

Renew Series Week 6 Devotions

Our devotions for the coming week were written by Dumisani Mnkandhla and they are designed to help us manage our attention to be able to think and act like champions.

DAY 1: God Is With Us

Scripture: *That same day two of them were walking to the village Emmaus, about seven miles out of Jerusalem. They were deep in conversation, going over all these things that had happened. In the middle of their talk and questions, Jesus came up and walked along with them. But they were not able to recognize who he was. (Luke 24:13-16. The Message Bible)*

Reflection: It was a few days after Jesus' death and two of his disciples were walking along the road to Emmaus feeling sad and disappointed when he joined them. However, their attention was so fixated on discussing his death to realise that not only was he alive but he was right there with them. For some time that day they missed the significance of history's greatest event because they were so focused on their disappointments and problems. So often we too find ourselves consumed with our issues, dashed hopes, failures and frustrations that we forget that Jesus promised to never leave nor forsake us (Matt 28:20, Heb 13:5). His name is Emmanuel which means "God is with us". It is by no coincidence that this is one of Jesus' names and this should always be a reminder of his never ceasing presence in our lives. Tough times, loss of loved ones, disappointments and failure are just but a few in the long list of things that may cloud our view of God being with us. It takes active effort to take our attention from the issues that overwhelm us to see that Jesus is right there with us to take our hand and walk us through the storm. Reading further in Luke 24 to verse 32, the disciples finally realized it was Jesus they had been walking along with the whole time. How much worrying and disappointment would they have saved themselves if they had paid enough attention to see it was Jesus walking with them all along? Let us learn from their lesson and know that through it all, in every season, He is Alive and He is With Us.

DAY 2: Keep The Main Thing The Main Thing

Scripture: *No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. (Matt 6:24. NIV Bible).*

Reflection: Someone said, "Multitasking is a myth, you aint doing anything good, just everything awful". I'm not sure how far true that is but it sure applies to what Jesus was saying in this Scripture. Jesus says we can only have one master. We live in a materialistic society where many people serve money; they spend their lives chasing it at every expense, even that of other people's lives. Some live by the motto, "Money Over Everything" while some have even sang songs with that title. Their desire for money and what it can buy far outweighs their commitment to God. Money in itself is not evil but the Bible tells us that the love for it is "the root of all kinds of evil". We all strive to study hard, work hard and make money to earn a decent living. God has absolutely no problem with that and in fact encourages us to work hard and use our gifts and talents. But our commitment to Him and pursuit to serve Him should far outweigh our chase or love for 'paper'. If you were young Solomon and God gave you one wish, what would you choose? A mansion, a lambo, fame, stardom, fortune? Solomon knew the "Main Thing" and chose wisdom and went on to be the richest man to ever live. The Bible tells us that the fear of the lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). Choose God over money and he can still bless you with money and when you leave this earth, he promises you eternal life; choose money and that's all you end up with and when you die you leave it all behind. Be wise, focus your attention on what matters, keep the main thing the main thing.

DAY 3: Looking Unto Jesus

Scripture: *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. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of God. (Heb 12:1-2. NIV Bible).

Reflection: It is the Holy Spirit's work to turn our eyes away from ourselves and our own efforts to Jesus; but Satan's work is just the opposite of this, he is constantly trying to make us regard ourselves instead of Christ. He tells us, "Your sins are too great to be forgiven; you have no faith; you do not repent enough; you will never be able to continue to the end; you are not Christian enough; you have such a wavering hold of Jesus." All these are thoughts about self, and we shall never find comfort or assurance by looking within. But the Holy Spirit turns our eyes entirely away from self: he tells us that we are nothing, but that "Christ is all in all." We will never find happiness by looking at our prayers, our doings, or our feelings; it is what Jesus is, not what we are, that gives rest to the soul. If we are to overcome Satan and have peace with God, it must be by "looking unto Jesus." Keep your attention and focus simply on Him. When Jesus called Peter out of the boat to walk on water, Peter walked on water for as long as his attention was on Jesus. It is when his attention left Jesus and he looked at the wind and the high waves around him that he started to sink. Looking unto Jesus means we trust in Him, we believe Him and believe what he said to be THE truth. To help us in this we ought to talk and listen to Him in prayer, read his Word diligently and do what he says.

