



Grow. Pray. Study

Weekly Devotional Guide

MONDAY 8/10/20

1 Corinthians 12:4-12, 26-30

In the 1970s, the Pittsburgh Steelers became the first team to win four Super Bowls and the only team to twice win back-to-back Super Bowls. Their coach Chuck Noll said, “The single most important thing we had in the Steelers of the ‘70s was the ability to work together.”¹ The apostle Paul said God gives each Christian gifts and talents that empower us to join in God’s mission. But no one person receives all the gifts and talents needed for the job. God wants believers to work together, to use their gifts in ways that make the overall body/team stronger. Have you ever seen your gifts become more effective as you join them with other people’s various gifts in a team effort? Think and pray about one way, in the next 12 months, that you might more fully integrate your gifts and abilities into the “the body of Christ’s” overall mission. In verses 29-30, Paul asked a set of questions that all focused on the issue, “Are we all gifted in the exact same ways?” He phrased them in a way that assumed the answer was “No.” Reflect on the mix of interests, talents and passions that makes you unique. What are some ways in which your uniqueness can join God’s mission, and equip you to work with God and others for the sake of the world?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for calling me to play a role in your mission to change the world for the better. Help me to discover my role, and to play it with full energy and commitment. Amen.

¹ Quote found at https://www.brainyquote.com/search_results?q=Chuck+Noll

TUESDAY 8/11/20

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11- 16, 29-32

Current Chiefs' head coach Andy Reid said, "Respecting people is an important part of life, whether it's the person doing janitorial work or the person above you. It doesn't matter who you are: I'm going to respect you."² Today's reading reminded Christians in Ephesus that their varied gifts were not tools to outdo others in a quest for power or glory. Connected in Christ, they needed to respect, depend on and support one another. "One Lord, one faith, one baptism." When we're physically healthy, our body parts do not envy or compete with another. Have you ever seen people with different gifts or ministries yield to the all-too-human urge to view other gifts or ministries as "rivals" for attention and resources? We're all naturally inclined to believe whatever we're involved in is the "most important." How can we allow the "one Lord" behind them all to help us avoid unhealthy silo-ing or infighting? Today's passage said, "God's goal is for us to become mature adults...measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ." We don't serve merely to do good things, but because in serving we grow toward God's goal of maturity. The passage also said one of the ways we help each other grow is "speaking the truth in love." Which do you find harder as you relate to others: speaking the truth at all, or doing so in love? What can help you grow toward maturity in both of those dimensions?

Prayer

Lord God, keep teaching me how to value and respect all your children, no matter how differently they use their gifts to serve you. Amen.

² Quote found at https://www.brainyquote.com/search_results?q=Andy+Reid

WEDNESDAY 8/12/20

John 15:8-17

John 13:2-17 described an awkward moment. In Jesus' day, a slave usually washed supper participants' hot, tired feet. With no slave at the Last Supper, no disciple chose to bless the others by doing a slave's work. Then Jesus—their leader, their Lord— did! Jesus' words in John 15 —“love each other”—were a direct challenge. His followers had to stop seeing each other as rivals and start living as a true team to carry on his work. The great football coach Lou Holtz said it pungently: “If you burn your neighbor's house down, it doesn't make your house look any better.”³ Jesus said, “You are my friends if you do what I command you.... I give you these commandments so that you can love each other” (verses 14, 17). How has taking Jesus as the best model of what love looks like changed or deepened your understanding of what it means to love others? In what situations have you had to make tough choices as you asked yourself, “What's the most loving thing to do?” Scholar Craig Keener wrote, “Ancient ideals of friendship included intimacy and the sharing of the secrets of one's heart in confidence.”⁴ What practices help you keep deepening your trust in Jesus' friendship? How do you seek and build trusting relationships with other Christ followers? Who are the friends with whom you feel safe to “share everything in confidence”?

Prayer: King Jesus, you called me to be your friend, not just your servant. Fill my heart with your loving presence and guide me to friends who can help me build a stronger friendship with you. Amen.

³ Quote found at https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/lou_holtz.

