You sent Your only Son to earth. Your Son was rejected, yet He loved. Because Jesus was obedient to the point of dying on a cross for my sins, I can receive the gift of eternal life. Thank You for making a way for me to be called Your child. Father, please help me live my life as a reflection of You so that those who do not yet know You can see You in me. Help me to love as You love. Please use me as a bridge to bring those who are searching for You into Your Kingdom. I love You, Father. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #15

Matthew 6:33(ESV) "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



Seek first the kingdom of God...

For many years, my focus on the 6th chapter of Matthew was trying to make sense of how it was possible to not worry about my life, what I would eat or drink; or about my body, what I would wear.

I understood that worrying couldn't add a single hour to my life, as the scripture said. However, I could not understand how it was possible to not worry about the future.

One day God gave me a rhema word, a "right now" word, as I re-read the 6th chapter of Matthew. He made verse 33 come alive to me in a new way.

"Seek," in this context, does not mean to look for something not yet present, but rather that we are to make the kingdom the very center of our existence. In other

words, when we pursue the kingdom of God, we are seeking after His righteousness. This is to be our number one priority in life.

When a seed is planted and properly cared for, a harvest follows. So it is when we seek God's kingdom, the fullness of God's provision follows.

There are some things we don't have to understand with our minds. When we simply trust our Father, stepping out in faith and taking Him at His Word, His provisions overflow in our lives in ways we could never imagine.

Today's Prayer: "Father, I am thankful that I don't have to worry about the cares of this world. You take care to feed the birds of the air and to clothe the grass in the fields. You have promised to do even more for me if I would just have faith and believe. You already know what I need. Instead of worrying about food or clothing, I will seek You and Your righteousness. Lord, help me to trust You more, not looking to the world for my security. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #16

I Samuel 18:1 (NIV) "After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



Whatever you want me to do, I'll do for you...

Most of us remember the story of David and Goliath. But that's not where the story ends.

Shortly after David killed the Philistine giant, Goliath, he was brought to Saul, Jonathan's father. It must have been a divine appointment, because after David finished talking with Saul, we are told that "Jonathan became one in spirit with David and loved him as himself." (I Sam. 18:1) This was the first time David and Jonathan had met.

At one point, David approached Jonathan to let him know that his father, Saul, was trying to kill him. Jonathan was very close with his father and replied, "Never! My father doesn't do anything, great or small, without confiding in me. Why would he hide this

from me? It's not so!" (I Sam. 20:2)

Saul knew that his son loved David; it was not something that could be hidden. When Jonathan found out that his father was, indeed, trying to kill David, he said to David, "Whatever you want me to do, I'll do for you." (I Sam. 20:4)

Their friendship was so deep that Jonathan protected David from his father's jealous attempts to kill David. Jonathan's love for David superseded his love for his own father.

It was God who brought David and Jonathan together. They loved and protected each other, never competing to see who was the greatest between them. Even when they were torn apart physically, they were never separated in spirit. Once, when they had to go their separate ways, they wept together as Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord." (I Sam. 20:42)

When David received word that both Saul and Jonathan had died together in battle, he tore his clothes as he mourned, wept and fasted. In his sorrow he lamented, "I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of a woman." (II Sam. 1:26)

God's desire is that we would experience deep friendships, joined together both in heart and in spirit, as we spur each other on to live boldly for Him.

If God has placed such a person in your life today, now is a good time to commit your friendship back to Him, as you thank Him for the most precious gift of friendship.

If you have never experienced such a friendship of being one in spirit with another person, ask your Father to bring the gift of deep friendship to you. He will fulfill your longings as you commit your friendship to His perfect will for your life.

Today's Prayer: "Father, I know I am not to journey alone on the path You have asked me to walk. I desire deep friendship. I know that when You join heart and spirit, there is nothing that can separate friends, not even distance. So, today I ask that You would open my eyes to those You have place on my path, so that I may be strengthened in friendship as I serve You. Help me to be unselfish in my friendships. Please strengthen me with the gift of pure, holy friendships. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #17

James 3:9-12(NIV) "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701

My brothers, this should not be...



As we are nearing the half-way point in our 40 Days of Greater Dependence on God, my eyes have been opened to something: I have "yucky" stuff inside of me, and it's leaking out!

I can only describe what's happening in me as relating to the two personalities of the one man, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Maybe some of you can identify with me.

As God reveals Himself to me, I feel full of life and hope and strength. In these moments, there is absolutely nothing that can stop me from standing up in Him.

However, sometimes without warning, riding on the heels of my perfect moments, something ugly suddenly appears.

In these moments, I am forced to look at myself in all my depravity. Instead of life and hope and strength; in these moments, I long to curl up in the fetal position and hide in a dark room.

"How can this be?" I daringly ask God. "Why must the fire of the Holy Spirit reveal so much "yuck?"

As I prayed this prayer of desperation, God brought to mind the book of James. James is talking about taming the tongue when he states, "Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water." (Jas. 3:11&12)

The purifying process of removing salt from salt water is painful.

How can both praise and cursing come from the same mouth? This should not be.

The heat is on. The salt is slowly being boiled out and is being replaced with pure, fresh water. As the Holy Spirit graciously answers our prayers for holiness and righteousness, His fire must devour every impurity.

So, as you continue to pray and fast, may I encourage you to stay the course with me? What God is doing is necessary for our good and for His glory.

As we allow ourselves to face the truth of whom we are, God is able to open our eyes to the truth of who He is.

As we stay committed to the process of purification, light will always overcome darkness.

Oh, how beautiful the fresh, pure waters will be, as we open our mouths and sing praises to our gracious Father.

Today's Prayer: "Father, instead of acting surprised at all the impurities You are revealing in me, I want to thank You for loving me too much to leave me to my own demise. Sometimes the fire feels too hot to bear, please keep me in these moments, and hold me close. In me is no good thing. I see so clearly my own depravity. I know that only You can remove the impurities, so I can be pure and holy and righteous. I am so thankful that You see me as I will be and not as I am, yet You love me no less. I will stay the course and trust my life to the fire of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #18

I Samuel 3:10b(NIV) Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



Speak, for your servant is listening...

Samuel was a man of God with a very unusual story. The Lord had closed his mother, Hannah's, womb. Hannah longed for a child so much that she wept and prayed to the Lord, making a vow that if He would give her a son, she in turn, would give him to the Lord all the days of his life.

The Lord answered Hannah's prayer and gave her a son. As soon as Samuel was weaned, Hannah made good on her promise and took her young boy to the house of the Lord. She left him with Eli, the priest, whose own sons were wicked men.

However, as the boy, Samuel, grew up in the presence of the Lord, "he continued to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and with men." (I Sam. 2:26)

One night as Samuel was lying down in the temple, the Lord called to him. This was a time when the Word of the Lord was very rare. Although we have already been told that Samuel had favor with the Lord and with men, up until this night, Samuel did not know the Lord because "the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him." (I Sam. 3:7)

Three times the Lord called to Samuel. Three times Samuel got up and went to Eli saying, "Here I am; you called me." Finally, the third time Samuel went to Eli, the priest realized that it was the Lord calling the boy.

Can you imagine how Samuel must have felt when Eli told him that it was the Lord calling him? I'm sure he was unable to sleep as he lay down wondering if the Lord would call him a fourth time.

The first three times, the Lord **called** to Samuel. The fourth time, "The Lord **came and stood there**, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" (I Sam. 3:10)

The Lord had Samuel's full attention as He repeated his name two times. Samuel acknowledged the Lord by saying, "Speak, for your servant is listening." (I Sam. 3:10) Other translations say, "Speak, for your servant hears."

Has the Lord ever gone out of His way to get your attention? We often think of men and women of the Bible as "special" or "different" from us; they are not. Their stories are recorded to build our faith, to give us hope, and to inspire us to fully live our lives for God's glory.

God has great plans for each one of us. Can you hear Him calling your name? Let's

obey His call on our lives as we humbly respond, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Today's Prayer: "Oh, Lord, I know that You have a purpose for my life. Today, I embrace my story. I know that my story is meant to build and inspire other's faith and to bring You glory. You have told me that I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Today I realize that my entire life belongs to You; past, present and future. I realize that you have had a purpose for me from the beginning, before I ever knew You. I desire to live my life fully surrendered to You, for Your glory. I am Your child. Speak, for your servant is listening. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #19

Psalm 107:8&9(NIV) "Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men, for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



He fills the hungry with good things...

