



Devotional

Oct. 4 - Dec. 30

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December 6–12, 2020: Weekly Devotional by Ed Cronyn

These chapters reveal the inextricable bond between the good news of mercy and salvation on the one hand and our frailties on the other, which together form the foundation of our faith: humility, repentance, obedience and service. In Philemon, we read that the runaway slave and the imprisoned missionary, both facing consequences for their pursuit of freedom, come to each other's aid as brothers in Christ, who sacrificed Himself for them. In Hebrews and James, that same message of hope and solidarity includes all who face challenges:

“It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist . . . should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. . . My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.” (Hebrews 2:10; James 1:2-4, NRSV).

So here's the paradox: challenges produce struggles, which offer the opportunity to lean both on God and one another, ultimately resulting in the joy of knowing Him and one another more fully. Even during times of our own struggle, we are called to a faith which is active and demonstrable as we coming alongside others in their time of need. Having accepted salvation from the one who sacrificed His own life for us, we find both hope for ourselves and encouragement to act in mercy towards those around us.

“Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above. . . Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who

deceive themselves. . . Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” (James 1:17,22,27, NRSV).

Challenge: When have you felt closer to Christ: during times of difficulty and struggle, or in times of relative comfort? How do your own experiences with hardship and these scriptures motivate you towards love, generosity, justice and caring for others in need?

Prayer: God, thank you for your mercy, lifting us up when we are down and giving us the strength to do your work with and through one another. Help me to show your love and mercy to others.

WEEK ELEVEN (DECEMBER 13–19)

Day 348: Decemer 13, 2020

Full Plan: James 3:1–5:20

Abbreviated Plan: James 5:1–20

There's so much practical guidance in James. Tame your tongue, resist envy, be humble, pray for others, and help them restore their faith. And it ends with where it began: practice patience amid your suffering, and it will strengthen your heart. (5:7-11)

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 349: December 14, 2020

Full Plan: 1 Peter 1:1–2:25

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Peter 1:1–25

1 Peter is for those suffering and exiled:

Live in hope; the future's bright. (1:3-12)

Live in holiness; you were bought with a price. (1:13-25)

Live in harmony; you are building something eternal. (2:1-10)

Live honorably; others are watching. (2:11-17)

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 350: December 15, 2020

Full Plan: 1 Peter 3:1–5:14

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Peter 4:1–19; 5:1–11

It's important to hold to your convictions, and to still live in love and humility with one another. A key to doing that is 1 Peter 3:15: Always be ready to profess your convictions, but do it with "gentleness and reverence."

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 351: December 16, 2020

Full Plan: 2 Peter 1:1–2:21

Abbreviated Plan: 2 Peter 1:1–21

2 Peter 1-2. God has give you everything you need for "life and godliness." Full stop. You've got all the raw material to live life as God intends it, including the free will to choose to. 1 Peter 1:5-8 shows us how to "make every effort" to do so.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 352: December 17, 2020

Full Plan: 2 Peter 3:1–18

Abbreviated Plan: 2 Peter 3:1–18

Waiting is hard. 2 Peter was written to people getting tired of waiting for God's promises to be fulfilled. It's hard, but God sees the long game. (3:8) What we see as God's slowness, God sees as deliberateness and intentionality. Be alert. Don't give up.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 353: December 18, 2020

Full Plan: 1 John 1:1–3:24

Abbreviated Plan: 1 John 1:1–10; 3:1–24

The gospel of John and the epistle of 1 John are two sides of the same coin. The first is about belief, the second is about behavior. The first is about truth, the second is about love. The first is about the light of Jesus, the second is about living in that light. Both are necessary for true life.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 354: December 19, 2020

Full Plan: 1 John 4:1–5:21

Abbreviated Plan: 1 John 4:1–21

1 John 4: Love! It's the essential nature of God (16), the antidote to fear (18), and is to characterize our relationships with everyone (20-21). We love, because God first loved us. (19)

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

December 13–19, 2020: Weekly Devotion by Whitney Smith

Recently at church we were studying about Samuel hearing God, and as part of the service I heard the testimony of three different members of our congregation on how they hear God speak. Most of us have not heard the audible voice of God like Samuel. The three people gave examples of their different experiences involving hearing God through scripture, prayer, meditation, intuition, wisdom from others and in overcoming obstacles. But how do we really know if the message is from God or not?

