

the way ahead clearly, sometimes not. The certain thing is that God wills to walk with me.

This is comforting yet frightening. If God is with me, then I need not be afraid; but if God is with me, then I cannot unashamedly do whatever I please. Having God present means that there is also present a holiness before which none of us can rightly stand and to which each of us must answer.

May I have the courage to pray that God Himself, not just His peace, be with me.

Joshua 23:1-16; Psalm 55; Matthew 27:11-23

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Sunday, July 19

Mark 2:1-12 *They couldn't get to Jesus through the crowd, so they dug through the clay roof above his head. Then they lowered the sick man on his mat, right down in front of Jesus.* (v.4 NLT)

The psalm for today and this passage in Mark tell about people desperate to be in the presence of God. Many people think of Jesus as harsh and rigid, or maybe even mournful and boring. This was certainly not the case. People don't flock to hear someone preach against them, neither do they vie for attention from someone who drones on about old topics. People wanted to be with him because he was life itself, because he walked the earth as King. We see his enjoyment of and his passion for his creation at every turn in the Gospels.

One of the most valuable experiences of my Christian life was reading the entire Gospel of Mark out loud at one sitting with a small fellowship group. We found ourselves absolutely captivated by the energy, intelligence, wisdom, and, at times, biting humor of the man whom we dare to call God. At the end, someone in the group said, "One feels one could have a real belly-laugh with him."

I used to think that people would be impressed by my attempt at solemn morality and correct thinking. They're not. My hope is that as I grow, and as we grow, in the Lord, our lives reflect the same delight and joy that his did, to his praise and glory.

Joshua 6:15-27; Psalms 63, 98; Acts 22:30—23:11

Monday, July 20

Joshua 7:1-13 *"Hidden among you, O Israel, are things set apart for the LORD. You will never defeat your enemies until you remove these things from among you."* (v.13b)

Why do we think we can take things that belong to the Lord without His knowing it? If we believe in the omniscience (all-knowingness) of the Lord, we have to concede that there is nothing we can hide. And if we admit that the world—and everything in it—was created by God, then anything we take, we are taking from Him.

Some of the things that belong to the Lord are the future, His plan for us, and His plan for other people. Sometimes I am so sure that I know what ought to happen in a certain situation. I constantly must remind myself that my attempt to control such things is not just a waste of time, it is an attempt to steal what is God's.

Lord, please help me to remember that the future is Yours, and that the stewardship You give me is only for today.

Psalms 41, 52; Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 26:36-46

Tuesday, July 21

Romans 14:1-12 *So why do you condemn another Christian? Why do you look down on another Christian? Remember, each of us will stand personally before the judgment seat of God.* (v.10)

This verse, indeed this whole passage, hits all of us where it hurts. How many times do we criticize other denominations or individuals for their interpretation of Scripture, their method of worship, or their stance on a particular issue? Of course, there are times when our judgment may be correct. But according to this passage, it is not our job to be preoccupied with judging the lives of other people. Paul seems to be saying very loudly, “Mind your own business!”

We like to mind other people’s business because it keeps us from letting God gently show us our misdeeds or our purpose. We can usually find someone who has done or said something we don’t think we would have done or said. Add in some rationalizing on our part, and we come out—in our own eyes—looking a little bit better than everyone else.

In the long run, however, minding other people’s business wears us out and makes us peevish, unpleasant, unappealing people to be around. We need to be aware of this danger and we need to make our witness more effective by encouraging other Christians in their life with Christ.

Joshua 8:1-22; Psalm 45; Matthew 26:47-56

Wednesday, July 22

Psalm 119:49-72 *Your principles have been the music of my life throughout the years of my pilgrimage.* (v.54)

This verse captures something of the beauty of God. As Christians we are accustomed to thinking of our lives as a long journey, full of unexpected storms and unkind innkeepers, treasure maps to be deciphered, and only enough light for the next step. But music on a pilgrimage? Shocking. Who would expect it? What lonely traveler would expect to dance?

How often do we interrupt our daily trials and tribulations to glory in the beauty of sight and sound around us? In the hectic pace at which most people live today, we owe it to God and to ourselves to pause long enough to hear the music of life singing in God’s words. Only then can we go on to face life with joy in our hearts.

God’s word appears here not just as a safe place to sleep or shared bread along the way but as something beyond the necessary, something serendipitous, something to make us, as C.S. Lewis wrote, *Surprised by Joy*.

Joshua 8:30-35; Romans 14:13-23; Matthew 26:57-68

Thursday, July 23

Matthew 26:69-75 *Suddenly, Jesus’ words flashed through Peter’s mind: “Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went away, crying bitterly.* (v.75)

Peter had sworn never to deny Jesus, yet he found himself doing that very thing. What strikes me about this verse is how similar we are to Peter. We all find ourselves in this position, and not just about God. It is so easy to look at another person’s life with judgment and say, “I would never do that.” The older I am and the more I mature as a Christian, the less frequently I make such critical pronouncements. I have found myself doing things and thinking things that I never would have thought possible.

We have two major advantages over Peter: we live on the other side of the Resurrection, and we are not faced with risking our lives to acknowledge Jesus. Peter denied Jesus not out of malice, it seems, but out of disappointment, confusion, and fear. Rather than saying, “I would never do that,” I should be praying, “God, please hold me close when I feel disappointed, confused, and afraid.”

Joshua 9:3-21; Psalm 50; Romans 15:1-13

Friday, July 24

Psalm 40 *He lifted me out of the pit of despair.... Many will see what he has done and be astounded. They will put their trust in the LORD.* (vv.2-3)

When we are in the “pit of despair,” it is indeed a black hole. Not only does everything seem to be working against us, but our energy becomes sapped, our minds are numbed, and our spirits are quenched. The resources we need to lift us from our sorry state just don’t seem to be available to us.

Last year was a difficult one for my family. We know exactly what the “pit of despair” feels like. But the experience of being drawn out of darkness by the Lord strengthened me. It is one more event to which I can look back throughout my life and say, “God sustained me.” It is one more chapter in my spiritual story. It is one more way that God once again won the allegiance of my stubborn heart and made me more His own. Thanks be to God.

Joshua 9:22—10:15; Psalm 54; Romans 15:14-24; Matthew 27:1-10

Saturday, July 25

Romans 15:25-33 *And now may God, who gives us his peace, be with you all. Amen.* (v.33)

God gives us His peace. But the emphasis of this passage is on God Himself being with us, not just His peace.

God wants me in rich fellowship with Himself. Sometimes I have peace, sometimes not. Sometimes I have joy, sometimes not. Sometimes I see