Although we've been talking about fasting, and now have a better understanding of what it is, there is still a mystery to fasting that defies explanation.

If you don't believe me, try it.

Spending time in God's presence, on an empty stomach, is deeply impacting.

The mind is unable to comprehend the power of fasting; however, the heart understands fully. The heart comes to life, understanding mysteries of the Spirit, hungry and

longing to be filled.

Sometimes, on a day of fasting, God brings His Word to life in a new way; other times He reveals areas in our life that have not yet been fully committed to Him. In

His great love and in His great discipline, we are able to receive all He has for us.

Recorded beautifully in the Psalms, there is one thing we can be certain of as we hunger for God, "he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things."
(Psalm 107:9)

God fills us when we are hungry and thirsty for Him. Fasting is not necessary for one to hunger and thirst after God. Yet, the heart more clearly recognizes its desperation for God, when the stomach is made aware of its own dire situation. When we crucify the desires of the flesh, the Spirit is given full reign.

So, as we set aside today as a day of fasting, may God fill you with good things. And, let us give thanks for His unfailing love, and His wonderful deeds for men.

Today's Prayer: "Father, today I am longing to hear Your voice above all the noise and busyness of the day. I desire to joyfully enter Your presence, knowing You are excited to meet with me as well. I long to know You, as I am known by You. Please fill me, Holy Spirit, as I enter Your presence with boldness. I know nothing in this world can fill me, nor fulfill me, but You. Speak to my heart today, Father. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #20

Hebrews 12:1(NIV) "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



Throw off everything that hinders...

The heat beats down on you, threatening to steal the last bit of strength that the last 26 miles of the marathon haven't already taken from you; you turn into the final stretch.

Through a tunnel you stumble, entering the Grand Stadium, to finish the final lap of your race.

The awaiting crowd begins to cheer at the top of their lungs at the sight of you. Taken aback, you glance about the packed stadium.

Some faces are unfamiliar, yet your spirit senses that you know them from stories you have read about them. Pioneers of the faith, and veterans alike, are on the edge of their seats.

There were moments during the race when you wanted to quit. Other runners came alongside you, speaking words of encouragement. Sometimes one word of encouragement would keep you strong for miles. And you, too, were able to speak hope into lives along the way, as you stayed the course.

You carry nothing with you, only your weary body and your faith; a faith so strong that not even the strongest wind or the hottest heat could take it from you, as you persevere toward the finish line.

The crowd continues to cheer as electricity fills the stadium. Suddenly, you realize they are no longer cheering for you, their eyes have shifted to the finish line.

Anticipation fills you as you round the last corner. Looking up, your eyes are "fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith." (Heb.12:2) The noise of the stadium is forgotten; your legs begin to buckle beneath you.

As you remember the challenges you faced along the way, and the sin you struggled with, you look into the face of Jesus. You are reminded that "in your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." (Heb.12:4)

Because of the sacrifice of Jesus, for the joy set before Him, even the times when you wanted to give up, you were able to "consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you would not grow weary and lose heart." (Heb.12:3)

Now, He is awaiting your final push to the finish. Though you are weathered and

worn, His arms are open wide. Nothing can keep you from His embrace.

The stadium erupts with praises to the King, as you cross the finish line, running with renewed strength into the awaiting arms of Jesus.

Today's Prayer: "Father, I am humbled that You have qualified me to run this race for You. There is nothing I have done to deserve so great a privilege. Thank You for the cloud of witnesses who have gone before me. Their faith and perseverance have given me courage at times when I had no courage of my own. In moments when I feel weak and weary, I remember the race You ran with joy. Because You ran Your race in total obedience to the course Your Father set for You, I am now qualified to run the race You have set for me. I will stay the course, Father. I will encourage those on my course and speak words of life and hope, because of the joy You fill me with. I love You. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #21

Matthew 16:15(NIV) "But what about you?" he asked, "Who do you say I am?"

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



Who do you say I am...

Jesus, having just performed many signs and wonders, came to the region of Caesarea Philippi to retreat from the crowds, and to be alone with His disciples.

Rumors were flying about who this Man, Jesus, was. People were confused and wanted answers.

Jesus took the initiative and asked his disciples a question He knew was already on their minds, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" (Mt. 16:13)

The disciples gave Jesus the report of what people had been saying.

Then Jesus repeated the question, this time directing his question to His disciples, "But what about you?" he asked, "Who do you say I am?" (Mt. 16:15)

Simon Peter, the spokesman for the disciples, answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Mt. 16:16)

Jesus knew this was not something Simon Peter had heard from a person. Jesus said to Simon, "This was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven." (Mt. 16:17)

With the disciples' acknowledgement of Jesus' true identity, came a new level of responsibility. Because God had revealed Jesus' identity to them, they believed that Jesus was the Son of the living God. It was shortly after this revelation that Jesus was able to explain to His disciples that he would have to suffer and die.

After Jesus suffered, died and resurrected, He had the disciples meet Him in Galilee on a mountain. There they worshiped Him. Jesus reminded them of the responsibility they were being entrusted with, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age." (Mt. 28:18-20)

Who do we say Jesus is?

Do we live our lives in light of the acknowledgment of who He is to us?

When Jesus sent out the disciples, he sent them with clear instructions. One instruction was, "whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven." (Mt. 10:32&33)

What about you? Who do you say Jesus is?

Today's Prayer: "Father, today I acknowledge that Jesus is Your Son. Would You please forgive me for the times I have not acknowledged Christ before men? I will no longer live in fear of what men may say about me in regard to my relationship with You. You are the one and only living God and I will worship You. I know You are a jealous God, and I give my full devotion and affection to You alone. As I continue to seek You, would You please give me a divine revelation of who You are? In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #22

2 Corinthians 3: 17&18(NIV) "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit".

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



With unveiled faces we reflect the Lord's glory...

Paul, the author of Corinthians, makes reference to how Moses had to put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away, from having spent time with the Lord.

Because the Israelites refused the divine truth that Moses shared with them, the veil is representative of their minds being made dull because of a veil that covered their hearts. It was a veil of rebellion and unbelief. However, "whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away." (1Cor. 3:16NIV)

Before Jesus' death, the veil of the temple was what separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple. The Holy of Holies was entered once a year, on the Day of Atonement, by the high priest alone to make atonement for the sins of the people.

After Jesus' atoning death, this was no longer necessary. At the moment that Jesus died, and gave up His Spirit, "behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split." (Mt. 27:51NAS)

Jesus' obedience to death gives us all unrestricted access to the presence of God. Now, we get to gaze by faith into the gospel and behold Christ; behold His glory.

Because the veil has been torn, we can now, "have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain (veil), that is, his body...so let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith." (Heb.10:19&22NIV)

Right now, as we reflect the Lord's glory with unveiled faces, we are being transformed into His likeness.

One day He shall come for us, His bride. Then, we will behold our Bridegroom face to face, and our transformation into His image will be complete.

Today's Prayer: "Oh, Lord, today I come before Your throne with great boldness. I long to draw near to You, Lord. I ask that you would remove any rebellion or unbelief from my heart so I can be transformed into Your likeness. Thank You for giving me the gift of Your Spirit. Because of this gift, I have freedom to live my life as a reflection of Your glory. Jesus, because of Your obedience, the veil has been torn, giving me full access into Your presence. Today, I come boldly before Your throne with praise and thanksgiving. I long for the day when I shall see You face to face. I love You. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #23

Ephesians 6:12 "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



We struggle not against flesh and blood...

