

## Daily Devotional Guide

**Monday** – Read 1st John 4:7-8. For centuries, theologians and scholars have discussed the nature of God. There are not enough libraries to contain what has been written about God. But there is one thing definitive about God that can never be challenged. This definitive sums up everything about God – God is love. Since God is love, when we make the choice to love we are congruent with the will and nature of God. When we choose not to love, we are going against the will and nature of God. It is a simple truth, but one that is worth remembering. Today, be mindful how many of your choices come from love.

**Tuesday** – Read 1st John 4:9-10. How do we know that God is love? People make all kinds of statements about God, but in Jesus Christ God made his own statement. We know that God is love not just because the Bible says so but also because God demonstrated his love for us in Christ. God went all the way to the cross to prove his love for us. What more assurance do we need? Whenever you doubt God's love for you or for the world, all you have to do is look at the cross.

**Wednesday** – Read 1st John 4:11-16. What is love, really? Love is not just a feeling; it is a choice and an action. Love is making the choice to say and do what is best for another person. Often this choice is made despite how we may feel. We may wonder how we can make this choice. Well, we don't make it alone. Our text today is clear that God's spirit of love lives within us as Christians. We rely on God's loving spirit to help us make the choice to love. Today, in prayer, ask God to help you make the choice to love.

**Thursday** – Read 1st John 4:18. This is a powerful verse. Many of us do not see love as something that casts out fear. God's love is the most powerful force in the universe. We have often heard the statement, "Love conquers all." This is absolute truth. The source of all love is God, and love created the world, sustains the world, and love is what will heal the world. There can be no fear when God's love is the driving force of our lives. We can't lose! Be encouraged today in the abiding truth that if you love you have nothing to fear.

**Friday** – Read 1st John 4:19-21. These verses are the litmus test for the right behavior of Christians. In the news we often see well intended believers spew hateful rhetoric about others. This is not in accordance with the will of God. In fact, the Bible says that if we say we love God but hate others we are liars. One thing is for sure: the closer we get to the love of God the more God draws us closer to other people. This is inescapable. Are your relationships congruent with the love you have for God?



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## ~ Living the Dream ~ The One Thing You Can't Afford to Lose

Sunday, January 2, 2011

Sermon by: Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor

Scripture Lesson: 1st John 4: 7-21

A preacher friend of mine tells about greeting people the Sunday after Christmas. He smiled at one woman and said, "Happy New Year! How was Christmas?" She replied, "Great." "So the jolly fat man was good to you?" he asked. Then she turned to her husband, hugged him and said, "Oh, Reverend, my husband is always good to me." I have a feeling as he thought about his wife's comment, there was something he wanted to change in the new year.

There are a lot of things that many of us would like to change in our lives. Well, now is the perfect time to make changes because it is a new year and a new year can mean a new you!

Many of you are glad to see 2010 gone and are ready for a brand new year with brand new possibilities. Many of you are tired of the same old, bad habits, poor choices, no joy, doing the same things and getting the same results. As the calendar turns to a fresh 2011, there is something inside all of us that wants to make this the best year ever.

Today is your wake up call. Because I am here to tell you that 2011 can be the best year of your life. 2011 can be the year when you begin to live the dream – a life with more joy, energy, purpose – a life with better relationships, better choices and better results – a life where all the good things you want for yourself happen. You can start living the life of your dreams today!

How is that possible? There is someone who wants your life to be extraordinary and this someone can give you the power to live an extraordinary life. This someone is the author of your life – God.

When God took human form in Jesus and walked the earth 2,000 years ago, he said a remarkable thing that many people miss. He said something that told the world why he came. He summed it up in one sentence: "I have come that you might have life and have it in all of its

abundance" (John 10:10).

God wants us to have an abundant life – a life overflowing with the best things for our lives. God wants us to be overflowing with joy, meaning and power. God wants what is best for us. Why? Well, why is the one thing you can't afford to lose. This one thing is what causes the life of your dreams to be opened up to you. This is the one thing that sets you free to be who you want to be. This one thing is God's love.

I don't know the images of God you have brought with you to church today. Many people have very bad images of God imprinted on their minds and hearts. Many see God as this angry judge that wants to spoil our fun. This is a myth, and I am here to dispel all the negative images of God.

For thousands of years scholars and theologians have filled libraries telling us who they think God is. But you can take all that the theologians have written about God and it would not come close to how the Bible is able to explain God in three simple words - "God is Love" (1st John 4:16). God is in love with you. You were made from God's love. Because God loves you, God enjoys nothing more than seeing you have an abundant life. What's more is that God wants each of us to be the change we desire for the world. For how can the world be peaceful if we are not at peace? How can the world be joyful if we are not filled with joy? How can the world be loving if we are not loving? All of God's power is available for you to live the abundant life.

