

BE STRONG
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**DECEMBER
DAILY
DEVOTIONALS**

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

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DECEMBER 01 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

2 Corinthians 4:18 - WHAT YOU SEE IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

I love this verse of scripture! Paul writes to the Corinthians and reminds them of this truth. In this world, there are things seen and things unseen. The unseen things are just as real as the seen things. And, the seen things that contradict the Word of God, which pertains to the unseen things of the spirit world, are only temporary. What a great truth to remember! Whatever you're facing today that seeks to steal from you, and rob you of your joy in Christ, remember that it's only temporary. In other words, it's subject to change! Are you facing symptoms of sickness or disease in your body? Those things were dealt with through the work of Jesus on the cross, so they go against the promises of God for health and long life. Therefore, they're subject to change!

Whatever you face today that flies in the face of Calvary - is subject to change through your faith! Therefore, I want to encourage you today to strengthen your hands which may be hanging down in despair, and get your eyes once again focused on God's faithfulness. He will never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). He is with you always, even to the end of this age (Matthew 28:20). So take a cue from the Apostle Paul. Remind yourself that what you see is only temporary, but the eternal, spiritual things of God are unchanging. They are constant. God watches over His word to perform it (Jeremiah 1:12), and He exalts His word above His own Name (Psalms 138:2). Is your wallet empty and you have many bills to pay? Don't worry, that situation is subject to change! It's only a temporary set of circumstances that God is well able to change, if you keep your eyes on Him and stay in faith! The devil is constantly trying to get you over into the area where you "see" only what can be observed in this 5-sense world in which we live. As long as he's successful in doing that, he'll whip you every time. But if you keep your eyes fixed on the spirit world, and the unchanging promises of God, you'll whip him every time. Remember, stay in faith because what you see in this world that contradicts God's word is only temporary. Your faith in God's word makes it subject to change!



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DECEMBER 02 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Galatians 6:10 - IS THERE ONLY A SEASON FOR DOING GOOD?

As we enter into the Christmas season, people start putting up all their decorations, lights, and slogans pertaining to the holiday season. One such thought that people have around Christmas is the thought of doing good to others. We talk about the "season" for giving, and for being kind to others. Hollywood makes movies that amplify this idea, and people flock to the theaters to watch them. And although it's a thought that definitely applies to the Christmas season, it's not something that's just reserved for this time of year. Oh yeah, it's Christmas time - time to think about God giving us His only begotten Son, so let's all talk about how wonderful it is to be kind and generous to those less fortunate around us. We have our clothing drives, the "Toys for Tots" program from the Armed Forces, special "human interest" stories on TV about people helping those less fortunate. We have loved ones with relatives serving in the Armed Forces overseas, surprising them with special gifts, treats or blessings. And why is all of this going on at this time of year? Because it's the Christmas "season."

Well, guess what? The season to be kind and generous to others is all year long, not just for a month or two at Christmas time. That's what Paul is reminding the Galatians here in our verse today. He says **AS YOU HAVE OPPORTUNITY**, do good to all men, especially those of the household of faith. He didn't say **IF** you have opportunity, he said **AS** you have opportunity. The fact is, we Christians have opportunity all the time, throughout the year, to be kind and giving and generous to those less fortunate around us. But, in most cases, we look the other way because we're too wrapped up in our own little world. In Mark 14:7, Jesus said that we'll have poor people with us always, and **WHENEVER WE WANT**, we can do them good. It reminds me of the story of the rich man and Lazarus, found in Luke 16:19-31. The rich man is in fiery torment even to this day, simply because he wasted his opportunities to be good to those less fortunate. In his case, it was the poor man laid at his gate full of sores. So what about you? Are you showing "goodwill towards men" only at Christmas time, or throughout the year, whenever the opportunities present themselves? I challenge you to make changes if the answer to that question isn't what God wants to hear! Do good! Be a generous person, not just at this time of year but always!



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DECEMBER 03 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Luke 16:25 - YOUR LIFETIME IS A LIMITED TIME OFFER!

