

THE GOSPEL

— ACCOURDING TO PAUL (NOT SMIT) —

DAILY DEVOTIONALS - WEEK 3

MONDAY

The apostle Paul knew God had a big plan—to restore our world to total wholeness (cf. Revelation 21:1-5). In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote that God, in divine wisdom, is trusting faithful humans as the best means to carry out that mission. “The church,” he wrote, is God’s main instrument to show his wisdom and glory. And “the church” is the gathering of God’s people, guided by the Holy Spirit (cf., Ephesians 2:18, 22). Which means you are part of God’s master plan!

- In Greek, “the many different varieties” in verse 10 was one word “polupoikilos.” It literally meant “many coloured,” as though Paul was picturing God’s grace and wisdom as a kind of cosmic rainbow. In what ways have God’s grace and wisdom added colour and beauty to your life?

How can you help your church reflect that beauty to all who come in contact with you?

- Reflect on verse 20: “Glory to God, who is able to do far beyond all that we could ask for or imagine by his power at work within us.” Do you believe God can really do far more than we can ask or imagine by working through us, through you? If not, what holds you back from that belief? What God-sized hopes, hurts, dreams and challenges can you identify, trusting that God’s mission can go to work through you to help to address them?

read

Ephesians 3:10-21

pray

Great God, I know Paul said your big plans for the world are for your church to accomplish your purposes. I’m part of your church. Help me be faithful to you and join in your work in the world. Amen.

TUESDAY

Like most ancient Greek and Roman cities, Corinth had many temples for the wide variety of pagan gods they imagined as dwelling on Mount Olympus. But there were no physical, architectural Christian temple buildings (yet). Paul used this letter to tell the Christians in Corinth that they, as a community of faith and as individual members of that community, were the “temple” of the Holy Spirit.

They were the visible sign of God’s presence to draw their neighbours to their God.

- In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul was concerned about people who set one church leader against another, putting loyalty to their favourite leader above loyalty to Jesus (cf., 1 Corinthians 3:3-4). It’s clear that this [Temple] image refers to the church community as a whole, not its individual members, as the holy place of God’s presence. Why would Paul say trying to destroy the church community is worse than taking a sledgehammer to a physical church building?

- In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul spoke to converts, likely formed by Plato’s Greek ideas, who thought God hated their bodies anyway. Paul knew that was false: The body isn’t destined for destruction but for resurrection (see 1 Corinthians 15:50-57)....

Individual Christians are united with the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:17) through the presence of God’s Spirit in them. This makes the human body a temple for God’s presence through the Spirit. How can it shape your lifestyle to see your body as the Holy Spirit’s temple?

read

1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-17, 6:15-20

pray

Lord Jesus, you created me as a physical as well as a spiritual being. Guide me into a fuller understanding of how you wish to dwell in me, and in all my fellow believers, as your ultimate temple. Amen.

WEDNESDAY

The apostle Paul wrote the two passages you just read over two thousand years ago. Yet they are timeless, applying to each Christ-follower in 2025. The church is “the body of Christ,” so each member is an integral part of a larger whole. If one person with one gift is missing, the entire body suffers. As the body works together, unity and power come into being. We do not acquire or use these gifts on our own strength, but only through the Holy Spirit at work within us.

- Are you clear about which of these gifts the Spirit has given you? If not, ask the people who know you best what gifts they see in you. Once you have a sense of what your gifts may be, how can you put those gifts into action to serve and build up the body of Christ?
- Your “package” of spiritual gifts won’t be exactly like anyone else’s—note how Paul used words like “some” and “if” in writing about the gifts. Tomorrow we will read about the “fruit of the Spirit” (cf. Galatians 5:22-23). Those are qualities the Spirit grows in every Christian. Spiritual gifts are natural abilities in your areas of giftedness, which leave you room to grow in using them with maximum effectiveness. How can you develop your spiritual gifts as you learn to use them?

read

Ephesians 4:11-16
1 Corinthians 12:27-30

pray

Lord Jesus, the Spirit has gifted me in unique ways so that the Kingdom might come to earth. Help me to recognize the joy and responsibility of my giftedness. Amen.