If God wants everyone to live the abundant life and God's power is available to live this life, then why don't more people live the dream? It is very simple, really. Most people don't claim it. Most people don't choose it. God has given us free will, but most people don't use it. Most people are reactive to life instead of being proactive to life. Most people allow other people to do their thinking and choosing for them. Most people's

lives are like a ship without a destination, drifting without a captain, ending up shipwrecked somewhere. Then folks wonder why their lives are in shambles. They have no direction.

All of us are where we are today because of our thoughts and choices. We are the accumulation of our own thoughts and choices. The good news is that if you don't like where you are you can change your thoughts and choices. This is what this series on "Living the Dream" is all about. Choose to claim God's love for you. Choose the abundant life. Choose to live the dream.

In this series I'm going to give you the tools to live the dream and be changed forever. I would like to begin by telling you what is in store for you when you choose to live the dream.

### **Find A Self You Can Live With**

There is a great story about actor Kirk Douglas. He picked up a hitchhiker on California freeway one day. The hitchhiker took off his coat and settled down for a ride when suddenly he realized who was driving. He couldn't believe Kirk Douglas had picked him up! Excited and overwhelmed, the hitchhiker asked, "Do you know who you are?"

I want to ask you that this morning: "Do you know who you are?" Some people think they are what they do. We are doctors, lawyers, businessmen, homemakers, plumbers, mechanics, etc. We do invest ourselves a lot in what we do, don't we? But who are we when we retire, or lose our job? Some of you are asking that question today.

Some would have us believe that we are what we have, what we own. We are what is in our bank account. But what happens in an economic crisis? What happens when there is a disaster and we lose everything? Does having nothing mean we don't exist? Many believe this which is why suicides rise during tough economic times.

Let me tell you who you are. You are a child of God. Before you were wounded by people, weary with work, preoccupied with possessions, you were created in the image of God. Before we were sinners, control freaks, mean, and cynical we were loved with an everlasting love. Jesus said it well, "Anyone who loves me I will come to him and make my home in him."

### **Find A Purpose You Can Live For**

There was once a survey done of the many successful people in America. They interviewed many people from many walks of life who were determined to be fulfilled in life and successful in their vocations. You know what they all had in common? They all had discovered the purpose to their lives.

The purpose of life is to live a life of purpose. The abundant life must include a purpose. God wants us to live our lives on purpose!

There is a great story that Lou Holtz tells on

himself. Early in his career, Holtz was the assistant coach at the University of South Carolina. But he was not there for long because the head coach resigned and he was left with no job. Holtz was discouraged, so his wife bought him a book on goal setting. Holtz loved it. He read it over and over again and wrote down 107 goals for himself – "fly an airplane, skydive, write a book..." One day he turned to his wife and said, "Thanks, honey! I love the book! Look! I have 107 goals!" His wife looked over the list and said, "That's great, Lou." Then she grabbed a pin and wrote down, "108 – get a job!"

Setting goals is great. All of us need to write down our dreams and the goals we want to accomplish. But the first goal we need to write down is our life purpose. God has a purpose for each of our lives. We all have give gifts and skills that God has given us to make the world better. You are on this earth for a purpose. You cannot live the abundant life without discovering and living out your purpose. In this series I will help you discover your purpose. Keep this in mind - our God given purpose connects our greatest passion with the world's greatest need.

### **Find A God You Can Count On**

I have discovered that many people are turned off by faith, church, and religion because, quite frankly, people make it too complicated. The Christian faith was never meant to be complicated.

I am going to tell you what the faith is all about and make it as uncomplicated as I can. What I am going to tell you sums up my theological education. In fact, if you receive what I am about to tell you, you will have the equivalent of a doctoral degree in Christian theology.

Here goes. Christianity is not a religion, creed, a liturgy, or a set of prayers. Christianity is not a bunch of rules and regulations or a good moral story. Christianity is a *relationship* – a relationship with the one who loved you into existence – a relationship with one who thinks you are beautiful – a relationship with the one who has a purpose for your life and loves you more than you can imagine – a relationship with a God you can count on.

You see, Christians are not perfect. Christians are not in control. Christians don't have all the answers. Christians are not better than other people. Christians are not folks that can give the perfect theological answer to every question. Christians are those who have learned that God can be trusted. God can be trusted to give peace in the midst of the storm. God can be trusted to take what is evil and transform it into something good. God can be trusted to empower you in the midst of trouble. God can be trusted to receive you when you die. God can be trusted!