I mentioned this story in yesterday's devotional, citing the importance of taking advantage of our opportunities to be good to others. As we enjoy another Christmas season, where we get to reflect on God's goodness to us in sending and giving Jesus, we must remind ourselves that generosity is not something relegated only this particular time of year. In truth, our lives are limited time offers from God, where we are commanded to extend Christian love and kindness to those around us. This is basically what Abraham told the rich man in our verse today. As the rich man cried out in pain for deliverance from his torment in the flames, Abraham reminded him that IN HIS LIFETIME he had many opportunities to be kind to those less fortunate, and make the choice to look the other way. In his case, he had a poor man named Lazarus, laid out at his front gate daily. This man was poor, sick, hungry and dying. His body was full of open wounds and sores that dogs came and licked at will. Apparently, Lazarus was so weak and sickly, he didn't even have the strength to drive the dogs away. At any time, the rich man could've gone out there to his front gate and helped this unfortunate soul. But instead he made a choice, the same kind of choice people make everyday all around us. He choose to stay inside his house, stuffing his face with food all day long and enjoying the "good life" as we say. But then it says he DIED...

Death comes to us all, rich or poor alike. The rich man's riches couldn't prevent that. Death is certainly no respecter of persons! The poor man died also. One went to Abraham's bosom, to wait for Jesus in relative rest and comfort. The other went to Hades, the place of fiery torment reserved for those who reject God's love and conditions for salvation. And in Hades, the rich man looks up and can actually see Lazarus standing with Abraham across a great gulf. Lazarus is now comforted, and the rich man is now tormented. And their addresses will NEVER change! Do you get that? Do you understand that? The rich man is STILL in Hades today, still looking for someone to dip their finger in water to cool his scorched tongue. And why is he there? Because he failed to understand the purpose for his life, and the purpose for his prosperity. Friend, your life isn't all about cars, homes, money, income, assets, investments and a soft and cushy retirement. Its all about helping people, being generous to people, and being ready at all times to GIVE as God gives you the leading to do so with the thousands of opportunities you have each year. Your life is a one-time opportunity from God. Don't make the mistake the rich man made. Don't let your opportunities to be kind and good to others pass you by! If you have the leading from God to be kind, be kind! Don't pass it up. When God says help someone, help them! This isn't just a Christmas theme, but a life theme for all of Christianity. Understand that, and you'll be enjoying the joys of Christmas all year long, not just for one or two months out of the year!



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DECEMBER 04 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

2 Timothy 4:6 - HOW WILL YOU BE REMEMBERED?

According to Luke 16:19-31, our lives are limited time offers from God. In our lifetime, we have a one-time shot at doing something, and being something of significance for the glory of God. Abraham reminded the rich man of this truth when he told him to REMEMBER the many opportunities he had had to do good while living on earth. The rich man failed to seize his opportunities and wasted his life - his one-time offer from God. When Paul came to the end of the road in 2 Timothy, he had a different song to sing. His was a song of triumph, accomplishment and significance. He knew his life had been spiritually meaningful because of the choices he had made to focus his time, talent and energies on the kingdom of God. As a result, his life, and the things he did while on earth serving Jesus, is still changing and influencing lives today. Only God knows how many people have found Jesus because of this man's ministry, both while he lived and then after he died. How about you? What kind of legacy are you going to leave behind?

The older I get, the more I think about these things. How will I be remembered after I'm gone, should Jesus tarry? What kind of spiritual, eternal impact has my life had for the glory of God? Have I helped anyone draw closer to God? Will there be a line of people in heaven someday, thanking God for the fact that if it weren't for me, they might not be in heaven as a child of God? What about your life? After you're dead and gone, how will people remember you? Or, outside of your immediate family, will people remember you at all? Sad to say, most Christians have no lasting legacy to leave behind. Why? Because they've never made ministry to others a priority in their lives. "But Apostle Mike", you might say, "I'm not a minister like you!" Maybe not, in the sense of being one of the five-fold ministry gifts (Ephesians 4:11), but ALL believers are full-time ambassadors for Christ, and as such, are full-time ministers of the gospel. You are a minister of Jesus Christ whether you know it or not, or believe it or not. What are you doing with that calling and that charge from God? How are you making a difference in people's lives? How are you helping people draw closer to Jesus? WHY would anyone remember you after you're gone? These are questions you need to honestly ask yourself. If you don't like the answers, make a change and start building an eternal legacy for after you're gone - one that will live on and on in the hearts and lives of others.



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DECEMBER 05 DAILY DEVOTIONAL Psalms 118:17 - BUILD YOURSELF A LEGACY!