THURSDAY

In Roman times (and today) many people think the actions and qualities the apostle Paul listed in Galatians 5:19-21 are part of a good life, “fun” or at least side-effects of having “fun.” But Paul sketched a different vision, saying “you shouldn’t do whatever you want to do,” but should be “led by the Spirit.” A truly good life results as we let God’s Spirit, not our own selfish wishes (literally “flesh” in Greek), direct and control us. He listed nine vital qualities (fruit) the Spirit will produce in our lives.

- The many ways humans miss the mark made Paul sad. (Review his examples in verses 19-21, noting how he mixed socially “respectable” actions with things almost everyone rejected.) But he didn’t see self-righteous “goodness” as a better choice “all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse” (from Galatians 3:6-11). *How did his use of the term “fruit” in 5:22 focus attention*

on the spiritual roots of the nine key Christian traits he listed as growing in our lives?

- With gentle irony (and deep seriousness) Paul followed his list of the fruit of the Spirit with the phrase, “There is no law against things like this.” Why would anyone make a law against qualities that make life so much better? *When have you let go of your own agenda, and found that God had given you something better, deeper and more freeing than the things you used to think you wanted?*

read

Galatians 5:16-25

pray

Come, Holy Spirit. By your gentle, powerful presence grow your beautiful fruit to fill and guide me to that wonderful life against which there is no law. Amen.

FRIDAY

In today's three passages, the apostle Paul used the Greek word *arrabon* ("down payment"). Scholar William Barclay said, "There are many Greek commercial documents still extant in which the word occurs. A woman sells a cow and receives so many drachmae as *arrabōn*. Some dancing girls are hired for a public entertainment and are paid so much in advance. Paul is saying the experience of the Holy Spirit which we have in this world is a foretaste of heaven; and it is the guarantee that some day we will enter into full possession of the blessedness of God."

- Ephesians said even the best worship, praise, service or caring times the Holy Spirit gives us are only God's "down payment," signs that our world's full renewal will come. What are some ways you are experiencing the down payment of life in the Spirit? Are you freer and less a slave today than before you met Jesus? How can you participate in making church an attractive preview of the eternal love, joy and grace that await you?

- When God anoints someone with the spirit, Paul declares, this is the first part of the gift which will be completed in the resurrection itself. If the Christian hope is founded on Jesus' own resurrection, that hope becomes a real possession within us through God's gift of the spirit. What a key truth to understand—every positive change the Spirit brings in your life is a "down payment" on your eternal resurrection life with God! What resurrection foretastes have you experienced recently?

read

2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5

Ephesians 1:14

pray

Gracious God, how I look forward to eternity with you. Thank you that your presence with me in the Holy Spirit lets me begin to "taste" what that glorious eternity will be like. Amen.

SATURDAY

In the ancient world, Jesus' followers stood out. Only a minority of groups even claimed to surmount ethnic and class divides, Early Christians, proved distinctive in challenging class (slave vs. free) prejudice. One distinctive way the apostle Paul shared this in his letters was by reminding converts that God “adopted” them into heaven’s family. By Roman law, adopted children, unlike slaves, were full heirs of the father’s estate. The inheritance Paul refers to is the glory, or eternal life in God’s presence, that God intended for humanity (Romans 2:7, 10; 3:23; 5:2) and that Christ has already received. As in the best human cases, God’s adoption is not tentative—you only leave God’s family if you choose to.

- The adoption image linked, of course, to thinking of God as father. In the Bible story, God planted the seed for that in Exodus 4:22, calling Israel “my son.” Paul, trained as a rabbi, often used the Hebrew Scriptures. Isaiah 64:8 said, “Now, Lord, you are our father,” and Psalm 68:5 described God as a “father of orphans.” But Paul followed Jesus' example (cf. Mark 14:36) and taught believers that the Holy Spirit teaches us to address God with the Aramaic word *abba*. *Abba* was a respectful but intimate way to address one’s father, it does not appear in Jewish prayers (unlike “Father”). To our knowledge, this way of directly addressing God seems to have been unique to

Jesus (until adopted by his followers; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). Your adoption invites you to address God, not stiffly and formally, but with the intimate family word Jesus used. *How did this change God from distant and intimidating into someone whose love you can always trust?*

read

Galatians 4:3-7

Romans 8:15

Ephesians 1:51

pray

Dear God, you are always worthy of awe and respect. Yet, You are also my abba, loving, caring - and worthy of trust because you are Creator and Lord. Help me to always trust that you are “for” me. Amen.