

The Weekly Word
June 22-28, 2015

I hope you enjoy Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. I do. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

Monday, June 22: 2Corinthians 1- Prayer makes a difference...

*We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, **as you help us by your prayers**. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us **in answer to the prayers of many** (8-11).*

Paul and friends suffered under great pressure and even despaired of life... those are words of tremendous anguish. I like to muse on Paul, the great missionary, evangelist, apostle... miracles, many being saved, traveling the world. And although this was certainly part of the story it was not the entire story, not by a long shot. Paul also endured great suffering for the sake of his calling as an apostle.

But what struck me and led me toward God's heart this morning were the 2 phrases I bolded in the reading.

as you help us by your prayers...

in answer to the prayers of many...

The prayers of the saints for Paul made a difference. Paul was convinced of this. The Holy Spirit wanted us to know this, inspiring Paul to put these words in Holy Writ.

Prayer makes a difference. Prayer matters.

We have long established tradition at my church to pray for anyone heading out on a short or long term mission or ministry trip. Sometimes I wonder just how important that is. Paul reminds me that those moments are VERY important.

We have another long established tradition of prayer teams available to pray with and for anyone at worship for any need. This, too, I am reminded is HIGHLY important.

I have a friend who has begun praying with some teachers and staff at the local school after school weekly. I don't know what a godly affect this will have but it will affect the school. It really will.

Prayer matters... it really does.

As we pray for others, God does things in the heavens. Our prayers affect those people, movements, and advances of the kingdom.

Prayer matters... it really does.

Lord, teach me to pray with greater passion, regularity and faith for the sake of saints around the world and for the sake of Your kingdom's advance to the ends of the earth. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Tuesday, June 23: 2Corinthians 2- The aroma of Christ...

I love it when I come home in the winter and my wife has had a chicken soup cooking on the stove all day. The house is filled with this wonderful aroma that jumps on me as soon as I open the door. Or similarly in the summer when I arrive at a friend's house and the BBQ is fired up and the meats are already cooking... ahh, the aroma of a summer BBQ!

In like fashion, we are to be the aroma of Jesus in the world.

But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing (14-15).

I am to be God's pleasing perfume in the world today.

The word perfume kicks off another set of thoughts and images in my meditation. Some women, with just a touch of perfume, can turn a head as their scent, their aroma, wafts by.

I am to be God's pleasing scent in the world today.

The goal of my living for Jesus is to be so pleasant and pleasing that people are drawn to Jesus. My life is to add aroma to a world often filled with the scent of hatred, bigotry and other malice...

Lord, help me to live pleasingly on Your behalf and so become a pleasing aroma for You in my world. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Wednesday, June 24: 2Corinthians 3- Our letter of recommendation...

Paul writes that the Corinthians were his letter of recommendation for ministry. *Do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter...* (1b-2a).

This statement got me thinking. What would be my letter of recommendation of my faith and ministry? I am not an apostle so I cannot point to some church founded or body of believers worshipping somewhere that didn't exist until I arrived and planted that church. So what is my imprint of ministry and faith?

I looked outside at my backyard as I was pondering this. Over the 13 years we have lived here my wife and I have completely re-sculpted the gardens. Oh, the terraced rock walls are the same but beyond that, the plantings, the colors, the fenced in portion, the outdoor lighting and speakers and so on, are all our imprint on the back yard.

People leave an imprint wherever they live...

This thought of an imprint helped me reframe the Lord's nudge in my heart. What is my faith-imprint? I don't have to be an apostle to have a faith imprint...

Lives impacted... I thought about some people along the way whose lives I touched for God and for good. (Who might you point to... people you have touched?)

I thought about ministries/programs in the churches I have been a part of that I maybe helped start or I simply volunteered and worked with. Sunday school classes taught, church dinners I helped set up, clean up. My list wasn't filled with big or notable things as much as small acts of service... (What might you point to... things you have done to build God's kingdom?)

