

Devotions for Sept. 12 – 18, 2011

Monday, September 12, 2011: Impossible Daily reading: Genesis 12:1-3

This text is a turning point in Genesis, moving from the broad picture of global history to the specific story of the Israelites. The fact that these are the very first words of the story of God's people means that they are foundational to understanding the story of God's people as a whole. The story begins with separation and difficult obedience. God calls Abraham to leave everything behind and journey to an unknown location. God simply promises to "show" Abraham "a land." It is not until later that this promise becomes any clearer. The offer is sweetened by three promises: to make of Abraham a great nation – an outrageous promise considering Sarah's barrenness and Abraham's age of 75; to bless Abraham – a nonspecific promise of divine favor; and to make Abraham's name great. Given his reality, these three things are not only outrageous, but impossible ... at least at first glance. What seems impossible in your life? Ask God to help you believe in what seems to be impossible.

Tuesday, September 13, 2011: Obedience Daily reading: Genesis 12:4-9

Abraham receives God's promises by a faith that's demonstrated through his actions. Abraham does indeed leave his homeland. And God, of course, makes good on his promises in surprising ways. Unfortunately, Abraham's descendants accept God's promises but forget their purpose. They wind up seeing themselves as the privileged rather than the purveyors of God's blessings. God, however, fulfills God's promise most completely through a child born to yet another unlikely couple: Mary and Joseph. Ultimately through Abraham comes God's great blessing for the whole world: Jesus the Savior. Has there been a time in your life when obedience to God led you to the exact right place and time? Ask God to help you be obedient to God's plans and purposes today.

Wednesday, September 14, 2011: Trap Daily reading: Genesis 13:2-7

"What did I ever do to deserve this?" Have you ever asked yourself that question? The only time we hear this phrase is when someone assumes that God is punishing them for some unknown sin. Why don't we ever hear this as a heart-felt prayer of gratitude for what we've been so generously given? Did Abraham ever ask the question, "What did I do to deserve this?" It's a trap we all fall into. Is it possible to live through this day and turn this phrase around? As you talk on the phone to a friend, ask yourself what you did to deserve a friend like this. As you spend time at home, wonder out loud what you might have done to deserve a roof over your head. Ask God to rearrange your thinking today.

Thursday, September 15, 2011: Issues Daily reading: Genesis 1:20-23

There are two issues to deal with when you consider what it means to be "blessed to be a blessing." First, do we really see ourselves as blessed? We often think that the good things we have in life are of our own making. We've worked hard, made good choices, etc. We'll give a brief nod to God, but deep down we take the credit. We believe we've earned it. Second, do we feel compelled to be a blessing? We are naturally (sinfully) bent on selfishness and self-preservation. A three-year-old will rarely share toys with another three-year-old unless mom or dad forces the issue. The adult version of this scenario happens in church when the preacher seeks to use guilt, shame, fear, or some other form of manipulation to convince people to give generously. Are you feeling compelled to be a blessing today? Ask God to grow that compulsion in you today.

Friday, September 16, 2011: Forgiveness Daily reading: Matthew 18:21-35

Jesus is teaching about life in the Kingdom. In this chapter Jesus emphasizes humility, the danger of being a stumbling block to new disciples, God's passion for the "lost," and how the community needs to deal with those in the body who sin. Jesus teaches about the importance of forgiveness. To give the story context, a silver talent was about 75 pounds, valued at 6,000 denarii. Denarii were about a day's wage for a common laborer. To translate this into 2008 currency, assuming a minimum wage of \$6.75 per hour, the servant owes the king \$3,240,000,000. The debt is so great it can never be repaid. The servant's offer to repay the king is absolutely ludicrous. Conversely, the second servant owes the first servant 100 denarii, a 2008 equivalent of \$5,400. How it is possible that one who has been forgiven so great a debt could be so petty as to violently demand repayment of a small debt from a fellow servant? Is there someone in your life who needs your forgiveness? Ask God to lead you down the pathway of forgiveness today.

Saturday, September 17, 2011: Transformational Daily reading: Matthew 12:33-37; 13:8, 23; 15:17-20

The parable's core is in the final verse: "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." "Mercy" is not giving a person what he/she deserves, while "grace" is giving a person what he/she does not deserve. This is the central principle of Kingdom life that Jesus inaugurates. A person who has truly experienced the mercy and grace of God will be transformed into Jesus' disciple, experiencing a transformed heart that produces a changed life that gives away the mercy and grace received from God (Isaiah 40:2). This transformation is evident in the words and actions of a disciple's life. Transformation is a matter of the heart, and that's the work of the Holy Spirit. Where would you love to be transformed? Ask God for that gift.

Sunday, September 18, 2011: Want Daily reading: Hebrews 10:16-18

One of the parable's troubling aspects is the idea that our inability to forgive will result in God not forgiving us. This idea is found in the Lord's Prayer: "forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." Is God's forgiveness conditional? Isn't our failure to forgive one of the things we most need to be forgiven for? Perhaps the journey must begin with simply wanting to forgive, something for which we need God's grace. Or could it be that our lack of forgiving others is a sign that we ourselves have not accepted the grace of God? Do you want to be forgiven? Ask the Holy Spirit to work in you and, by God's grace, grow your desire to be forgiven.