"Just walk away!" screams a voice from within, (Col.2:21)

"You cannot have it, it is wrong; it is sin!" (Heb.12:1)

You feel the war waging, feel a strong pull, (Heb.12:1)

Not just for your mind, but your heart and your soul.
(Rom.7:15)

Worldly desires call out, fighting against your spirit,
(Rom.7:8)

Will you stand to attention, or pretend you don't hear it? (Jn.12:40)

The flesh feels so weak; the pull is so strong, (Gal.5:17)

How could something so powerful possibly be wrong? (Rom.7:15)

Don't you know you're God's temple, that His Spirit lives in you? (I.Cor.3:16)

He has put you together, every muscle and sinew. (Acts14:21)

Weakness and fear cannot stand in the way, (I.Cor.2:3)

The Spirit's power demands that sin must not stay. (I.Cor.2:4)

The spirit of the world cannot understand what you've learned: (I.Cor.2:14)

That the Spirit of God helps you to know and discern. (I.Cor.2:12)

When you wrestle with sin, Satan won't triumph, as you endure, (Ps.13:2)

Your hands must be clean and your heart must be pure. (Ps.24:4)

You did not choose Him, He chose you--He gave you His glory, (Jn.15:16/Jn.17:22)

He's interceding on your behalf and redeeming your story. (Rom.8:34)

Everything is permissible, though not necessarily beneficial, (I.Cor.10:23)

The lures of sin are deceiving and superficial. (Rom.16:18)

So stand firm in Him, let nothing move you: be bold, (I.Cor.15:58)

Take every thought captive, let go every stronghold. (IICor.10:4)

Shake down all your idols; lay down foolish pride, (Isa.78:58/Prov.8:13)

There is no where to run, there is no where to hide. (Ps.139:8)

God's grace is sufficient. Rest in His strength, in His power, (IICor.12:9)

You are safe when you run to the Lord, your strong tower. (Prov.18:10)

Prepare your mind for action, be self-controlled, (IPt.1:13)

After a time of testing, you will come forth as pure gold. (Job23:10)

One day you will shout praises, as sin loses its bite, (ICor.15:55)

As you stand before your Lord, victorious in fight. (I.Cor.15:57)

God alone is your rock and salvation, you are victorious in Him, (Ps.62:2/Ps.60:12)

In His faithfulness He has washed you clean, He has taken away your sin. (Jn. 1:29)

Praise Him every creature! Praise Him great and small! (Ps.145:21)

He lifts up all who are bowed down and upholds all who fall. (Ps.145:14)

Great is the Lord and most worthy of our praise, (Ps.145:3)

Let us serve Him, heart and soul, for the rest of our days! (Deut.6:5)

Today's Prayer: "Father, Your Word is truth. I stand on Your Word; taking You at Your Word. There is no power that can overtake Your kingdom. My footing is secure when I trust You and live my life in obedience to Your Word. Your Word is powerful and life-giving. Your Word breathes new life into me as I read It and meditate on It. I am in awe of Your majesty. You are King of Kings and Lord of Lords. There is nothing that happens that You are not aware of. Today, I lay my fears, my doubts and my sins at Your feet. You are my Rock and I am victorious in You. I love You with an undying love. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #24

Matthew 8:19&20(ESV) "And a scribe came up and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "foxes have holes, and birds of the air

have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



Nowhere to lay His head...

Sometimes when we view a person's life, it can appear adventurous and alluring. Not walking in another's shoes makes it impossible to understand the reality of what their life fully entails.

Such was the case in Matthew when a scribe approached Jesus, after Jesus had just finished an amazing teaching.

A scribe was a professional Torah scholar; a student, not a disciple.

The scribe, having just heard Jesus give orders to His disciples to cross the sea, decided, on the spot, that he wanted to follow Jesus, too. He wanted Jesus to be his teacher, since it was normal for students to live with their Rabbi's, so they could learn from them.

Jesus, knowing the scribes motives, wanted to make it very clear that to "follow" Him would require more than just following Him, listening and learning from Him. Discipleship was a total lifestyle.

Jesus describes the cost of discipleship, and the lifestyle of anyone who would follow Him, as anything but a settled one. Using the example of two simple creatures, foxes and birds, He shows us that even they have more security than He does.

To be a disciple of Jesus requires us to live a life of urgency. Jesus' disciples became homeless wanderers. To follow Jesus requires a self-denying lifestyle that more than likely won't match anyone around us.

Following Jesus requires total humility and total obedience.

Why would a person willingly choose to give up everything to follow Christ? Because, "his divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." (2Pt.1:3) We get to participate in His divine nature and by so doing escape the corruption of the world caused by evil desires. (2Pt.1:4)

It is a privilege to be called a disciple of Jesus.

Instead of possessions, we have been given an unshakeable faith in Jesus. In addition to our faith, we are encouraged to add qualities, not items that can be bought, but rather: goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. We are promised that if we possess these qualities in increasing measure, "they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2Pt.1:8)

We have been chosen as Jesus' disciples. Our life is not our own. We are no different than Jesus' early disciples; He wants our lifestyle to match Him.

Jesus promises that if we live our lives in faith, possessing the graces listed above, we will "never fall and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2Pt.1:11)

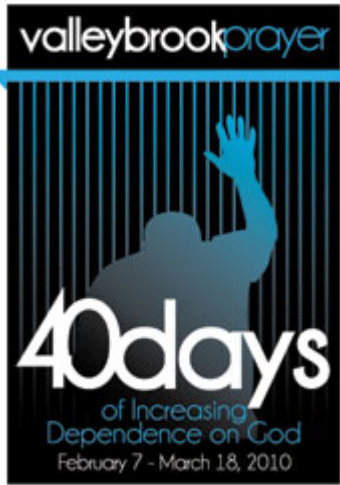
When we look at the cost of discipleship in light of eternity...what else really matters?

Today's Prayer: "Father, I am aware that being a disciple of Jesus will cost me everything. Everything I have is rubbish in light of spending eternity with You. Instead of more material possessions, today I ask that You would fill me with the fruits of the Spirit. Would you please fill me with love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness and faith? Today I remember the hope you have called me to. Help me to remember that my life is not my own; it's been bought with the precious blood of Your Son, Jesus. Thank You for the privilege of being called Your disciple. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #25

Job 38:2&3(NIV) "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me." "

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



I will question you and you shall answer me...

Job was a God-fearing, successful man, who, by all appearances, had the perfect life.

That was about to change, when Satan showed up with the angels before the Lord and the Lord gave Satan permission to test His servant, Job.

God said to Satan concerning Job, "Everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." (Job1:12)

Everything Job possessed was taken from him, including the lives of his children. As Job fell to the ground to worship God, he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." (Job1:21)

Satan presented himself a second time before the Lord, this time asking permission to afflict Job himself. Satan pleaded his case before God saying, "Skin for skin! A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face." (Job2:4)

So God gave Satan permission to afflict His blameless, upright son, Job. Satan "afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head." (Job2:7)

Job was inconsolable. He was so miserable that he eventually began to complain against the Lord. When Job's friends and wife didn't sympathize deeply enough, Job said to them, "Miserable comforters are you all! Will your long-winded speeches never end?" (Job16:3)

Finally, the Lord answered Job out of the storm. He said, "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me." (Job38:2&3) For two **very** long chapters (Job 38&39), the Lord lets Job have it. God speaks forcefully, with authority, as He begins to ask Job rhetorical questions such as, "Do you send the lightning bolts on their way? Do they report to you, 'Here we are?'"(Job38:35)

The Lord paused for a moment, then asked Job, "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!" (Job40:2)

I don't think anyone envied Job in that moment.

Suddenly, Job the complainer, became Job the man of few words. He answered the Lord, "I am unworthy--how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer--twice, but I will say no more. I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." (Job40: 4&5/Job42: 2-6)

After Job repented, "The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first." (Job42: 12)

Oftentimes, we don't understand why suffering is a part of our world. It's easy in those moments to harden our hearts and turn our backs on our Creator.

When our suffering exceeds the threshold we have set for ourselves, who are we to question God? Despite our circumstances, His plans for our lives cannot be thwarted; He remains our faithful God.

If you are in a season of suffering, may I encourage you today to not give up? Our Creator knows all things and holds all things together.

He is altogether more wonderful than we can know.

Let's trust Him with our lives; and may He bless the latter part more than the first.

Today's Prayer: "Father, Your ways are too wonderful for me to understand. Help me to not question Your plan for my life when my eyes are unable to see the path. You are my Creator, I am Your creation. Would you please help me to not look upon my circumstances, but rather keep my eyes focused on You? Please train my ears to hear Your voice above the voices of those around me who do not support what You are doing in my life. I repent for the times I have complained against You concerning my circumstances. I desire to be blameless and upright in Your sight. Thank you for being ever-faithful. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #26

Proverbs 13:12(NLT) "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a dream fulfilled is a tree of life."



