

**Devotions for the Week of September 10, 2017**  
**Lessons from Shenandoah: STEP INSIDE**  
**Message for North East United Methodist Church**  
**By Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian**

**Sunday, September 10, 2017**

**Read 2 Corinthians 13:5; Psalm 51; Acts 2:38; James 1: 23-25; Ephesians 5:26.**

In order to grow, become like Christ, we must practice daily self-examination. We are quick to examine one another, but often afraid to spend too much time looking in the mirror. Yet scripture tells us, “*Examine yourselves to see if your faith is really genuine.*” James tells us to “*keep looking steadily into God’s perfect law.*” He says to not be like one who looks “*at your face in a mirror but [does] nothing to improve your appearance.*” Christ gave up His life, Paul writes, “*to make [the Church...us] holy and clean, washed by baptism and God’s Word.*”

We must examine ourselves. Benjamin Franklin said, “*There are three things extremely hard: steel, a diamond, and to know one’s self.*” And Plato stated, “*The first and best victory is to conquer self.*” It is a difficult task to allow God to shine His light into the dark areas of our person...to bring to light our secret sins, faults, inadequacies, weaknesses, fears, and insecurities. Yet, that is what God wants...God wants all of us. He wants to cleanse us and grow us into the likeness of His Son, Jesus.

Spend time this week in self-examination. Each day’s devotion this week will deal with examining our hearts, ourselves in order to become more like Christ. Be honest. God knows your heart...God knows your secret sins...your pride...your dishonesty...your weakness. Don’t try to hide it from Him as Adam and Eve tried to hide from God in the garden after eating of the tree of knowledge. Come out from hiding, allow God to embrace you, cleanse you, and grow you.

**Monday, September 11, 2017**

**Read Psalm 51; Matthew 23: 27-28; Amos 5: 21-24;**  
**Psalm 63:1-8; Jeremiah 29:13.**

In Psalm 51, David cries out to God. His prayer is personal, sincere, real. David understands that God does not care about “*sacrifices [and] burnt offerings.*” God wants “*a broken and repentant heart.*”

The Pharisees in Jesus’ time did not understand this. Jesus criticizes them, calling them “*whitewashed tombs,*” beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people’s bones...God speaks through the prophet Amos, explaining that He hates “*show and pretense,*” the hypocrisy of “*solemn assemblies.*” It is not about going to church...It is not knowing about God...It is not about religion, following certain laws, acting a certain way. It is ALL about the HEART!

Proverbs 15:11 asks, “*Even hell holds no secrets from God...do you think He can’t read human hearts?*” God knows what is in a person’s heart. God knows if we are simply going through the motions on Sunday morning or if, like the psalmist we cry out, “*As the deer longs for streams of water, so I long for you, O God*” (Psalm 42:1). God wants us to KNOW Him, to love Him with all our hearts, minds and souls. A real, deep, vibrant, loving relationship.

Have you given God your heart? Do you have a personal relationship with Him or are you simply going through the motions? Is it more about church than a personal relationship with God for you? Does your inside match the way you act on the outside? Do you long for God like the deer pants for streams of water?

If you don’t have a personal relationship with God, read Psalm 51 again. Then pray, like David, confessing your sin, crying out to God for forgiveness...accepting Christ as your Savior and the leader of your life. God wants “*a broken and repentant heart.*”

**Tuesday, September 12, 2017**

**Read I John 2: 3-4; Micah 6:8; James 2: 14-16.**

How does one know if they have a personal relationship with Christ? The scripture tells us, “*And how can we be sure that we belong to him? By obeying his commandments.*” What does Micah 6:8 tells us? Micah tells us, “*This is what the Lord requires: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.*”

If we have truly given God our heart, we are going to do our best to obey His commandments. We will never be perfect; thus, we thank God for grace, for mercy, for forgiveness. But we have the deep desire in us to obey, to serve, to do what is right out of our love for God. As James wrote, “*Faith without works is dead.*” Works are the outward expression of our faith.

Do your actions each day, each night, in public and in private, show your love for God? When you mess up, do you quickly seek God, asking His forgiveness? Do your actions show that you KNOW Him?

**Wednesday, September 13, 2017**

## **Read Colossians 1:10; Matthew 5:48; 2 Peter 3:18; 2 Corinthians 3:18.**

When we come to Christ, give Him our hearts, and begin, out of our love for God, to obey Him, it is just the beginning of the journey.

Paul tells us, "...continually do good, kind things for others. All the while, you will learn to know God better and better." One of my favorite quotes is by Max Lucado. It is a quote I repeat quite often and hold in front of myself, pushing myself to be a stronger Christian. Lucado writes, "God loves you just the way you are, but He refuses to leave you that way. He wants you to be just like Jesus." That's what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians, "...as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more." Jesus, Himself, said, "But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect."