We all die. Death is a part of life. The only ones who won't die are those who get taken in the Rapture of the church, which is a controversial doctrine that some don't accept, but one which I personally believe in. But let's say whether there is or isn't a Rapture of the church - we live out our lives and physically die before Jesus returns. We come to the day of our death. If that happens, we find a statement here in this verse which helps us understand that death is not the end for a believer, but rather a new beginning. Our death in this life means we go home to be Jesus, which is the start of our eternal life with Him in heaven, or wherever else He might go in the eons of eternity yet to come. But more than that, our physical death begins something else - our earthly legacy. Have you thought about your legacy? What does the term mean anyway? The word "legacy" simply means something received from an ancestor or predecessor from the past. So after your death, should Jesus tarry, what would you be able to pass on to those you leave behind? A legacy of love? A legacy of kindness? A legacy of ministry and unselfishness? Any legacy at all?

Ask yourself these questions. You need to begin building your legacy NOW, while you're still alive and a member of the body of Christ on earth. What would you pass on to others if you died today? How would they remember you? What have you imparted to others that they could use to be a better Christian, or a more fruitful soul winner? This is your legacy. This is the sum total of the value of the life you've lived. Proverbs 27:21 says that a man is valued BY WHAT OTHERS SAY OF HIM. Not what God says about him, but what other people say about him. In other words, the value of your life as far as God is concerned, is not determined by how He sees you, but rather by how much you've helped others draw closer to Jesus. Think about that! God already loves you, and already has proven that by sending Jesus to the cross. And, He's no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34), so He loves ALL men equally. But, your earthly VALUE is determined by something else. It's determined from the number of people who got something from you that helped them find not only salvation, but also a way to get closer to Jesus as one of His disciples. The more people you've helped in this way, the more value your life has had, and the greater of a legacy you'll leave behind. If your life isn't all about helping others, your life hasn't got much value as far as God is concerned, and you won't have much of a legacy to leave behind to others. But that can change! You can change it! You can start TODAY to make helping others the legacy of your life. That way, even if you die before the Rapture, your life will still go on!



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DECEMBER 06 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Genesis 4:10 - YOUR BLOOD WILL TELL YOUR TALE!

History is full of examples of Christians who gave their lives for the furtherance of the gospel. Many times, Christians in the Western church forget this, and fail to understand and appreciate our brothers and sisters who've made the supreme sacrifice for their faith. Make no mistake about it - history is being written today, all over the world as well. I read one report said that there were more Christians murdered for their faith in the 20th century, than in all of the first 19 centuries combined! If true, that's an amazing statistic! And then there is the horrific displays of barbarism and persecution against Christians going on right now in the Middle East, Europe and Asia. We need to remember that for those who have given their lives, their blood continues to speak, and their death was NOT in vain! Their shed blood became a tool that God used then, and is using even today, to witness to those of us left behind. Are you aware of that?

Your life can live on long after you die and go home to be with Jesus. And to what degree that happens is basically up to you! Your blood can speak, so to speak, when you understand the importance of building and leaving a legacy for those you leave behind when you die, no matter how or when you depart and go home to be with Jesus. Death itself is not to be feared - for the Christian it's a homecoming event that should really be anticipated with great joy. God says that the death of His saints is PRECIOUS in His sight (Psalms 116:15). So as we celebrate the year's Christmas season, bear in mind the eternal aspect of your life. And realize that for the many souls who have made the ultimate sacrifice through death for their faith, their blood will continue to speak and witness for all eternity. Understanding that, and living life in the light of that, helps us to maintain our focus, our energy, our resolve and our priorities.



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DECEMBER 07 DAILY DEVOTIONAL Luke 12:14 - GOD SEES EVERY ACT OF KINDNESS

In our verse today, we see Jesus teaching us the importance of being kind to those who have no ability to repay. And at the end of this teaching, He makes the statement found in our verse for the day. He said that EVERY act of kindness done to those who can't repay will, in fact, be repaid in Heaven someday by God. And although most Christians would nod their heads in agreement with that truth, very few of us actually DO acts of kindness accordingly. Many believers need to be noticed and recognized for the things they do to help others less fortunate. They may not say it to your face, but inside they really have that desire. It makes them feel good when they're recognized for what they do to help the needy, and they feel hurt or offended if they're not. Where do you fit in all of this? When you give to others to help them out, how important is it to you if you get recognition from those around you, or even from those you are giving to?