A dream fulfilled is a tree of life...

Desire hurts.

If you can remember back far enough, there was a time when you allowed yourself to dream. As dreams have a way of doing, they can become distant memories, when faced with disappointment and opposition.

So, you hope and hope, and dream and dream; yet as time goes by and months turn into years, hope fades.

You push down desire, convincing yourself that too much desire is wrong. Desire, you decide, only leads you to believe in that which you can never attain. You convince yourself that you are happy; convince yourself that this is as good as it can get for you. Big dreams are for other people. Your dream betrayed you. You feel foolish for ever having allowed yourself to dream in the first place.

Heavy with disappointment, your heart is weighted, as day after day you drag through life. You tell yourself that you are happy and fulfilled. Though you may fool some people, you can never fool yourself. Each night, deep within the locked chambers of your heart, desire calls out to you.

You try to ignore the relentless pleading, but desire refuses to leave.

"Please go away," you whisper. "I believed in you once, but no more. I have been crushed and disappointed too many times. I have nothing to offer you. Now, please, leave me alone and let me forsake the dream that once was so alive."

But the dream has not been given permission to leave by the One who placed it within you. Though you try to silence and diminish the size of your dream, tremors are breaking out. You feel them rumbling and know you cannot ignore the earthquake that is about to erupt.

"Please, Father," you cry, "take away desire. My life does not match the size of my dream. I want to give up. Desire is killing me and I am unable to change my circumstances, they are bigger than me."

"You are right where you are supposed to be," your Father answers. "Have you forgotten that 'I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.' (Jn.15:5) Abide in Me, and worship Me, and see if the dream I have placed within you won't come

forth as a tree of life."

So, though your heart feels heavy from the weight of deferred hope, you realize that the road to life and joy doesn't lie **around** the weight of your heavy heart, but **through** it. There are no shortcuts or side roads. The journey to fulfill the dream your Father has placed within you will require trust, obedience and patience. There is no room for denial, self-protection or control.

You realize you cannot kill desire, and you no longer wish too. Instead, you lay down control and fear, and pick up your dream, releasing it from its locked chamber.

"Please forgive me, Father," you cry. "Though desire hurts, I will trust you with the dream you have given me. I know that one day my hopes will be fulfilled, and they will be a tree of life, bringing glory and honor to You."

Today's Prayer: "Father, it has been so long since I have allowed myself to remember the dream You have placed within me. Would You please awaken hope? I know that only You can fulfill the dreams within me; they are far too big for me to reach on my own. Please help me to lay down control and fear as I trust You with Your plans for my life. Help me to be patient as I wait on You. May my hope remain strong when Your timing doesn't look like my timing. I desire my life to be a tree of life, lived in faith and obedience to Your will and purposes. I desire You above all things. My hope is in You. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #27

Matthew 18:3&4(NIV) And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



Whoever humbles himself like this child...

When we look at the lives of people who were totally helpless in the Bible, such as the invalid who couldn't get himself to the pool when the water was stirred (Jn.5: 7), or the man crippled from birth who was carried to the temple gate every day to beg (Acts3: 2), we understand without explanation their need for total dependence on God.

Or take a little child, as an example. A little child is totally vulnerable and dependent for his or her every need.

Yet, as we look at our face in the mirror each morning, it's easy to forget our own helplessness. Sometimes we forget that our need for total dependence on God is equally as desperate.

As I was praying the other day, God gave me a gift. I was kneeling in front of my warm fire, wrapped in my warm blanket, looking out the windows of my house at the beauty of winter, when something happened. God opened my eyes to see that the only thing I possess is my faith. He showed me that everything I could see with my eyes or touch with my hands, was His blessing and favor on my life.

If not for His blessing and favor, I would be kneeling in a snow bank, without food, clothing or shelter.

I was so humbled at the reality of my situation. Suddenly, I realized that my situation was desperate. I realized that my need for total dependence on God was not now, nor ever had been, an option. I was a fool to think I had the power, intelligence or talent to self-sustain in this world.

Jesus makes it very clear that apart from Him, we can do nothing. (Jn.15:5)

Living in a state of total dependence on God requires us to live in a constant state of realizing our depravity. We are no different from the invalid or cripple spoken of in the Bible. They were never able to forget their complete helplessness, and therefore were keenly aware of their great need for a Savior.

As our eyes are opened to the truth of our need for a Savior, we cry out, "Help us, O God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and atone for our sins for your name's sake." (Ps.79: 9)

Just as a child is dependent, so are we to be dependent on our Father. Jesus tells us that God has revealed to little children things that are hidden from the wise and learned. (Mt.11: 25) He goes on to say, "I tell you the truth, unless you change and

become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Mt. 18: 3)

As we hold tight to the gift of our faith, and come to God as little children, let us humble ourselves in His presence as we acknowledge our helplessness; our need for total dependence on Him.

Today's Prayer: "Father, today I come into Your presence as a little child, totally dependent on You. I know that everything I can see and touch has been given to me from You. There is nothing I have done to deserve Your blessing and Your favor in my life. I am finished with thinking I can take care of myself better than You can take care of me. Please forgive me for not trusting You with every detail of my life. I recognize my need for total dependence on You today. Just as a child doesn't worry about the details of his life, I will humble myself with my life as I trust You with the details. I am so desperate for You, Father. I will hold on to my faith, my greatest gift from You. I love You. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #28

I Corinthians 3:5&6(NIV) "What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe--as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



But God made it grow...

The Apostle Paul was a fiery, passionate man. Everything he did, he did with intensity.

Paul, known as Saul of Tarsus at the time, persecuted and tried to destroy the church of God. He had the reputation of being a fire-breathing monster. He also breathed murderous threats to the disciples.

That all changed one day as he was traveling on the road to Damascus, preparing to take prisoner anyone who believed in God.

God got Saul's attention with a bright light that flashed from heaven, knocking Saul to the ground. Unlike most people, God was not intimidated by Saul. Saul's conversion was fiery, just like his personality. For three days Saul was blind and didn't eat. Then the Lord spoke to a disciple named Ananias, telling him to go and lay hands on Saul and pray for him to restore his sight.

Ananias had heard the reports of this intensely dangerous man and resisted the Lord's instruction at first. However, the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! this man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." (Acts 9:15&16)

Saul the fire-breathing monster became Paul the Apostle just like that. His fiery conversion was a shock to everyone. Later, when Paul tried joining the other disciples, "they were afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple." (Acts 9:26)

Once God captured Paul's heart, his zeal and passion for the Lord could not be deterred. He began to teach the gospel by divine revelation that was given to him by Jesus Christ. (Gal. 1:12)

Paul didn't hide the fact that he had persecuted the church, trying to destroy it. Neither did he hide the truth of who he was in God. In spite of his history, Paul recognized the call God had on him from birth, "But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me... (Gal. 1:15)

Paul's conversion brought humility as he became a servant of the Gospel by the gift of God's grace through the working of His power. Paul realized that becoming a servant of the Gospel meant that he was also a servant to the people. God's power was clearly evident in Paul and he suffered greatly for God's name. Bold and courageous, Paul was a servant of Christ who didn't live to please men. (Gal. 1:10)

Sometimes, when a person is confident and sure of their calling in God, people are drawn to them, and want to follow that person instead of God. When this happened with Paul, he didn't touch God's glory. Instead, he professed that he was only a servant, "What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe--as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow." (1 Cor. 3:5&6)

As God's servants, called by His grace, He has given each one of us gifts and talents as diverse and individual as our personalities. Regardless of our history, God has set us apart and is pleased to reveal His Son in us. Like Paul, we can be used by God to bring others to believe in Him.

And in the process of serving God and serving people, may we never touch His glory.

Today's Prayer: "Father, I know that you have set me apart from birth and called me by Your grace. I know that the gifts and talents You have given to me are to be used for Your glory. Help me to be bold and confident in whom You have made me to be. Help me to be willing to suffer for You as I live my life in obedience to You. I don't want to live my life to please men. I pray that my life would please You and bring a smile to Your face. Help me to point others to You as I serve and love them in Your name. I pray that it would please You to reveal Your Son in me. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #29

Acts 9:10(NIV) In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



The Lord called to him...