To be perfect...I know I have a long, long, long way to go. John Wesley believed we were going on to perfection. He wrote, "But whom then do you mean by 'one that is perfect?'" We mean one in whom is "the mind which was in Christ," and who so "walketh as Christ also walked," a man "that hath clean hands and a pure heart," or that is "cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit," one in whom is "no occasion of stumbling," and who, accordingly, "does not commit sin." But Wesley was clear, "...there is no such perfection in this life." Nonetheless, this is our goal...to be like Christ.

When you look at your life today compared to this time last year, are you more or less like Christ in your thoughts, words and actions? How have you grown in your faith over the last year? Are you being intentional about growing in your faith, about becoming more like Christ?

## **Thursday, September 14, 2017**

### **Read Hosea 6:6; Psalm 51: 15-17; Matthew 23:27.**

When Jesus enters the Temple, He doesn't simply see what is taking place around Him...men and women making sacrifices to God...the priests praying and blessing the people...Jesus sees beyond the outer trappings. Jesus sees beneath the busy and religious Temple courts. Jesus sees into the hearts of the worshippers, the hearts of the priests, the religious authority. Jesus takes on the role of prophet, protesting against the profaning of the Temple, against debasing the worship of the Lord, against substituting ritual for devotion. As Jesus tells the Pharisees at another time, "For you are like whitewashed tombs," beautiful on the outside, appearing to do all the right, religious actions and speech, yet inside your hearts are decaying and far away from God.

The moneychangers and animal merchants appear to be doing a service for those who have traveled far to worship and make sacrifice. It is a service encouraged by the priests. Yet, Jesus sees within and finds greed, selfishness, and injustice.

As we spoke of earlier this week, David understood this...In the Psalms he prayed, "For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering...The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart." Jesus told the parable of the Pharisee that stood before the altar, praying before God, "God, I thank you I am not like other men." Next to him, was a tax collector, who "beat his breast" and cried out to God, "be merciful to me, a sinner." Jesus concludes His parable saying, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18: 9-14).

We must always remember it is not about what everyone sees on the outside, our doing the right and respectable and religious things expected of us...it is about what is on the inside, our hearts, a relationship with Jesus Christ. Out of that relationship our actions flow. God sees the heart.

Ask the tough question: When God looks at your heart, what does God see? Spend time in prayer and ask God to mold your heart into the likeness of the Savior's.

## **Friday, September 15, 2017**

### **Read John 2: 13-22.**

As Paul C. Shupe writes, we must see "...Jesus with the whip of cords in his As Shupe points out, "imagine Jesus entering our own sanctuaries, overturning our own cherished rationalizations, and driving us out in the name of God."

If Jesus were to enter our homes, our hearts, our daily lives, what would He say...what would He drive out? This is a tough and disturbing question that requires great honesty and self-examination. Pray and ask God to show you areas in your life that need to be "driven out," that you and your family may be more in tune and more intimate with Christ.

## **Saturday, September 16, 2017**

### **Read Insert...Accountability/Self-Examination Questions.**

Paul tells us to "Test yourselves to make sure you are solid in the faith. Don't drift along taking everything for granted. Give yourselves regular checkups. You need firsthand evidence, not mere hearsay that Jesus Christ is in you. Test it out. If you fail the test, do something about it" (2 Cor. 13, MSG).

James Bryan Smith shares a treatise Madame Guyon wrote to her daughter entitled *How to Pass the Day Devotionally*. She writes, "As you prepare for sleep try to examine yourself, particularly, your thoughts and words and actions of the

*previous day. Do this with a contrite heart and make a resolution to improve tomorrow and ask God for his assistance.”*

There are many spiritual disciplines that can assist us in moving ourselves, our spirits, toward conformity in Christ including prayer, fasting, Bible reading, Devotional reading, and meditation. These practices allow our spiritual life and relationship with Christ to be, as Kenneth Boa points out, “*progressively cultivated in the disciplines of faith.*” Boa goes on to explain, “*you and I will not wake up one morning to find ourselves suddenly spiritual. This is why Paul uses the metaphors of an athlete, a soldier, and a farmer to illustrate the discipline of the Christian life* (see I Cor. 9: 24-27; Eph. 6: 10-18; 2 Tim. 2: 3-6).” Furthermore, Boa recognizes, “*we have bought the illusion that we can be like Christ without imitating his spirituality. If we wish to be like our Master, we must imitate his practice; if we believe he knew how to live, we must seek the grace to live like him.*”

Therefore, we must constantly be examining our walk of faith and if we are progressing in becoming more like our Master or if we are failing to progress as we are continually immersed in the world. “STEP INSIDE” and allow God to shine His light and show you where you need to work and grow, where you need to confess, where you need to forgive. “STEP INSIDE” and let Christ work on your heart. “STEP INSIDE” and allow the practice of self-examination to help you face the real within. Don’t be afraid. God is ready to lovingly develop your soul. Let Him.

**And remember to invite someone to church tomorrow.**