DAY 4: Keeping A Clear Conscience

Scripture: *Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. (Heb 13:18. NIV Bible).*

Reflection: Fire alarms have an internal switch, triggered by a beam of light. As long as the light is received unbroken by the photosensitive receiver, the detector is quiet. But if smoke, moisture, or an insect obstructs the beam for even a split second, the alarm sounds. Paying attention to that alarm can make the difference between life and death. And your conscience works on the same principle. When sin obstructs the connection between you and God, your conscience signals that something's wrong. At that moment you should thank God for helping you to feel good about feeling bad. Only a fool would turn off the alarm or develop the ability to sleep through it. A French proverb says, 'There is no pillow so soft as a clear conscience.' Listening to your conscience will keep you from going the wrong way. And if you decide to keep going regardless, your conscience will keep you from being at ease with your decision. Always ask yourself this question and you'll make the right decision: 'How will doing this affect my confidence towards God?' The Bible says, '...If our heart does not condemn us, then we have confidence towards God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we...do those things that are pleasing in His sight.' (1 John 3:21-22). In life; at home, at school and at work (when you start working), you will be continuously faced with choices to make. Every choice and decision is the ink by which you write the story of your life. God has given us the conscience to help us know when we are making the right or wrong choices – therefore we should pay attention to it.

DAY 5: WHO YOU ROLLIN' WITH?

Scripture: *These are the names of David's mighty men... (2 Sam 23:8 NIV Bible).*

Reflection: One way to understand David's success is to notice the kind of men who followed him. David is one of the most prominent characters in the Bible. Apart from his rule as king, he is well known for his military prowess. This passage of Scripture reveals the mighty men of David and their courageous exploits. When you read through from verse 8 – 23, you would think you were reading the narration of a superhero movie. That's how solid David's squad was! They were a part of his success as a warrior and as a king. Do you pay attention to the people you surround yourself with? We live in the age of social media where we have hundreds of "friends". This has somewhat diminished the true meaning of the word friend. David's mighty men were loyal to him and so was Jonathan his closest friend. They made him better and helped him achieve God's purposes for his life. Do our friends do the same for us? Pause and think about it. These men were also motivated by the greatness and personal qualities of their leader. Are we just taking from the good that our friends give without much to offer ourselves? Pause & think about it. And how do we choose our friends? Some of David's mighty men were previously outcasts of society, yet he chose them regardless. A good number of us choose friends because they are cool, famous, good looking, rich... this list

of superficial criteria is endless. It is important to choose friends wisely as they have a very important impact on our future. God's word rather than superficiality should motivate our choices. As you pursue God and seek to be better, you ought to pay attention to the impact your friends have on your goals.

DAY 6: CHOICES

Scripture: *Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!". Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright." "Look I'm about to die", Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?" But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob (2 Samuel 23:8 NIV Bible).*

Reflection: A birthright was an honor given to the firstborn son. It included a double portion of the family inheritance along with the honor of one day becoming the family's leader. The oldest son could sell his birthright or give it away if he chose, but in doing so, he would lose both material goods and his leadership position. Esau, as the firstborn, traded the lasting benefits of his birthright for the immediate pleasure of food. He acted on impulse, satisfying his immediate desires without pausing to consider the long-term consequences of what he was about to do. As young people we are often confronted with similar pressures. We will probably never have to choose between a birthright and soup but we all have our versions of these things; things that want to take away our birthright as heirs of God's kingdom. Drug abuse, alcohol abuse & immorality are examples of the modern day 'soup'. Most of us are familiar with the acronym YOLO (you only live once) which tells us to throw caution to the wind and 'live'. There are moments when this leads to regrets. Some choices are irreversible – they will stay with you for a lifetime. The bible tells us to enjoy life while we are young (Eccl 11:9). It is good to do so, but we shouldn't do anything physically, morally, or spiritually that will prevent us from enjoying life when we are old. God blessed us all with the gift of making choices and every day we will each face the opportunity to use this gift to choose. Heads or tails, passing pleasures or eternal values, it's our call to make – God just tosses the coin.

DAY 7: KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE PRIZE

Scripture: *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:10-14)*

Reflection: Paul, the writer of this Scripture, says that his goal is to know Christ, to be like Christ, and to be all Christ has in mind for Him. He makes an analogy of an athlete focusing on winning the prize. As the saying goes, "No pain, no gain" – athletes spend months or even years training and putting their bodies through a lot of strain and pain just to win that Olympic medal. The desire for it consumes their energy. For us the prize is far greater than an Olympic medal which we will leave behind, its being like God Himself and finally sharing eternity with Him once this life is over. This should consume our energy. It might be hard and uncomfortable at times, but we should not let anything take our eyes off our goal – knowing Christ. With the single mindedness of an athlete in training, we must lay aside everything harmful and let go of anything that may distract us from being effective Christians. What is holding you back? Paul also spoke about forgetting what is behind. We all have done things which are not proud of and we live in the constant tension of what we've been and what we want to be. Because our hope is in Christ and not ourselves, we can let go of past guilt and look forward to what God will help us become. Don't dwell on your past. Instead grow in the knowledge of God by concentrating on your relationship with Him now. Realise that you are forgiven, and then move on to a life of faith and obedience. No matter how many times you stumble and fall, get up, dust yourself and get on your way. Keep your eyes on the prize until you cross the finish line. And the good part about this particular race of Christianity is that if we finish the race, nobody takes an L, WE ARE ALL WINNERS!!!