Ananias was just a Christian.

He is only mentioned in the book of Acts for nine verses. (Acts 9:10-18)

Ananias enters and leaves the narrative, and we never hear mention of him again.

So why does this man have an honored place in sacred history and a special claim on the gratitude of all, who in one way or another, have entered the blessing that stems from the life and work of the Apostle Paul?

Let's enter the story and find out:

Remember the story of Paul, first known as Saul of Tarsus, who was knocked to the ground by a bright flash of light from heaven and was suddenly blind as he traveled on the road to Damascus to find Christians to persecute? Well, Saul was led by the hand to the house of Judas who lived on Straight Street, one of the main

thoroughfares in Damascus.

Enter Ananias. Ananias was a disciple who lived in Damascus. the news of Saul had already reached Damascus and Ananias was aware of the authority that had been given him to arrest believers.

The Lord called to Ananias in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus name Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." (Acts9: 10-12)

Ananias was scared. He reminded the Lord who Saul was and how dangerous he was. The Lord told Ananias that He had a great work for Saul to do. Saul was His chosen instrument, a messenger who would spread the good news of Jesus' name more widely than anyone else.

Ananias obeyed and went to the house of Judas on Straight Street.

Upon entering the house, Ananias placed his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord - Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here--has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 9: 17) Immediately, scales fell off of Saul's eyes and he could see again.

Ananias was God's mouthpiece that day, his words were not his own: he was commissioned by God. He immediately baptized Saul. Then, Ananias leaves the story, and we never hear from him again.

Ananias, just a Christian, made history that day because of one single act of obedience. He was an ordinary man who didn't ask God for the leading role, for a title, or for credit; he was simply obedient. Then he exited the story.

We do not know if Ananias was married or single, rich or poor. We only know that he knew the voice of the Lord and obeyed.

Just a Christian is all it takes to change the course of history and spread the news of Jesus to the world.

Ananias--just a Christian.

Today's Prayer: "Father, thank You for saving me by Your grace and mercy. I am available for Your purposes, just like Your disciple Ananias. I want nothing more than to live a life of obedience to whatever You ask of me, even when You ask of me that which I do not understand. Help my life to impact Your kingdom. Use my life to reach Your children, in whatever way You choose. I will do what You ask. I will trust You. I am not seeking a position, a title, or credit for my obedience to You. I am seeking to please You and bring glory to Your name. I love You. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #30

Hebrews 2:18(NIV) "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



Because he himself suffered...

For many years, when I thought about the sufferings of Jesus, my thinking would rest on the obedience of Jesus when He suffered and died on the cross. I did not consider that Jesus endured incredible suffering leading up to the death he died on the cross for the redemption of our sins.

Because He was a man with flesh and blood, He had to share in our humanity so that "by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil." (Heb.2: 14)

Jesus was made perfect through His suffering. (Heb.2:10)
We are to share in His suffering in order that we may also

share in His glory.

There is no other way to learn obedience than through suffering.

Jesus went first, making a way for us to spend eternity with Him, through His own obedience to His Father. We are taught that during Jesus' life on earth, "He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he

became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him." (Heb.5:7&8)

Because we know that we will suffer for Christ, prayer is the source of strength that will keep us through our suffering. If Jesus offered up prayers with loud cries and tears, so should we. God will hear our cries and answer our prayers; we are not hidden from His sight.

Jesus understands our weaknesses. Because of His obedience, we have been given full access to the throne of God, "for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Heb.4:15&16)

Instead of being shocked when we are tempted and when we suffer, we get to come to our Father with confidence. We are encouraged to not throw away our confidence and to persevere. (Heb.10:36)

We are being transformed into pure, holy and righteous children as we go to God in our weaknesses in our times of suffering. Instead of running from what God is calling us into and taking the easy road, we are to not shrink back and so displease our Father. (Heb.10:38)

We are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Instead of complaining when we are tempted and when we suffer, Let's follow the example Jesus set as we follow His steps and, "let us be thankful and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire." (Heb.12:28&29)

Today's Prayer: "Father, it is so easy to read Your Word and see that suffering is part of what I am called to; but in the middle of suffering, I am weak. Just as Your Son learned obedience through His suffering, I know You desire the same for me. Would You please strengthen me and help me to not shrink back when the road becomes narrow and bumpy? As I lay down pride, would You please cloak me with the cloak of humility so I can come to You in my weaknesses and cry out to You? I am so thankful that Jesus' suffering and obedience has given me full access to Your throne of grace and mercy. Holy Spirit, I give You permission to do whatever is necessary in me so that I can become pure, holy and blameless in my Father's sight. Thank You for not forsaking me in my weaknesses. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #31

Proverbs 18:24(NIV) "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



A friend who sticks closer than a brother...

I have a confession.

The other day as I was praying, I realized something.

I have asked God to be many things to me over the years, but I had never asked Him to be my friend.

As I was praying, reflecting on friendships and praying for my friends, God showed me that He wants to be my friend. I was taken aback.

I felt like I was back in third grade and someone had just passed me a torn piece of paper folded in half. Scribbled in large print with a No.2 pencil was this message, "Do you want to be my friend? Circle one: YES or NO."

"I can't imagine God wanting to be **MY** friend," was my first thought.

Yet, as we read throughout scripture, that is exactly what God wants to be to each one of us; our friend.

Jesus tells us in the Gospel of John, "I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you." (Jn.15:15&16)

So, it's not us passing the scribbled note to Jesus asking for His friendship - He has chosen us as His friend. Not only has He chosen us, He is also sharing with us everything His Father has made known to Him. He longs to be the best friend we've ever had.

What does He ask for in return? That's simple. He asks that we would be as loyal and committed in our friendship with Him as He is with us. He tells us what friendship with God requires as we read in James, "Don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God." (Jas.4:4)

Our God is a jealous God. He desires us to stick close to His side and promises to stick close to us no matter what. He wants to be our dearest and closest friend. He will not grow weary or lose interest in us as time goes on. He will not abandon ship when high winds blow and waves come crashing all around us. He will remain faithful, even if we are not.

James shares with us about the relationship between God and Abraham. He says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness, and he was called God's friend." (Jas.2:23)

I pray that we will all embrace God's friendship.

I can think of no better epitaph than, "She believed God and was called God's friend."

Today's Prayer: "God, I feel unworthy to be called Your friend. Yet that is what You desire, my friendship. Please teach me what it means to not be a friend of the world. Open my eyes to areas of my life that are still holding onto the world. I desire to be close to You. I say, "YES!" I want to be Your friend, God. As I continue to get to know You, and spend more time with You, I know I will become more like You. I long for my heart to beat as one with Your heart. I love You. Thank you for the gift of Your friendship. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #32

I Corinthians 6:19&20(NIV) "Do you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at at price. Therefore, honor God with your body."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit...

If you have ever been a part of a remodel project, you know how messy it can be. It seems most of the houses I lived in as a child became candidates for being remodeled to better fit the size of our family.

Walls were knocked out as lathe and plaster sent layers of white, chalky dust into every nook and cranny of the house. Sometimes foundations had to be removed and new ones laid one wheelbarrow of cement at a time. It was physically exhausting, tedious and messy for months on end.

During the remodel process, we didn't invite friends to our home; we wanted to wait until the project was finished so they would only be able to see the beauty of the finished project.

Does it feel like God is doing a remodel in you Inner World? As the Holy Spirit burns out all that is not pleasing to our Father, entire walls may need to be knocked down. The uprooting of what must go, to make room for what is good and pleasing, is difficult and messy. However, as we fully commit our lives to our Father, we are reminded, "Do you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body." (1Cor.6:19&20)

Remember, this is what we have desired; to become pure, holy and blameless children of God. (Eph.5:27) There is no way around the mess of lathe and plaster being stripped from walls. We cannot rush the long, tedious and painful process. Weeds must be pulled out that have pushed their way through the foundations of our souls.

There is only one blueprint for our house, and God is holding it. He is the General Contractor, knowing what must go and what must stay. We get to fully participate in the process, holding onto the Word of God, as we trust God with what is best for us.

