

Devotional and Reading Plan for 2022, Week Forty-one

Week 41 — October 8th-14th. Matthew 8:18-22; 9:27-10:42; 14-18; Mark 6-9; Luke 9; John 6:1-8:20

The theme for this week is authenticity. As you read about the life that Jesus lived, I hope you are able to see how authentic He was in His dealings with the people around Him. Whether they were friend or foe, He did not deceive or mislead anyone and always acted authentic. -DC.

October 8th (Day 281)

Matthew 9:27-10:42; 13:53-58; Mark 6:1-13; Luke 9:1-6. "A Heart for the Lost"

If you love only those who love you, what good is that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. – Matthew 5:46

In the gospel of Matthew, right before Jesus sends out the 12 disciples, He told His disciples to ask the Lord to send more workers to gather the harvest. In that passage (Matthew 9:35-38), Jesus reveals to the disciples His heart for the lost. As He taught and healed among the people, His heart was genuinely burdened for those people whom He described as a sheep without a shepherd.

A heart for the lost is not easily feigned. This is because the lost are not going to be receptive to the message of Jesus, or the messenger for that matter, most of the time. It is so easy to love those with whom we are comfortable. What about those who have hurt you or persecute you? A heart for the lost means that we must respond with grace and mercy to those who don't deserve it, but desperately need it.

May you, like Jesus, have an authentic heart for the lost.

October 9th

Matthew 14:1-36; Mark 6:14-56; Luke 9:7-17; John 6:1-21. "Peer Pressure"

The court of public opinion is a powerful force, especially for those who live and work in the political arena. When you read about Herod's dealings with John the Baptist, you quickly realize that this court of public opinion, or more commonly known as peer pressure, has been influential for 2,000 years.

Peer pressure can make authentic living very challenging. Authentic living can be understood as remaining true to one's own character when faced with external pressures. When faced with the external pressures, Herod gave up John's life in spite of his genuine respect for him. Jesus too was confronted with a variety of pressures from both his followers and adversaries. However, unlike Herod, Jesus' actions were always consistent with His character. In John 6:15 we read that He turned down the opportunity to lead a political coup, choosing instead to remain true to His commitment to do the will of His Father who sent Him (John 8:28-29).

May you, like Jesus, be able to live authentically in the face of peer pressure.

October 10th

Matthew 15:1-20; Mark 7:1-23; John 6:22-71. "A Changed Heart"

“The purpose of my instruction is that all the Christians there would be filled with love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and sincere faith.” – 1 Timothy 1:5

Jesus turned the religious system of first century Judaism on its ear. He was able to look through their traditions and recognize that they were attempting to gain acceptance before God by following extensive lists of rules and regulations governing their external behavior.

Living an authentic life for the Christian means that our heart and our actions must match. To practice the externals of religion without a heart that has been changed by God does not make us acceptable before God.

Our acceptance before God is dependent entirely upon the change of heart that occurs when we trust in Christ for forgiveness and salvation. It is this step of faith that allows the Holy Spirit to change us so that our actions will be born out of a heart that beats for God.

October 11th

Matthew 15:21-16:12; Mark 7:24-8:21. “Simple Faith”

I have long struggled with the overabundance of denominations that we have within Christianity. Certainly, there have been valid reasons involved that led to some of these divisions. Taking a stand on issues such as the deity of Christ or salvation by grace alone through faith alone is never wrong.

That being said, I am often bothered by the attitudes that I sometimes encounter as a result of denominationalism. Accusing someone of not being truly saved because of a disagreement on a secondary or tertiary theological issue is not our place and yet it happens. I hear some accuse people of other denominations of having an insufficient view of God because they are not five-point Calvinists.

Jesus didn't give the Gentile woman a theological pop quiz to see if she had all the right answers. He recognized her faith, as simple as it may have been, and accepted her for it. Like the thief on the cross, this woman's salvation was not dependent upon right theology, but an authentic faith in the right One.

October 12th

Matthew 16:13-17:13; Mark 8:22-9:13; Luke 9:18-36. “Transparency”

Jesus modeled transparency to us in how He lived His life. Jesus opened himself up to His disciples and allowed them to know certain things about Him and His purpose. I do think that it is important to note that He was more transparent with some of his disciples (Peter, James, and John) than He was with the rest.

Part of living an authentic Christian life is the practice of transparency with a trusted brother or sister in Christ. Like Jesus, we need not be as transparent with all as we are with some. Transparency involves giving someone else a window into our soul where our deepest thoughts and emotions lie. Transparency leads to authenticity because, when we allow others to know us fully, we can no longer fool them with our external behavior. They know when we're faking it because they know the real us.

Like an overhead transparency that is revealed when the light is switched on, may your life become transparent when you encounter the light of Christ.

October 13th

Matthew 17:14-18:35; Mark 9:14-50; Luke 9:37-50. “Humility”

“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.” – James 4:10

In 1973, Senator John C. Stennis was mugged and shot outside his home. When Senator Mark Hatfield received word of the incident he drove straight to the hospital. Upon arriving, he observed that the hospital staff was overwhelmed with the high volume of incoming calls. Spying an empty switchboard, Hatfield sat down and helped field calls through the night and into the next morning.

It was genuine humility that led Senator Hatfield to assist the hospital staff that night. He was unwilling to view himself as too important to do the mundane task of answering the phone.

Authenticity leads to humility, because when we are willing to see ourselves as we truly are, we learn that we have no greater intrinsic value than the next person. Understanding this lesson allows us to fulfill the command to consider others as more important than ourselves (Phil. 2:3).

October 14th

Matthew 8:18-22; Luke 9:51-62; John 7:1-8:20. “Awareness of Sin”

F.B. Meyer has been credited with saying that “when we see a brother or sister in sin, there are two things we do not know. First, we do not know how hard he or she tried not to sin. And second, we do not know the power of the force that assailed him or her. We also do not know what we would have done in the same circumstance.”

Judging someone in haste, and without full knowledge or consideration of the facts, generates tremendous hurt and damage. Jesus knew this full well when He extended grace to the woman caught in adultery in John 8.

Authentic Christian living requires an awareness of sin in our life. I believe that the more aware we are of our sin and our propensity to repeatedly sin that we are less likely to judge others who are caught in sin. It is those among us who assume that their struggle with sin is done that are often the ones who are so quick to judge. We all must remember that we are all sinners who are equally in need of grace and mercy from a holy and just God.