These are our letters of recommendation, our faith-imprint...

And this got me thinking, now toward the future. What would I wish my faith-imprint to be? Are there people God has laid on my heart whom I might impact for God and for good? Are there ministry ideas or programs that I can support with my time, talent or finances?

O, Lord God, I want to leave an imprint for You in my world. When I leave this world and go to be with You, I want there to be a garden of lives and services rendered in Your name and for Your glory that speak of my life lived for You. Amen.

Thursday, June 25: 2Corinthians 4- renouncing the ungodly...

Devotions are different each day. This morning the first words of verse 2 gripped me. *We have renounced secret and shameful ways...*

Thoughts about what God has required me to renounce seized me. I was not involved with cults or false idols before I began my walk with Jesus, so I didn't have those kinds of secret things to renounce.

There were secret compartments of my life that I did have to open and then surrender to Jesus. I had aspirations, relationships and behaviors that could not or should not continue if I were to abide with Jesus.

My thoughts went to those places this morning and I pondered and probed their roots in my life to examine if I honestly dealt with them at the core...

And so my morning went as I sat with my Lord this morning.

Lord, I pray that I have been honest with myself and that I have truly looked deep into the areas You need me to deal with. Lord, I do this as part of my surrender to You, my Lord and my God.

I ask, too, if there are areas in my life that You want me to begin dealing with, that until now I have not recognized as an area for growth. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, June 26: 2Corinthians 5- Ambassador for Christ...

Ambassador is an important governmental position. Ambassadors represent the government and its leaders to a foreign people. Ambassadors are the voice of the President, Prime Minister or whatever the governmental leader is called.

According to Paul we are God's ambassadors in this world. *We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us...* (8). If that is so then we represent God to this world!

I let that sink in... God has appointed me (and you) as His ambassador to the human race. We make God known so that people can be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

As I write this, I sit in a crowded international airport. I am God's ambassador here, right now! What should an ambassador do?

I guess I should embody God, my Savior, as best I can... my attitude, my demeanor, my politeness should reflect our God, who seeks to reconcile others to Himself. And when given an opportunity I should, on behalf of the Lord, make God's appeal, inviting people to be reconciled.

What an awesome responsibility...

Lord, empower me to be the best ambassador I was created to be. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, June 27: 2Corinthians 6- Unequally Yoked...

I was on an extended trip to West Africa when I sat for my devotions after a long day of travel. Reading chapter 6 verses 14-18 struck me.

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

“I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

Therefore,

“Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.”

And,

“I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty” (14-18).

I found myself chewing on these verses, particularly the opening salvo. Paul is quite direct and strong. Don't be yoked to unbelievers... what do they have in common, what harmony or fellowship do they have with unbelievers, he counsels.

The key is the meaning of yoked... I know from 1Cor 5:9-10 that Paul does not mean that we are never to associate with unbelievers. In that case we would have to leave the world, Paul says in 1Cor5:10. Additionally, I need only recall yesterday's devotion about being ambassadors for Christ! So he is certainly forbidding some other relationship, one of deep connection.

At this point I was interrupted to eat dinner.

And after dinner I found myself amongst a group of Christians from across Africa. I didn't know any of their names and, yet, as they sang praises to God and read the Bible together I was instantly connected to them. It hit me, I can never have this kind or depth of connection with an unbeliever. My inner spirit will never resonate with theirs like mine did tonight with these other Christ followers.

As I mentally wandered back to the verses above, it hit me that I must never put myself in a relationship where I will be forced to choose between my relationship with the unbeliever and my God. That, it seems to me, is what Paul is meaning when he used the word 'yoked together'.

I began to search through my relationships. Are there any that would lead me away for Jesus? This is my take away tonight as I meditate and pray.

Lord, fidelity to You is of utmost importance. May every relationship I have draw me closer to you. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sunday, June 28, 2015, Sunday Worship

If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.

If you are reading along with me from the PCOG website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@pcogonline.org.

Click here for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.