God is faithful. As we surrender our lives into His hands, we know that "the works of his hands are faithful and just." (Ps.111:7) God gently holds us during the process of being transformed into His image, even when it feels that the pain of walls coming down and roots being pulled, is more than we can bear.

Let's stay the course as our remodel projects are in process, knowing that, "the Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made." (Ps.145:13)

As every impurity is removed, there will be no more darkness within us. When we

honor God with our bodies, the glory of God will be the light within our ever-transforming temples.

Today's Prayer: "Father, I know that my body is a temple for the Holy Spirit. I know that the Holy Spirit is a gift from You, and that I am to honor You with my body. There is a lot of remodeling that needs to happen in my Inner World. Please forgive me for trying to build my house to suit my own set of blueprints, instead of trusting You with the Master Plan. Please stay close to me as the process of becoming more like You will require me to trust You in ways I have never trusted You before. Sometimes the pain of weeds being uprooted is more than I can bear, yet I know that it is for my good that they must be removed. I desire for the light within me to shine bright and draw others to You. Help me to see that the process of transformation is necessary so that I can bring glory to You. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #33

Proverbs 3:11&12(NIV) "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



The Lord disciplines those He loves...

As one of six children, discipline was one thing my father believed in strongly. I tried learning from the mistakes of my sibling, but somehow I would find myself in situations that landed me in the hot seat.

My father would step in, against my wishes, and I would gain first-hand knowledge on the pain of discipline.

The first-hand lessons on discipline brought greater clarity than the lessons I learned from watching my sibling experience being disciplined.

Discipline, when implemented in love, produces obedience. Paul, the author of Hebrews, reminds us that discipline is a good thing when he says, "If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children

and not true sons." (Heb.12:8)

My childhood experiences of being disciplined have given me insights into raising and loving my own children, not to mention great stories to reflect on when talking with my sibling. It's hard to believe that the painful memories of discipline can, over time, become a fond memory. The fondness comes from knowing that our father loved us too much to not discipline our unacceptable behavior.

As an adult, I thought my days of being disciplined were far behind me. However, more often than I care to admit, I still undergo discipline; though now from my heavenly Father.

It took some time to discern the difference between thinking Satan was out to get me, from knowing that my Father was providing me with a healthy dose of discipline.

When we endure hardship, it's easy to think we are being attacked by the forces of evil; so we may begin to rebuke Satan from our lives. But Godly discipline is different altogether from being attacked by the forces of evil.

Just as I had thought as a child that I knew better than my father how my life should be lived, sometimes I do the same with my heavenly Father. At those times, His hand of discipline weighs heavily upon me, as He reminds me that He "disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in." (Prov. 3:12)

God loves us too much to leave us to our own demise. He knows what is best for us and "disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." (Heb.12:10&11)

In the middle of experiencing the Lord's discipline, comes pain. When we surrender our hearts to our Father through the discipline, pain produces Godly sorrow and Godly sorrow brings repentance. Instead of being rebellious, grieving the Spirit, He longs for us to yield in submission to His hand of discipline. He is not raising spoiled, pampered children, but rather children who are moldable and useable, who delight His heart.

So what are we to do when we are being disciplined by our Father? We are to strengthen our feeble arms and our weak knees and not lose heart or make light His discipline because the "Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." (Heb.12:5&6)

I believe that as God disciplines us, leading us back to the Path of Obedience, He understands our pain. He might even feel how my father felt before presenting my punishment, when he would say, "This hurts Me more than it hurts you."

Today's Prayer: "Father, discipline hurts. In the process of being disciplined, I want to run from You and hide. Yet, I know that You long for me to surrender my will and allow Your will to be done in my life. Please soften my heart so I can be moldable in Your hands. Thank You for loving me too much to not discipline me. I want to be a child that brings You delight, not grief. Help me to not rebel against Your hand of discipline. Help me to not think I know better than You how to live my life. I know that apart from You, I stray from the path of obedience; so please keep me close to Your side. Strengthen my feeble arms and weak knees as I continue to learn how to yield my life to You. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #34

Psalm 39:4&5(NIV) "Show me, O Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



How fleeting is my life...

She didn't see the truck coming over the hill as she crossed the road to get her mail.

Regaining consciousness, she hears beeping noises close to her ear, and smells what she recognizes from visiting her grandmother before she passed, as the familiar smell of a hospital.

Attempting to open her eyes, everything is out of focus. A sudden hush falls over the room.

Slowly, her eyes follow the arm of the hand that is holding her own hand, working their way up to what she recognizes as the face of her husband. He is crying uncontrollably as he caresses her fingers in his hand, but she can't make out what he is saying, her head is too foggy.

There is no feeling in the lower half of her body, and she wonders why. Feeling very

confused, she closes her eyes to think.

"No!" She screams to herself behind closed eyelids. "This is not supposed to happen to me! I am young and healthy. I have small children who need me. I am a runner who needs her legs. I haven't experienced growing old with my husband or the thrill of being a grandparent." So many thoughts race through her mind that she can't keep track of them all.

The years of her life flash before her like a blur. Having led a fast-paced life, she earned degree after degree, setting high personal goals for herself just to see if she could reach them. There had been little time for anyone other than herself. Thankfully, her husband was a runner too, or she might not have met him. They had met at a local road race six years earlier. Now, six years and two kids later, here she was fighting for her every breath.

She thinks of all the things she still wants to do with her life. She remembers being a little girl in Sunday school, remembers praying the prayer to ask Jesus into her heart. She had been so young and so excited to know this Jesus; she had prayed to Him every night before bed.

"It's been a long time, Jesus," she reminisces, "I had planned to live my life for You, but somehow I lost my focus. I planned to give you all of me after I was finished reaching my personal goals. This can't be the end for me--I need more time. All that I have set my hands to accomplish has been for me, I see it so clearly now. Please forgive me for putting You on the back shelf."

Though she wishes to open her eyes and tell her husband of the peace she feels and the love of Jesus that is flooding her body, she cannot.

The noise of the room fades, as her heart slows. The heart rate monitor displays an irreversible flat line...**B...E...E...P.**

Today's Prayer: "Father, I know that my life is but a breath. I want to live each moment for You, without exception. Please open my eyes to see You and my ears to hear You. You are all that matters to me. May my life be a conduit of blessing to reach Your kingdom and to bring You glory. Whatever You ask of my life, I will do it. Please forgive me for the times when I lose focus. I desire to live the rest of my days for You, as I daily die to myself. May I decrease and may You increase. I love You. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #35

Matthew 7:13&14(NIV) "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



Small is the gate and narrow the road...

"What does it mean?" She asked as her eyes moved from one sign to the next and back again.

They had been traveling for days on a road that seemed to go on forever. There had been twists and turns, valleys and mountains, good weather and bad weather.

However, until now, the road had been wide, and they had weathered the journey together.

"This is what we've been searching for." He calmly replied as his eyes followed hers, taking in the new change of

scenery.

The road had come to a "T" and there was a choice to be made.

One road, wide and smooth, turned off to the left. The other road, narrow and rocky, went in the exactly opposite direction.

"If we go left, things will continue to be good as they've been for years." She thought out loud. "If we go right, we will have to leave behind all we have because there is no room on the path for anything except ourselves."

"And don't forget," he added, "If we choose to give up all we have and take the narrow road, we can never come back."

Although she had often dreamt of the narrow road and had desired to follow it, now that their journey had led them to this place everything looked and felt different and strange. Yet, desire and hope filled her even more than they had in her dreams, and she found that she could not take her eyes off the narrow road.

Their children caught up to them on the road, unaware that one choice could alter the only life they had ever known. One choice could forever change the landscape of all of their lives.

For a long time no one spoke.

"Well," the man found his voice and turned to the woman with a look in his eyes she had never seen before in all the years they had journeyed together, "I have no idea where this narrow path will take us, no idea at all." His voice trailed off almost as if he had forgotten he was speaking at all. The sadness in his eyes had a twinge of adventure seeping through. His calloused hands subconsciously rubbed his day old whiskers, as he lost himself in thought.

Many stories had been shared along the way with other passersby of what had been referred to as The Pearl of Great Price. It was said that the Pearl was so valuable that one would sell all he or she had in search of such a great Treasure.