As far as God is concerned, the real beauty in giving and being kind to those unable to repay is the fact that the giver isn't interested in being seen or applauded on earth in this life. It's when we expect, demand or want public recognition, that's when we lose our rewards in heaven for the good deeds done to the needy. At Christmas time, people like to emphasize the idea of giving. Although it's something we should be doing year-round, Christmas is a season which has become a focal point for such activities. So this year, as you look at the needs around you, just give as the Spirit leads, and don't be so concerned about who notices what you do. If people notice and say "thanks", that's fine of course. But if they don't, that's still fine too. God sees everything, and EVERY act of kindness, if done with a pure heart and with right motives, will be openly rewarded in heaven someday. Don't be concerned about being recognized or noticed here on earth. It should be more than enough to know that God noticed what you did, and He'll take care of you in heaven, where it really counts.



DECEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

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DECEMBER 08 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Luke 2:14 - PEACE ON EARTH?

Over the years, God has had me write a number of books, and one of them was written on the subject of peace. Why? Because people need to understand the power of peace in their lives – now more than ever. And here in our verse today, we see one of the most repeated and commercially exploited statements concerning the Christmas season. PEACE ON EARTH, GOODWILL TOWARDS MEN! How many Christmas cards, banners and advertising paraphernalia have you seen with that line on them or in them? In my lifetime, the answer would be a lot! But, do we really know and understand the power of God's peace? Most Christians don't, and that's why God had me write that book. In part, to let people know God's peace is available to ANYONE who accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior of their lives, and to also know that peace has the inherent power to change us, protect us, strengthen us, or do whatever needs to be done to surround us with God's presence and anointing. Jesus came to provide us with God's peace on earth. That's why the heavenly host said what they said in our verse today. In heaven, God's peace rules and reigns. But how about on earth, where the devil is constantly at work to disrupt and destroy our lives?

At this time of year, more than ever, we need to remind ourselves about the power of God's peace, and do whatever it takes to find it, or re-discover it. No matter what the devil throws against you, if you maintain your peace, you're insulated from the temptations to fear the future. I know in my own life and ministry, whenever I'm being tempted to fear, if I take the time to get before the Lord and meditate on His promises and faithfulness, the fear I'm feeling gives way to the peace of God – a peace that passes all understanding. So beginning today, we're going to devote a number of daily devotionals to the peace of God. At Christmas, people sing about peace, talk about peace and write about peace. But without Jesus, you CAN'T have real peace. Any "peace" outside of knowing Jesus is a lie in disguise – it's only a temporary FEELING. Why? Because He is the PRINCE OF PEACE (Isaiah 9:6), NO ONE ELSE! He is the consummate source for peace, no matter who you are or where you are. There is no REAL peace without Jesus. So if the Lord is YOUR Lord, relax! Let His peace dominate your life in every way. In doing so, you'll come to the place where Christmas is really appreciated, and understood.



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DECEMBER 09 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

John 14:27 - JESUS HAS LEFT YOU HIS PEACE

In yesterday's devotional, I told you that without Jesus, you can't have real peace. This verse in John confirms the truth of that statement. "MY PEACE I give to you," Jesus said. Then He said, "...not as the world gives do I give it to you." Notice it's HIS peace, NOT YOURS. That's why you can't find it anywhere outside of Jesus, because it can only be found by making Him the Lord and Savior of your life. But what about all the Christians that are just as harried, hassled, and hurried as the world of unbelievers around them? Truth be told, they've made Jesus Savior, but not really Lord - at least not in the arena of day to day living. If Jesus is your Lord, relax and let His peace control your life. According to today's verse, His peace was left for us to enjoy, so why not enjoy it? Don't let the affairs of this life rob you of God's peace, especially at this time of year. While Christians should be reflecting on peace, and renewing themselves to the power of God's peace during the Christmas season, instead they find themselves running around in frantic panic, just like the sinners and people who don't know Jesus. Are you in that boat today?