The author writes at 1 John 4:1 “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.” The early church struggled with false teachings. “In John’s day, the issue was about if Jesus had truly come in a real body of of flesh and blood. Many Gnostic-influenced teachers said that Jesus, being God, could not have actually become a flesh and blood human being, because God could have no partnership with “impure” material stuff (<https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/1-john-4>). “The heretics asserted that they possessed perfection, were “born of God” and were without sin. By placing themselves above the Commandments, they in fact sanctioned moral laxity” (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/letters-of-John>).

These false teachings led the author (traditionally the letters are attributed to John the Evangelist, son of Zebedee and disciple of Jesus, the author does not specify) to give some advice to the

churches under his mentorship know whether the message the person heard is from God.

1. Does the message correctly present Jesus and his teachings according to scripture? “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in flesh is from God.” 1 John 4:2

2. Who is listening and supporting the message? Other believers? Non-believers? “We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” 1 John 4:6

3. Is the message loving? Is the person giving the message behaving out of love of God and neighbor? “Beloved let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.” 1 John 4:7 “For this is love of God that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.” 1 John 5:3

4. Is the message fearful? Is the person giving the message fearful or fear-mongering? “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.” 1 John 4:18

John gives these words of wisdom to help brothers and sisters in Christ discern and live in the word of God, but while he gives instruction, he also gives encouragement. He encourages Christians to live with joy and confidence knowing we have overcome and have the victory of eternal life and relationship with God.

As people who have relationship with God, hearing from God isn't something that is considered rare, but as something expected. He reminds the readers that God hears them. “And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.” 1 John 5:14.

He also reminds us that we are given protection and understanding as children of God from the untruth of the world. “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.” 1 John 5:20

This news is exciting, powerful and comforting! When thinking about false-prophets, lies and evil in the world looking to sway us from God's truth, it can be very intimidating and scary. No one wants to be deceived. But also sometimes we don't want to accept the truth, sometimes accepting lies that keep things the same seems easier than to accept the change that can come with truth.

Sometimes false messages can sound interesting, wise or esteem-building. We may have people close to us who try hard to convince us of falseness. Those people may have good intentions, but are speaking out of their own hurt or misunderstanding. I've had people from all backgrounds speak lies about God to me... people from church, people who do not believe, people who are spiritual, but not religious.

I would say the thing that specifically has really helped me with discernment is a combination of asking for it in prayer and reading scripture with intent to memorize. I've had moments in my head

of “That doesn’t sound right.” followed by a bible verse. We are blessed that we have access to the Word of God and relationship to keep us in truth! With the message of John, we can all be reminded of whose we are and the tools we have to continue to live in the truth.

WEEK TWELVE (DECEMBER 20–26)

Day 355: December 20, 2020

Full Plan: 2 John 1–13

Abbreviated Plan: 2 John 1–13

2 John was written to a female leader of a house church, a modern day Susanna Wesley. Our spiritual responsibilities should not just be relegated to Sunday mornings, but must include who we are at home, and impact how our families grow in Christ. (vs. 4)

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 356: December 21, 2020

Full Plan: 3 John 1–15

Abbreviated Plan: 3 John 1–15

3 John is the shortest book in the Bible, but it contains one of its simplest and most poignant verses: “Beloved, do not imitate what is evil but imitate what is good.” (11) Adopt that as your daily filter,

and you will begin to live life as God intends.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 357: December 22, 2020

Full Plan: Jude 1–25

Abbreviated Plan: Jude 1–25

Jude’s message is straightforward: don’t be immoral, don’t follow a perverted version of the faith. Those who do are “waterless clouds” (12) prone to prevailing winds. Instead, “keep yourself in the love of God,” (21) which is a good rule to live by today.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 358: December 23, 2020

Full Plan: Revelation 1:1–2:29

Abbreviated Plan: Revelation 1:1–19

Revelation 1-2. Everyone has a blind spot: those aspects of character and private behavior that we don’t want others to see. In