Though the woman had thought that the Pearl her heart treasured would always be out of reach, something deep stirred within every time she heard of this Pearl of Great Price. Hope and desire never allowed her to completely let go of the possibility that something, or someone, bigger than herself could be all her heart would ever need.

Yet the battle continued to wage within her, "What about the children? What about security? Why can't you just be happy with the life you already have? Why hope for what you cannot see?" And so the questions came one after the other, but a choice had to be made.

The man and woman locked hands. Peace and strength filled the couple with great measure, covering the children as well.

They knew that the choice had already been made. They knew that they were certain of what they hoped for even though they were unable to see it. Their hearts felt alive and full of God's love as they approached the small gate leading to a narrow road.

They turned right and didn't look back.

Today's Prayer: "Father, You have blessed my life beyond measure. Thank You for guiding me in every choice that must be made regarding my life. I know that in each decision I am faced with, I am not alone. I do not want to live my life in fear of what the world will think of me; I long to live my life to bring You glory. Please lead me to the small gate and narrow road and help me to not make decisions that will keep me from Your perfect will. May Your will be done in my life and may the decisions made each step of the journey keep me far from the broad road. Today I choose to turn away from

the world as I turn to You. All I have to offer You is myself. Today I give You all of me. I will leave behind what's familiar as I give You permission to change the landscape of my life. I will not look back. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #36

Psalm 23:4(NIV) "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



I will fear no evil...

Most of us could recite the 23rd Psalm. I know I have had it memorized for years. However, it wasn't until a couple years ago that the words went from my head to my heart.

I was walking through my own dark valley when I decided to read Psalms 23. I read it out loud, which is what I do often when I want to actually hear the words I am reading instead of skimming over them. As I read, I visualized what it would look like to lie down in green pastures and be led beside quiet waters. I tried imagining what it would feel like to not fear evil as I pictured Jesus standing by my side.

I recognized the times I had felt I deserved to voice my complaint to the world in the middle of my darkness, hoping for sympathy or empathy, instead of going to God.

"Is it possible," I thought to myself, "to exude strength and confidence in the middle of darkness by allowing God to be my strength and comfort, instead of living in fear?"

I had never considered that I was worthy of such attention or affection as portrayed in the 23rd Psalm. I paused, knowing I couldn't read any further without asking God to help my unbelief. As I prayed, I felt the full weight of the truth of God's Word-- His promises to me, and I fell apart. His truth filled me with a new confidence.

My situation didn't change that day, but my heart did. I learned that when one's

heart changes, so does one's perspective.

Suddenly, my dark valley didn't feel quite so dark.

As we pray the 23rd Psalm, let's recognize the different names of God, along with the truth of their meanings:

"The Lord is my shepherd (**Jehovah-Rohi, "The Lord is my Shepherd"**), I shall lack nothing (**Jehovah-Jireh, "The Lord will Provide"**). He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters (**Jehovah-Shalom, "The Lord is Peace"**), he restores my soul (**Jehovah-Rapha, "The Lord who Heals"**). He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake (**Jehovah-Tsidkenu, "The Lord is Righteousness"**). Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil (**Jehovah-Mekaddishkem, "The Lord who Sanctifies"**); my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

God wants to walk with us in the good times and the difficult times as we allow Him to be our Shepherd, Provider, Peace, Healer, and Righteousness. He will be the Lord who Sanctifies and will give us rest, comfort, confidence and strength in His presence.

Today's Prayer: "Lord, I ask today that You would open my eyes and my heart to take You at Your Word. As I study Your Word, I ask that You would illuminate Your truths and plant them deep within my heart. There are times when it feels that the weight of the world is on my shoulders. Teach me to trust You with my cares as I surrender them to You. I long to be led beside still waters and to lie down in green pastures. I know You are my Shepherd, watching out for and protecting me. I will hold on tightly to You and all that Your name entails. Even in the dark valleys, I know You have me; so I will be confident in You. Thank You for Your joy that fills me with hope even, in the valleys. I love You. In Jesus name I pray, amen"

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #37

Psalm 27: 4(NIV) "One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple."



all the days of my life...

What is the one thing that your soul craves?

When looking through scripture, there is a common theme between the men and women of the Bible who desired to live their lives to please God, and us. They wanted to love and be loved; to know and be known. They wanted to place their trust and faith in the One who would remain faithful and never forsake them, regardless of the sins that tripped them up. We are no different.

David was a man after God's own heart (ISam.13:14), he was divinely chosen and anointed by God (ISam.16:13), and became one of the greatest kings of Israel.

David's life was filled with great accomplishments and stained with terrible sin. It would be fair to say that he had some high highs, and some low lows. Before he became one of the greatest kings, he was known as a fine musician, so reputable that he played before the king (ISam.16:14-23). He was also a poet who wrote much of the Psalms, including the 23rd Psalm.

David went from being the youngest of eight boys, a courageous shepherd boy; to being a prominent king, having more power than anyone of his day. In spite of the power and privileges accompanied with being the king, there was only one thing that David's soul ultimately craved. It was something that no amount of power and no person could satisfy. David tells it well when he says, "One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple." (Ps.27:4)

Although David's heart was led astray by sin, the darkness of his sin and the realization of his depravity led him back to the heart of God, "My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, Lord, I will seek. Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Savior." (Ps.27:8&9)

Just like David, we are God's servants. Just like David, we are tempted and sometimes led astray by sin. And, just like David, there is nothing and no one that can satisfy the true cravings of our soul except our Lord.

What is the one thing that your soul craves?

Today's Prayer: "Father, I know that only You can satisfy the cravings of my soul. Nothing else and no one else can be to me what only You can be--my God and King. I desire to seek You and know You as I am known by You. I desire to love You and accept the love You have for me. Please forgive me for the many times I push You away out of fear, when my foot slips into sin and I feel unworthy of receiving Your love. I cannot fathom a love as great as Yours. Please stay close to me and do not hide Your face from me or turn me away in anger. I am so desperate for You. My soul will not be satisfied with anything less than all of You. I will seek You and worship You as I gaze upon Your beauty. There is nothing else my soul craves, only Your presence. I love You. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #38

Exodus 4:10-13(NIV) Moses said to the Lord, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." The Lord said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or dumb? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say." But Moses said, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



please send someone else to do it...

Every time I read about the men and women God chose as His servants in the Bible, I am reminded of their shortcomings and their personal inadequacies.

Because they were aware of their shortcomings, many times they would argue with God as to their ability to represent Him and do what He was asking them to do.

However, the more I thought about it, the more I realized that it wasn't so much their shortcomings that kept them from being obedient to God when He asked them to go and be His hands and feet.

Moses used the excuse of not being eloquent, being slow of speech and tongue.

Gideon, when asked to stand up for God, used the excuse of being the weakest clan and the least in his family. It would appear that they were being humble in recognizing their human weaknesses in light of God's greatness.

But when you remove all the excuses and work to the root of the matter--it comes down to trust.

What God was really calling them to, was to trust Him completely, regardless of their qualifications or lack thereof.

God parted the Red Sea, bringing the Israelites safely across, saving them from the hand of the Egyptians under Moses' leadership. Only after their eyes saw the great power of the Lord did they "fear the Lord and put their *trust* in him and in Moses his servant." (Ex.14:31) God understood the Israelites inability to trust what they could not see, so He allowed them to see His power for themselves and He allowed them to not only trust Him, who they couldn't see; but also Moses, who they could see.

But as people, we quickly forget all the wonderful things the Lord does for us. We struggle trusting what our eyes cannot see or our hands cannot touch. Such was the case with the Israelites. So God said to Moses, "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their *trust* in you." (Ex.19:9)

Although God allowed the Israelites to put their trust in Moses, Moses was not exempt from trusting God. Later, when the Israelite community was complaining in the desert because there was no water, God told Moses to speak (even though Moses had told God he was slow of speech and tongue) to the rock before their eyes and it would pour out water. Instead, Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff, disobeying God's specific instructions. Water gushed out for the Israelite community and their livestock. However, the Lord said to Moses, "Because you did not *trust* me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them." (Ex.20:12)

The Israelites constantly grumbled and complained and thought the Lord was out to get them, even though He performed miracle after miracle before their eyes. We are told, "In spite of this (the miracles performed), you did not *trust* in the Lord your God, who went ahead of you on your journey, in fire by night and in a cloud by day, to search out places for you to camp and to show you the way you should go." (Deut.1:32)

It all comes down to trust.