People running around buying presents, attending parties, taking care of year-end business, entertaining family and friends. In a word: HECTIC! Don't let that be you this Christmas season. Instead, witness to others with God's peace - the peace which Jesus came and died to make available to all men. Relax, step back from the hustle and bustle, and re-gain your perspective. Philippians chapter 4 says the peace of God is a peace which PASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING. Let that peace guard your heart and mind this Christmas season, as it is designed to do (Philippians 4:7). Relax, and enjoy this precious time of year! Jesus has left you His peace, so receive it, enjoy it, and don't let the frantic holiday season steal it from you!



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DECEMBER 10 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Luke 6:27 - TIS THE SEASON TO LOVE UNLOVELY PEOPLE!

Jesus said we should love our enemies. Not hate them, but love them. How? By doing the following things that we find in today's verse. 1) DO GOOD to those who hate you. 2) BLESS those who persecute you. 3) PRAY for those who spitefully use you. So, to love your enemies, we must do them good, bless them and pray for them. At Christmas time, people like to talk about doing good to others, but how many actually follow these directions here? Not many - and certainly not many within the church. But when you're tempted to think this is too hard to do, just think about Christmas, and what God actually did when Jesus was sent to be born of the virgin Mary. What an act of love!!!! Knowing that most men would reject His Son, God sent Him into the world anyway. What was He doing? In essence, the very thing Jesus is telling us to do in today's verse. He was loving the unlovely, who, in this case, was you, me and all humankind.

Of course, many will try to excuse themselves by saying that was God, and only God could love like that. But that's not what Jesus said. He said we should walk in love AS HE HAS LOVED US (John 13:34). And, Romans 5:5 says the love of God is already shed abroad within us through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. So now more than ever, at Christmas time, take an objective look at how you're dealing with people - specifically, those who don't like you, are using you or taking advantage of you. How are you treating them in return? Are you looking for ways to do them good? Are you trying your best to bless them at every turn? Are you genuinely praying for them? This is the mark of true Christianity. Nothing else can accurately identify you as a Christian. Jesus said by this shall all men know that we are His disciples. How? By loving others as He has loved us. Merry Christmas! Don't you just feel all warm and fuzzy inside when you're told to love the ones you can't stand? Ha! Well, that's what Christianity is all about, and most especially at this time of year. So quit looking for excuses my friend. If you've got a "list" of those you don't like, make a point this Christmas season to reach out to them in some way to show your love and Christianity. Tis the season to love the unlovely!



DECEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

DECEMBER 11 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Genesis 18:14 - THE MIRACULOUS ELEMENT OF CHRISTMAS

When people think about Christmas, they think of many things. Lights. Decorations. Food. Gifts. Getting together with family and friends. If you're Christian, you think about the love of God in sending Jesus to earth, and all the wonder of that special night. We think of the wise men, the shepherds, Joseph and Mary, the angels singing, and of course, our beloved Lord as a Babe, laying in the manger. But how many of us really stop to ponder the miraculous element of Christmas? A virgin conceived and gave birth to Jesus. The Holy Spirit caused her to become pregnant through faith, and as a result, Jesus was born. This is one of the cornerstone doctrines of Christianity. Jesus was the Word made flesh. He was born of a virgin. That's impossible, yet, as we read in today's verse, nothing is impossible for God. And I think that's the one element of Christmas that gets missed far too often when Christians think about Christmas. Christmas is a celebration over God's love, God's faithfulness, and also, God's miracle-working power!

So this Christmas, stop your busyness long enough to reflect and ponder upon the miraculous element of this blessed event. In order for God's plan of salvation to come to pass, Jesus HAD to be born of a virgin, something which is not possible in the natural. From the very beginning, our Lord's life on earth was a miracle. He was born because of a miracle. His ministry was all about the miracles of healing and deliverance which confirmed His messages and His identity. And then, His resurrection from the dead is the final miracle which completed this marvelous plan of salvation for mankind. And it all started with the little baby Jesus in that manger thousands of years ago. If you are in need of something miraculous this Christmas season, there's no better time to get it! The more you meditate on the miraculous element of Christmas, the more your faith will rise within you, and the impossible will become the possible. If all things are possible for God, all things are possible for you through faith. Jesus said so in Mark 9:23. **ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE TO HIM WHO BELIEVES!** All things! Not most things, but all things. That's the true message of Christmas. Don't get so busy with your holiday activities that you miss this wonderful point!



DECEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

DECEMBER 12 DAILY DEVOTIONAL 1 Corinthians 4:20 - NOT IN WORD, BUT POWER!

