

Digging Deeper

Love God

God's goal is to make us like Jesus, not to make us happy. We often approach God as if there is a formula he has to follow. Like a genie in a lamp, if we summon him in the right way or we act a certain way, he must respond in a way that makes us feel good. The fact is, God is going to do what God is going to do. If he says he will do something, then he will do it. However, he has made no commitments to working life out as you or I think it should go. His plan often contains some very hard and painful life situations. It is often hard to love God, when it feels like he doesn't love us because of our expectation that he will make life care-free.. God's ways are different than mankind's because his goal is not our happiness but our transformation into the image of Jesus Christ. This often means that following after Christ is the tougher road, ultimately it is the most fulfilling, but a joyful sense of purpose should not be confused with "happily ever after".



A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. Luke 6:40

Series: Dirty Little Secrets

Topic: The safest place in the world is in the center of the will of God.

Date Taught: 2/07/10

Day 1

Main Idea: Suffering is part of how God grows Christians.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 5:1-5

OBSERVATION:

- Why do we have "peace with God"?
- Verses 1 and 2 talk about the past, present, and future. What does it have to say about those three things?
- Why do we rejoice in suffering?
- How do we know that in the end we won't be disappointed for enduring such suffering?

APPLICATION:

- Do you feel at peace with God? Why or why not?
- Where in your life right now is God growing your "hope" through the process mentioned in these verses?
- Do you sense that the Holy Spirit is alive and active in your life? Why or why not?

PRAYER:

Lord, I acknowledge that I am not what I should be, I'm not what I could be, and I'm not what I am going to be. Thank you, dear Lord that I am also not what I use to be. Please give me the strength to suffer well, the patience to wait on you, a soft heart that you might form my character like Christ, and the eternal perspective that might result in hope in every circumstance. Amen

Day 2

Main Idea: Paul suffered much for following Christ, and embraces it in a positive way.

SCRIPTURE: Read 2 Corinthians 6:1-10

OBSERVATION:

- What truth does Paul want them to embrace?
- How does the list in verses 4-10 give testimony that Paul and his companions are true followers of Jesus?
- There are three distinct parts of this list. What are they?
 - ◊ See verses 4-5
 - ◊ See verses 6-7
 - ◊ See verses 8-10
- Considering verse 10, what is the “everything” that they possess?

APPLICATION:

- Do you believe that “now is the time of God’s favor, and now is the time of salvation”? What could you do to grow in that belief?
- Is there an area in your life that is a stumbling block in anyone’s path to embracing Christ? What does the Holy Spirit want to do in your life in response to the prior question? (Don’t just sit in guilt., that is the enemy.)
- According to Paul’s list, would your life be “commendable in every way”?
- What is one item on the list you would like God to grow you in? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you one step to take towards that goal this week.

PRAYER:

Reflect on 2 Timothy 1:8-9 and write a prayer in response.

Day 3

Main Idea: We will face trials and hardships of many kinds, but God promises to give us wisdom to persevere and navigate them.

SCRIPTURE: Read James 1:2-8

OBSERVATION:

- What should our emotional response be to the trials in our life? Why?
- What does it mean to be “mature and complete”?
- What is the criteria for receiving wisdom from God?

Day 3 continued on next page >>>

Day 3 continued

APPLICATION:

- Where in your life do you see growing your faith? How do you feel about that situation?
- Reflect on where you might need God's wisdom in that situation.
- What would it look like to receive God's wisdom without doubt? (Hint: see the prayer section below.)

PRAYER:

Reflect on Matthew 9:23-24 and write your own prayer in response.

Day 4

Main Idea: The enemy seeks to destroy us, but we are to take our troubles to God who will sustain us. God's people have this common experience of suffering, but take courage in the fact that in the end God will restore those who stand strong in the face of suffering.

SCRIPTURE: Read 1 Peter 5:6-11

OBSERVATION:

- According to this passage what are you suppose to do or be?
- What are the characteristics of the enemy?
- Where do you get the strength to "stand firm"?
- Why should you "stand firm"?

APPLICATION:

- Where in your life do you need to humble yourself before the Lord?
- What anxieties can you give over to the Lord?
- Where do you need the Lord's strength in order to "stand firm"?
- What is the Holy Spirit stirring in your heart right now? How is he asking you to respond?

