

Week 51

December 17 - December 23

2 Timothy 4:19-22; Hebrews; 1 Peter; 2 Peter

For those of you who have been reading this devotional through the entire year, the end is almost in sight. It has been a joy to journey though the scriptures with you and to help you discover the riches that the Word of God has for you. My prayer is that your experience of reading through the entire Bible this year has been an exciting opportunity that has changed your life. When you turn the calendar to January, I hope that you will now Live the Word. James 1:22 says, "And remember, it (the word of God) is a message to obey, not just listen to. If you don't obey you are only fooling yourself." So, our theme this week, and I hope for the rest of your life, is to Live the Word. - David Curtis

December 17th

2 Timothy 4:19-22; Hebrews 1:1-4:13. "Living and Active"

"The word, as indicated by the words 'living and active,' must not be thought of as a static speech-act. Rather, it is a dynamic power that has the ability to effect change, both in the created order and in individual lives" – George H. Guthrie

So, what does it mean to "live the Word?" A big part of the meaning has to do with obedience. As I think about the above quote from Bible Commentator George H. Guthrie, it seems to me that every time I encounter the Word, either written or spoken, the power of God is working in and through that encounter to change my life. His Word calls me to righteous living for His sake, and at the same time convicts me of sin in my life. It isn't so much that God's word tells me to change, but that it actually brings about the change. So, then the question I have to ask is, "Will I be obedient to the changes that the Word of God is seeking to bring about in my life?"

My prayer is that spending time in the word this year hasn't been a burdensome task for you, but rather an exciting daily encounter with the living and active Word.

December 18th

Hebrews 4:14-7:28. "Listening"

"You are young only once, but you can stay immature indefinitely" – Ogden Nash

Hebrews 5:11-14 describes those Christians who are really not living the word in their daily lives. Actually, according to the author of Hebrews, not only were they not living it, they were not even listening to it (Hebrews 5:11).

This reminds me of the times when I give my children instruction. Often my instructions seem to fall on deaf ears only to receive an "I already heard you Dad," when I repeat myself. What I now know as a father, and what I hope my young children will soon learn, is that truly hearing something implies a response with appropriate action, namely obedience.

So how do you respond to your Heavenly Father? Do you attempt to ignore Him as long as possible trying to fulfill your selfish desires? Do you listen and yet choose your own path? Do you listen and yet forget to do what He has asked of you?

Remember, that to listen to the word of God without living out the word is not really listening at all.

December 19th

Hebrews 8:1-10:39. "Tattooed"

"Your body is the one thing you have ultimate control over. Tattoos are a way of committing to something permanent and stable, of recording who and what you are right now" – Anne Velliquette, academic researcher commenting on the popularity of tattoos.

It may surprise some of you to hear that I have a tattoo. You may be even more surprised when I say that I hope all of you reading this have one too. These tattoos are not anything that you would ever see on the human body. No, rather the tattoos are of a spiritual nature, for as partakers of a new and better covenant, you have the law of God written on your heart and mind (Hebrews 8:10).

When you came to faith in Christ, you committed your life to something far more permanent than some ink on your skin. You committed your life to the one who is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8), and to his word, which never changes and never fails (1 Kings 8:56).

December 20th

Hebrews 11:1-12:29. "Fear Not"

For a long time, I read Hebrews 12:1-2 with fear. I had always assumed that the "cloud of witnesses" were there to judge us as believers as to whether or not we are living up to their standard. I was living a Christian life, constantly looking over my shoulder and concerned if I was doing it right all of the time.

Then one day, someone pointed out that the passage in Hebrews doesn't imply judgment, but rather encouragement. The witnesses, those people of faith mentioned in the previous chapter (Hebrews 11), are not judging or critiquing us, but rather are cheering us on and encouraging us. They have been through the fire and know what it is to live by faith.

As you think about living a life of faith or living the word, do you live it out of fear and trepidation, or out of love and encouragement? Remember that you are loved and accepted as a child of God and that "perfect love expels all fear" (1 John 4:18).