⁴ HarperCollins Christian Publishing. NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, eBook: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture (Kindle Location 241124). Zondervan. Kindle Edition

THURSDAY 8/13/20

Hebrews 10:32- 39

Any championship NFL team plays half their games as “road games,” with the crowd cheering against them. At times in our broken world following Christ feels like playing a road game. Today’s reading showed that early Christians faced that reality. Like a good coach, the writer of Hebrews encouraged readers not to let the pressure of a hostile crowd rob them of victory in the game of life. As Super Bowl XLI winning coach Tony Dungy said, “As big a deal as the Super Bowl is, it’s not the most important thing going on in the planet.”⁵ Can you recall a time when you felt persecuted or harassed by “the crowd” for living out your faith? Have you ever hidden or ignored your principles to avoid a negative response from “the crowd”? What are some of the things going on in the planet you believe Coach Dungy had in mind that are far more important than the Super Bowl? These verses reflected intense persecution leveled against Christians. Scholar N. T. Wright wrote: “Right from the start [early Christians] had faced terrible times, just like the Christians in Acts 8 or 1 Thessalonians 2....We don’t have to look too far, alas, to see contemporary examples of the same thing. Wherever a regime exists which claims absolute power and regards Christian faith and witness as a threat, Christians will come under attack.”⁶ Yet the writer urged, “Don’t throw away your confidence.” How strong or shaky is your confidence in your Savior? How can you strengthen it?

Prayer

Lord God, give me the spiritual strength needed to effectively fight off the distractions and influence of a hostile world. Amen.

⁵ Quote found at https://www.brainyquote.com/search_results?q=tony+dungy

⁶ Wright, N.T. Hebrews for Everyone (The New Testament for Everyone) (pp. 124-125)

FRIDAY 8/14/20

Hebrews 10:24-25, 12:1- 3

Most sports fans know a team's home stadium is like having an extra player on the field. The collective noise from home fans can invigorate the home team and frustrate the opposing team all at the same time. At its best, the Christian family is awesome, too. We have the privilege of encouraging each other, bringing out the best in one another. In Hebrews 12:1 we read that "a great cloud of witnesses" surrounds us. This crowd is much more than just spectators making noise. "Some consider this a reference to saints and angels observing us, as the crowd in a great stadium cheers on those on the playing field. Others see us observing the saints of ages past, taking heart from their consistent testimony (witness) to God's faithfulness." How does the image of this great crowd of witnesses shape your daily behavior and speech? Hebrews said it is our responsibility to "...throw off extra baggage, get rid of sin that trips us up, and fix our eyes on Jesus." What are some types of "extra baggage" we can pick up in the course of our Christian journey? What are some practical steps that help you fix your eyes on Jesus?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I'm thankful I don't have to do this "faith" thing all alone. Thank you for the people, in history and in my day-to-day life, who encourage and cheer me on. Amen.

SATURDAY 8/15/20

Galatians 5:25-6:4

Hall of Fame quarterback, Roger Staubach said, "It's okay to have personal ambitions, but you have to take someone with you."⁷ One person alone, even a star, can't take a football team to the Super Bowl. Winning teams work together to win the game and the season. As Christians, we celebrate our personal relationship with Jesus, and develop this relationship through hard work, self-discipline and sacrifice. But this relationship leads us to come together with other believers to serve as a team with a common purpose and goal. God created us to live in relationship with one another, as teammates who can restore one another, carry each other's burdens and bring the Kingdom of God to a reality on earth. Paul stated the obvious about teams at the start of today's passage. Teams don't function well if members are arrogant, make each other angry, or are jealous of each other. Are there places where you need to release arrogance, anger or jealousy to more fully follow the Spirit? Injured football players are sometimes carried off on a stretcher. Have you developed relationships with people who will carry you when you hurt, when your burdens become too much to bear alone? Whose stretcher would you help to carry?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, some days I'm happy and whole, and some days I'm hurting. Make me the type of teammate who helps others who hurt, and who is willing to accept the help of others when I'm the one who is hurting. Amen.

⁷ Quote found at https://www.brainyquote.com/search_results?q=Staubach

Family Activity

Every position is important in sports, just as every gift and ability is important in the Christian life and they all must work together. As a family, talk about how each person can use his or her God-given gifts and abilities. Discuss how those can each be used to serve those within and outside of the home. How can those same gifts be combined with those of other family members to work and serve? Using construction paper, draw pictures of your home, your neighborhood and the world. On the pictures, write or draw the gifts of each person where they might be best put to work. Also, write or draw about how each person's gifts can be used to serve others. Pray together, asking God to help guide you to use your ideas and gifts. Thank God for giving them to you. Display your family's pictures as reminder to serve and work for those who are in your home, neighborhood and world.