PRAYER:

Try praying the Lord's prayer from Matthew 6:9-13.

My Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give me this day my daily bread. Forgive me of my sins, as I forgive others. And lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from the evil one.

Day 5

Scripture: Reflect on Philippians 4:11-13

Reflection: Read and respond to the following article reprinted from Christianity Today

'Harsh Retribution'
Theme of the Week: Attitude Adjustment
Wednesday, February 25, 2009

The ragged European internees stood in rows in the Shantung Compound courtyard to hear the Japanese chief of police read his verdict. They'd heard rumors of atrocities in other prisoner-of-war camps in China.

The "criminal," standing beside the officer, was a small, bespectacled Catholic named Father Darby. He'd been caught slipping eggs under his cassock as he prayed by the compound wall. He was, it turned out, a key link between sympathetic Chinese villagers outside and the starving inmates.

The chief declared that he was determined to stamp out the black market and would have to make an example of Father Darby.

Would this gentle priest, the listeners wondered, be tortured or only shot? Then came, "I sentence you to one and a half months of solitary confinement!"

The internees erupted in a cheer. Father Darby, they knew, had served as a Trappist monk, thriving in the solitude of the same monastery for 25 years. An experience most would consider hellish isolation Father Darby had come to regard as a spiritual opportunity, affording heavenly peace. And so, as Japanese soldiers shook their heads, the priest marched off to his tiny dark cell ... humming a hymn.

—Langdon Gilkey in Shantung Compound

Adapted from [Shantung Compound](#) (Harper & Row, 1966) by permission.

My Response: What negative in my life could I ask God to turn into a positive?

Thought to Apply: Attitude is the mind's paintbrush. It can color anything. —source unknown

S.O.A.P.

You can't have a thriving, loving relationship with someone unless you learn how to communicate with them. God is no exception. When a person begins a new relationship, he or she becomes aware of a hunger to know and experience more of that other person. It is the same with the living God. We are driven to know him more. Who is this God? What is He like? What does He want me to do? Questions like these drive us to the Bible for answers. It is through his Word that God communicates to us.

Good communication doesn't just happen. Simply talking with the one you love doesn't automatically bloom into great communication. It is an art form that is developed over time, and has some intentionality to it. It also varies from relationship to relationship. Likewise, just reading your Bible doesn't automatically produce a deep relationship with God. There needs to be a method applied to your time with God that helps cultivate and grow that relationship.

There are many methods, but they all have basically the same principles. You need to read the scriptures, figure out what they are saying, apply it to your life, and act on what God shows you. One of these methods is summarized in the acronym SOAP.

Scripture - Systematically and routinely reading the Bible. Begin this time going before the Father and asking Him to illuminate His Word. Ask Him to give you spiritually attune ears to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit, and that you might not just read the scriptures but that they might become ingrained in your soul resulting in transformation into Christ likeness.

Observation - Observing and interpreting what the scripture means. Observation is about seeing what is right there before you. It's asking the right kinds of questions and letting the obvious speak for itself. The questions are the basic Who, What, When, Where, and How. The second part of observation is interpretation. This is where you open your mind to what the text means. Specifically, what did it mean to the original audience. Here you consider the Context of the passage, Compare it to other scriptures, and ask the question how the Culture of the original audience gives light to this passage. After doing your best to answer these questions yourself, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, you then may want to Consult other resources for further insight.

Application - Answering the question, "What does this mean to me today?" It is not enough to simply know the scriptures; you must act on what you know. When you open your heart to what the text means to you and start to personalize the truths you uncover in Scripture, you've begun the process of application. It is the "so what" part of the SOAPing method. Here's a list of questions that will help reveal a personal application. The questions are:

Is there a...

Sin to confess? Promise to claim? Attitude to change? Command to obey? Example to follow? Prayer to pray?

Error to avoid? Truth to believe? Something to thank God for?

Prayer - Talk to God about what you need to do in response to the scripture and then do what he shows you. After reading and reflecting on the scriptures and hearing what God is saying to you, there needs to be a process to receive God's transforming power to actually do or become what he has shown you. Prayer is a conversation between you and God, with the goal being too clearly hear from him what he would have you do, when he would have you do it, and what he wants to do in you. From there you're just a hop, skip, and a jump from answered prayer because you are laying a hold of God's willingness rather than your own plans and desires.