May you live the word, knowing that there are many who have gone before who are cheering you on.

December 21st

Hebrews 13:1-25; 1 Peter 1:1-2:3. "Holiness"

In the forests of Northern Europe and Asia lives a little animal called the ermine, known for his snow-white fur in winter. He instinctively protects his white coat against anything that would soil it.

Hunters take advantage of this unusual trait of the ermine. They don't set a snare to catch him, but instead they find his home, which is usually a cleft in a rock or a hollow in an old tree. They smear the entrance and interior with grime. The hunters set their dogs loose to find and chase the ermine. The frightened animal flees toward home, but doesn't enter because of the filth. Rather than soil his white coat, he is trapped by the dogs and captured while preserving his purity. For the ermine, purity is more precious than life.

"But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God—who chose you to be his children—is holy" (1 Peter 1:15). How important is holiness to you? To live the word is to practice the pursuit of holiness. We have the living word (John 1:14) dwelling inside us (2 Cor. 11:10). This is not only what makes us holy, but it also calls us to holiness.

December 22nd

1 Peter 2:4-5:11. "Suffering"

"I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not. I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one." – Jesus (John 17:14-15)

For the first-century disciples, like Peter, suffering for the faith was a constant reality. It did not bother Peter that Jesus neglected to pray that his followers wouldn't have trials. Peter had witnessed first-hand the persecution that the Lord endured. Why should it be any different for Christ's followers? In fact, church tradition records Peter being crucified upside down, for he refused to die in the same manner as his Savior.

Did you notice 1 Peter 4:12-19? To live the word is to suffer. Christ's life was marked by suffering, trials and persecution. He knew what awaited His followers. He knew the animosity of the world when confronted with the truth of the gospel.

May you come to view suffering, not as something to be avoided at all costs, but as an essential part of living the word.

December 23rd

1 Peter 5:12-14; 2 Peter 1:1-3:18. "Living by Faith"

"We may have as much of God as we will. Christ puts the key of the treasure-chamber into our hand, and bids us take all that we want. If a man is admitted into the bullion vault of a bank and told to help himself, and comes out with one cent, whose fault is it that he is poor." – Alexander MacLaren

Have you ever found yourself stuck in your Christian life? You are trying to live for God, but you just are not getting anywhere. If you are anything like me, you have probably thought, "If I just tried a little harder, and prayed more, then I would be alright." The problem with this thinking is that it is too focused on you. Instead of that approach, we must turn to Christ who has "given us everything we need for living a godly life" (2 Peter 1:3).

The means to living a godly life is not found in our personal determination not to sin, but rather in our faith in Christ.

May you see that, not only are you saved by faith, but you live by faith as Christ lives in you.

General Questions for each day:

Summarize the day's Bible passage in your own words.

What thoughts, actions, attitudes or beliefs are addressed in the passage?

How is the Holy Spirit leading you to apply this passage to your life today?

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Bible Discussion Guide:

Read James 1:19-27. What does it mean to you to "Live the Word"?

What changes has your daily encounter with the Word of God brought about in your life?

What is your first response to God's leading in your life?

Does listening to God include action for you? Why or why not?

How does knowing that God's law is written on your heart and mind impact your life? What about your decision-making?

Do you ever feel that you are living life constantly looking over your shoulder to see who is judging you?

Imagine the "huge cloud of witnesses" mentioned in Heb. 12:1. What are they cheering you on for? What might they encourage you in?

How closely connected is living the word with pursuing holiness?

How does knowing that Christ lives inside you motivate you toward pursuing holiness?

What has been your attitude toward suffering for the cause of Christ?

Read Jesus' prayer in John 17. What does He pray for that is surprising to you? What does He neglect to pray for that is surprising to you?

What has been your approach before when you feel spiritually stuck?

What are the spiritual resources that Christ has made available to us?