The late great spiritual writer Henri Nouwen received the greatest revelation about faith at, of all places, the circus! Nouwen went to see the German trapeze group, "The Flying Rodleighs" perform. He was mesmerized by their breath-taking performance as they

flew gracefully through the air. At the end of the show, he spoke with the leader of the troupe, Rodleigh himself. Nouwen asked him how he was able to perform with such grace and ease so high in the air. Rodleigh responded, "The public might think that I am the great star of the trapeze, but the real star is Joe, my catcher...The secret is that the flyer does nothing and the catcher does everything. When I fly to Joe, I have simply to stretch out my arms and hands and wait for him to catch me. The worst thing the flyer can do is try to catch the catcher. I'm not supposed to catch Joe. It's Joe's task to catch me" (Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Only Necessary Thing: Living a Prayerful Life* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), pp.195-196).

So often we try to grab on God. We think that if we read enough books and go to enough Bible studies we can catch God. We think if we do enough mental gymnastics or enough fanciful praying, we can catch God. It's not our job to catch God. God catches us.

### **Find A Love Worth Sharing**

1<sup>st</sup> John 4:11-12 says, "Beloved, since God loves us so much; we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is perfected in us."

I have found that so many people want to experience God in their lives. And many people will pay large sums of money to go to exotic places to experience God. They will go to conferences and retreats and try to experience God. And there is nothing wrong with any of these things. But our text tells us a way to experience God that will not cost us anything. You want to experience God today? Go and give away God's love. His love is perfected within us when we share his love with the world! Believe me, you will feel God when you share his love with others.

You haven't lived until you have loved, and if you haven't loved, you haven't lived – this is the best part of living the dream, the abundant life. The more love you share, the more love you experience. And the more love you experience, the more you have to give away. Loving and generous people never lack anything. And there are people everywhere who are hungry for God's love, who are hungry for someone to tell them that they are loved.

Peter Breemen wrote the book, "The God Who Won't Let Go." In the book he tells of the time he was in a grocery store late at night with only one check out line open. There was a long line of restless and impatient people waiting with their groceries. But Breemen noticed that the people in front of line were in a good mood. As I got closer to the end of the line, he figured out why. The lady checking groceries took a piece of cardboard, made a sign, and put it in front of her. The sign said, "We have been made with love, please treat us accordingly."

I came across the greatest definition of love. Love is "revealing to someone else that person's own

beauty" (Breemen). Loving is showing someone else how beautiful he or she is. A person cannot discover this alone, another human being is needed. When one human being shows another human being how beautiful they are, then love happens.

This is why God's love is the one thing you can't afford to lose because everything begins and ends with God's love. In order to live the dream, we must get in tune with God's love because it is all around us.

A few years ago in Washington DC, at a Metro Station, a man with a violin played six Bach pieces for about 45 minutes. About 2,000 people went through the station, most going on to work. At 3 minutes, a middle-aged man noticed the violinist for a few seconds and then went on his way. At 4 minutes the violinist received his first dollar. A woman threw money in the hat and, without stopping, continued to walk. At 6 minutes, a young man leaned against the wall to listen to him, then looked at his watch and started to walk again.

At 10 minutes, a 3-year old boy stopped, but his mother tugged him along hurriedly. The kid stopped to look at the violinist again, but the mother pushed hard and the child continued to walk, turning his head the whole time. This action was repeated by several other children, but every parent - without exception - forced their children to move on quickly.

At 45 minutes the musician played continuously. Only 6 people stopped and listened for a short while. About 20 gave money but continued to walk at their normal pace. The man collected a total of \$32.

After 1 hour, he finished playing and silence took over. No one noticed and no one applauded. There was no recognition at all.

No one knew this, but the violinist was Joshua Bell, one of the greatest musicians in the world. He played one of the most intricate pieces ever written, with a violin worth \$3.5 million dollars. Two days before, Joshua Bell sold-out a theater in Boston where the seats averaged \$200 each to sit and listen to him play the same music. This is a true story. Joshua Bell, playing incognito in the D.C. Metro Station, was organized by the Washington Post as part of a social experiment about perception, taste and people's priorities (story adapted from forwarded email sent to me).

If we can miss something like this, what else are we missing? What else are we passing by? Don't pass God's beauty in your life. Don't miss God's love for you. It is happening all the time around you. Don't miss God's purpose for your life, the life of your dreams. It is right in front of you. It is within you. Claim it. Live the dream. Amen.