

Heart of the Matter

Daily Reflections
for Changing
Hearts and Lives

Christian Counseling
& Educational Foundation

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INTRODUCTION

We hope this daily devotional will bless and serve you by being a constant reminder that personal change is centered in the person of Christ. The selections are excerpted from books and other materials written by the experienced counselors at CCEF. Each day's meditation is anchored in Scripture and saturated with Christ's mercies. The suggested Bible reading is meant to complement and enlarge on the themes of the daily reading. Reading the meditations thoughtfully, along with the daily Scripture passages, will encourage you to grow in your walk with the Lord.

We know from years of seeing lives changed that short readings alone are not a "quick fix." But we are convinced that the Spirit is always present and active through God's Word, thoughtful contemplation, prayer, and community within the body of Christ. As you seek to know God personally and be changed by him, our prayer is that he would meet you daily as you reflect on who he is and what he has done for you in Christ.

The Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation (CCEF) exists to teach people how to explore the wisdom and depth of the Bible and apply its grace-centered message to the problems of daily living. Our

INTRODUCTION

mission is to restore Christ to counseling and counseling to the church. As a ministry, we seek to do this in a variety of ways:

- We counsel.
- We train ministry leaders and laypeople in counseling through our onsite and distance education courses.
- We write counseling literature for the church and publish numerous resources.
- We partner with churches around the world through training and consultation.

To learn more about the ministry of CCEF and to find many helpful resources, visit our website at www.ccef.org.

JANUARY 1

2 PETER 1:3–9

God “has given us everything we need for life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). The first few verses of this passage lay out the glories of our identity as God’s children that Peter says we must not forget. God has given everything we need, not only for eternal life, but also for the God-honoring life to which we have been called until he returns. Notice the tense of the verb. Peter says God has given us everything we need. It has already happened! This is a fundamental Gospel truth. God will not call us to do anything without providing a way for it to be done. If he calls us to cross the Red Sea, he will enable us to swim, send a boat, build a bridge, or part the waters!

Don’t forget who you are. You are the children of God who have inherited riches beyond your ability to conceive. You have been given everything you need to do what God has called you to do. Don’t give in to discouragement. Don’t quit. Don’t run away from your calling. Don’t settle for a little bit of faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, brotherly kindness, and love. Get everything that is your inheritance as God’s children.

PAUL DAVID TRIPP

JANUARY 2

1 JOHN 1:5-10

Asking for forgiveness is a war between self-righteousness and unearned grace. Between the rules of my kingdom and the commandments of the King. Between a desire to be served and the call to serve. Between living for my own glory and being consumed by the glory of God. I do not fight this war alone. The King, who has welcomed me into his better kingdom, is a Warrior King who will continue to fight on my behalf until the last enemy is under his feet.

This *is* the battle of battles. His kingdom *will* come. His will *will* be done. He will not sit idly by and permit his kingdom children to live with a greater practical allegiance to the building of their own kingdoms. So he fights for the freedom of our souls. He battles for the control of our hearts. He works to liberate our desires and to focus our thoughts. And as he does this, he calls us to humbly confess that we really do love ourselves more than we love him and others. He invites us to admit how regularly we demand our own way. He welcomes us to own up to our anger, greed, envy, and vengeance. If his kingdom is ever to fully come, it must be a kingdom of forgiveness where rebel citizens can be made right again and again and again.

PAUL DAVID TRIPP

JANUARY 3

1 KINGS 19:1-8

Elijah had abandoned the job God gave him to do as Israel's prophet. He admitted that he had wrongly given up as he prayed in the desert, "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."

When we lose confidence in God, we never do so in the abstract. Rather, our faith dissolves in concrete situations where God doesn't seem up to the job. When Jezebel threatened Elijah he ran, revealing his false faith that she could affect his life more than the Lord. Yet, Elijah felt conviction of sin. He knew he'd sold God out, hence his conclusion that he was no better than anyone else. Life had become a messy, vicious cycle that made it hard even to consider approaching people again.

Remarkably, God did not ridicule or berate him. Nor did he reject him and find someone else to complete the mission. Instead, when Elijah arrived in the desert, God sent an angel to feed and strengthen him. Not only did Elijah's strength revive, so did his faith. Instead of simply running away from the enemy, he ran toward his Lord. Elijah may not have had enough faith to face the queen he had angered, but he learned he could face the God he had failed.

WILLIAM P. SMITH

JANUARY 4

1 PETER 1:3–25

The ending makes all the difference. A tragic story like Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* starts well, with people full of hope and love, but it ends badly. A comedy like *Much Ado About Nothing* opens with dark omens and scheming betrayers. The future looks very uncertain but it turns out wonderfully. It is the ending rather than the humor that makes it a comedy.

You must decide whether you will live life as a tragedy or a comedy. The story that Jesus offers you is a comedy. Scripture tells you the end, and, if you have put your faith in Jesus rather than in yourself, it is your end too. Jesus wins. His justice prevails. His love is seen for what it really is—boundless and irresistible. Our unity with him exceeds our imaginations. We will see that life was much more purposeful than we thought. Everything we ever did by faith—because of Jesus—stands firm and results in “praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Peter 1:7). Knowing this, of course, does not blot out sorrow. But knowing the end reveals that sorrow and death don't win. For those who know Christ, life and joy are the last word.

EDWARD T. WELCH

JANUARY 5

1 THESSALONIANS 5:14–18

Taking you out of the center of things, deep and thorough repentance and faith enable you to see those around you. You now see them through eyes cleansed by the forgiving grace of Christ. You begin to see things that, in your sin, you were not able to see. You may not ignore sin if it is there, but you begin to see the person and the struggles, temptations, and weaknesses that are part of his conflict with you. At this point, you can choose to serve and not be served. Christ's massive service for you on the cross gets bigger; it progressively changes your heart and empowers you to serve the other person. In 1 Thessalonians 5:14–18, Paul is giving pastoral instruction to the Thessalonians as they seek to help each other grow in grace.

“Warn the idle.” Love warns someone when there are patterns of destructive behavior that involve obvious violations of God's wise and loving commands. Whenever there is a persistent pattern of sin, love requires us to move toward the person with gentle courage and humble resolve. “Encourage the timid.” Love comes alongside the fearful and brings encouragement. “Help the weak.” The word *help* can be translated: “Hold on to them,” or “Put your arm round them.” This emphasizes the need for practical guidance and support through the long process of change. They need to be reminded of the gospel's comfort as well as its call.

TIMOTHY S. LANE