God is asking us today, "Do you trust me? Do you believe that I am on your side? Will you be my hands and feet?"

What will our answer be?

Will we trust and obey our God, or will we hold onto our personal inadequacies as excuses, and say, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it."

Today's Prayer: "Father, I will no longer use my personal inadequacies as an excuse to not trust You. I realize that You are asking for me to trust You completely, regardless of how things look. I know that You are asking me to fear You and to serve You with all of my heart, soul, mind and strength. Please forgive me for the times I grumble and complain about my circumstances instead of trusting and worshipping You. You are faithful. Please help my unbelief. Please help me to not rebel against You when I am afraid. I desire to trust You completely. I desire to spend my life obeying whatever You ask of me, Your servant. In Jesus name I pray, amen"

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #39

James 1:27(NIV) "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



look after orphans and widows...

She didn't know what to expect as she stepped out of the airport into the warm African air. She was here for the purpose of seeing what could be done from a business perspective to help meet the great needs of the people. Until now, the people had been faces on pictures or stories others had shared of personal experiences. Although touching, she figured it best to keep the heart in check, and instead work with the mindset to help find a solution for an impoverished nation.

There was nothing that could have prepared her for what the next day would bring as the driver turned down the bumpy, dusty alley to the gate of the orphanage, honking the horn to let the gatekeeper know they had arrived.

She trailed behind the team of three ladies she was with as they entered the orphanage. The smell was almost more than she could stomach. There were cribs

lined up, end to end, with babies laying on their backs staring up at her. Some met her surprised eyes, some were sleeping, and others were unfazed by her presence.

Bottles were propped next to the baby's heads, as they did their best to feed themselves, milk running down their necks and soaking their tiny bodies. The stench of milk-soiled clothes filled the hot, stuffy room and there was nowhere to go to escape it.

A little blind baby was listless and burning with fever. It was decided that she needed immediate medical attention. Other babies were sick as well. There was a low supply of diapers, which led to infrequent changes for each little baby. The smell of soiled diapers met the smell of spoiled milk; it was more than she could take in, so she slipped outside.

Instead of holding and loving the babies, she asked the driver to take her to buy more formula and diapers. "This is no time to be emotional," she rationalized as the driver slowly maneuvered the car through traffic, dodging a sea of people walking or sitting alongside the road. The smell of diesel, mixed with dust from the bumpy road and the heat of the day made her swallow hard to keep her breakfast down, as they bounced from store to store.

Each day they traveled to different orphanages to learn of the orphanage's needs and the needs of the mothers who, with set jaws and broken hearts, had given their babies up, hoping for a better life for them than they could offer. She met some of the mothers; they were young and beautiful. They had strength and resolve that women twice their age did not possess in developed countries. They had names and personalities and feelings--and shy smiles. Some of the young mothers were the same age as her own daughter and she felt her mother's heart long to hold them. They didn't run from her as she stared into their faces trying to imagine what their lives must be like. Instead, they welcomed her arms around their necks as she embraced them and held her hands as she put them to their cheeks to gaze into their faces.

She put away the rational business face she had arrived with--it was not needed. The babies and mothers were not in need of anything temporary she could buy for them. They were desperate for hope and in need of love. They were no different from herself, yet they were different from anyone she had ever met.

As she stood in the city, she took in the size of the great need.

That night, alone in her room, she wept. Her own eyes had seen and her hands had held and her heart had opened to love.

As she boarded the plane headed for home, she sat in silence. Now that God had captured her attention, she was faced with a decision; a decision that might cost her everything.

She put her seat in the lean-back position and closed her eyes as the plane headed across the nation to the land of the free, leaving behind the home of the brave.

Today's Prayer: "Father, I know that Your heart breaks for the needs of Your children. I know that You love every orphan; they are Your precious children. I know that You care about the needs of every widow, especially their need to be loved and cared for. Please show me what my part is in looking after orphans and widows. What does that mean for me, Father? I am asking You to open my heart to whatever You ask of me. I know that my life is not my own. I know that giving You all of me requires me to let go of the idea that my life should be comfortable and easy. Just because my eyes cannot see the vast needs of Your children, I know that I am not exempt from reaching the nations for You. Today, I am asking that You would speak to me and show me what living a life of selfless obedience looks like. I am unable to change myself, this much I know. Please change my heart and lead me in Your path of obedience. I long to spend my life bringing glory to You, even though it may cost me everything. I love You with an undying love. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

40 Days of Increasing Dependence on God: Day #40

Ephesians 6:24(NIV) "Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love."

Valleybrook Church | 412 S. Barstow Street | Eau Claire | WI | 54701



Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise...

For forty days our focus has been, on seeking God and drawing close to Him.

He's shared His heart as we've opened His Word, we've been convicted, encouraged and spurred.

He said, "Call to me and I will answer you." He delivered us from our fears and made us new.

He said, "Draw near to Me, and your face will shine, you

are the branch and I am the vine."

Devote yourself to prayer, being watchful and giving thanks, and when you fast and seek Me, I will fill up your tank.

Just like Joseph, hold on to your dream, remember that things are sometimes not what they seem.

Go after the lost sheep; leave the ninety nine to find the one, this was the priority and the heart of My Son.

Don't just merely listen to My Word, but do what I say; allow It to enter your heart and your mind, as you seek Me and pray.

When you are in a dark valley, you are never alone; I will cover you with My feathers, for you are My own.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition; rather, consider other's needs, and remember though you may water and plant, it is I who own the seed.

Your life is short; you are but a breath, a withering flower. Get up and pray so the devil, like a lion, won't devour.

Remember Esther who risked her own life saying, "If I perish, I perish." My grace for you is sufficient; you are My child whom I cherish.

To be My child is different than to be born of man, here's what one must do to be part of My clan: Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, the price My Son paid, you could never afford. Believe in your heart that I raised Him from the dead, that for His love for you, He suffered and bled.

Seek first My Kingdom; make it the center of your existence. Stay true to my path, though it will not be the path of least resistance.

Don't question Me when things don't make sense. When you're weathered and worn, don't put up your defense.

You long to be holy and righteous and pure, the process is painful and one must endure.

Your body is My temple; walls must come down. My discipline is for your good, and for My own renown.

I will satisfy the thirsty, and for the hungry give good things. With unveiled faces approach My throne and worship the King of Kings.

Who is it that you say I am? Am I the living God? Come like a child; humble yourself, no pretense and no facade.

Yes, hope deferred makes one's heart sick and desire hurts so deep, but My fulfillment is a tree of life, and I will hold you as you weep.

Stick close to Me, I am your friend, I will stick closer than a brother. What your soul craves, I alone fulfill, you will find it in no other.

Though foxes have holes and birds have nests, My Son had nowhere to lay His head. Small is the gate and narrow the road for those who follow Him instead.

When you say, "Speak, for your servant is listening," you have My full attention. Though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you will be filled with more love than you can mention.

Orphans and widows, do not ignore. Care for their needs, I strongly implore.

A great cloud of witnesses are clapping and cheering for you, so do not ask Me to send someone else to do what only you can do.

Just as I did for Jonathan, I will join you in spirit, with someone you might not have guessed. They will love you deeply from the heart and both of you will be blessed.

Remember Ananias, just a Christian, My obedient son? History was changed when he said to Me, "Yes, Lord, Your will be done."

Regardless your past, you have been set aside from birth; I am redeeming your story. So seek Me and serve Me all of your days, live your life to bring Me much glory.

Stay the Course...

Sheila Cote'

Today's Prayer: "O, Lord, there is no one like You. You are holy and righteous. You are worthy of my praises. I will praise Your name all the

days of my life. When I draw my last breath, Your name will be on my lips. You have given me life. My soul is alive in You. Just as the sun rises and sets at Your command, so shall I praise You with each new sunrise. You are glorious and majestic. You are my rock and my salvation. Humbly I come to Your throne to worship and adore You. You are beautiful and too wonderful for me to comprehend. You are all my heart desires; there is no one like You. You are King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Holy, holy, holy are You Lord God Almighty. Blessed be Your name forever."