In yesterday's devotional, we talked about the miraculous element of Christmas. We see that truth revealed once again in today's verse, where Paul reminds the Corinthians that God's kingdom is not in word, but power. That's what Christmas reminds me of every year. As I ponder and think about the Christmas event, I'm always awestruck at the miraculous aspect of what actually happened. The 2nd person of the Trinity left heaven, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, took upon Himself human form in the womb of the virgin Mary. This is what Philippians 2:5-11 is talking about. That passage is really a Christmas passage, yet few people really think of it in that way. I mean, when you really think about it, it's so awesome and wonderful, words can't describe it. God actually becoming a man, FOR US! This is the miracle of Christmas. We can't understand it with our natural mind, but we can certainly praise God for it! And I do, whenever I think about it.

And as I face the daily challenges of sanctification, and purpose in my heart to stand strong in Jesus, it helps to stop and really consider the whole Christmas event from a miraculous perspective. If God did all of that for us, in sending Jesus and having Him born of a virgin, then SURELY He's well-able to take care of me today, and meet my needs, right? That's how you should see it too. The kingdom of God is not in word, but power. Too many times we spend our time intellectualizing the gospel, and we do that to our own hurt I think. The whole plan of salvation began with something totally miraculous, it was carried out in the power of the Holy Spirit, and the resurrection from death was the final event that completed the plan. It's all about MIRACLES! It's all about the power of God in manifestation. It's NOT about getting up and sounding so polished and intelligent behind some pulpit somewhere. Don't mis-understand me here. It's fine to be a student of God's Word, and to make the study of God and His Word the focal point of your life. That's great, but NEVER forget that ultimately, it's not our sermons or scripture revelations that get the job done for God, but the power of God in manifestation which CONFIRMS the messages we share (Mark 16:15-20). So ask yourself how much of God's power is working in you, and through you to others. Because that's what Christmas is really all about, and that's how I encourage you to view it from now on!



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DECEMBER 13 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

1 Corinthians 2:4-5 - WHERE IS YOUR FAITH GROUNDED?

I think this is one of the most powerful statements in the whole Bible. Our faith, which we must have in order to please God (Hebrews 11:6), must be grounded in the power of God, NOT in the wisdom of men. Is your faith grounded in the power of God? As we celebrate the Christmas season, I want to remind you of this truth. Every Christian should be a walking testimony of God's power, and the Christmas season should be one which amplifies that fact to everyone who sees us and knows us. Ask yourself, as you view the traditional Christmas scene with the manger, the baby Jesus, Joseph, Mary, the shepherds, the angels and the animals (the wise men weren't there, they came along much later, when Jesus was almost 2 years old), how much of God's power rules in your life? Is your life a walking testimony of God's power? It should be, and Christmas should be a time to be reminded of that.

Paul told the Corinthians that their faith should never be grounded in the wisdom of men, and yet, if you look around at how most churches handle the Bible, you'd plainly see that is exactly where most of them have placed their faith. They love to camp around their intellect, and fellowship there. Introduce the power of God in some public way, and suddenly they get nervous! Isn't that sad? Come along and preach a message about the power of God, miracles, sudden manifestations of supernatural power in response to faith, and they'll throw you out on your ear! Stand up and challenge people to believe in the impossible, and they'll call you a freak or fanatic. But come along and mesmerize them with dazzling displays of oratorical preaching, with services as dry as the desert, and they'll listen to you for hours. Power! Miracles! Testimonies! Our faith **MUST** be grounded in those things, and there's no better time to think and meditate on that than now, at Christmas time. That's the way it's supposed to be when we come together for church! Where is your faith grounded? In the wisdom of men, or the power of God?



DECEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

DECEMBER 14 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Matthew 2:1 - THE WISE MEN!

Today I'd like to dispel a bit of Christmas tradition. Not to disrupt your mindset about the Christmas event, but just so you know that not everything we've always assumed about the stable scene is accurate. The three wise men is one such example. First of all, there are no verses which specifically say there were only three of them. The fact is, no one knows how many actually came to worship Jesus and give their gifts to Him. It might've been three, or three hundred for all we know! Historically, when caravans traveled through the deserts from the east, they were comprised of many men and pack animals, like camels. This was because of the harshness of the desert, and the constant threat of attack from thieves and marauders. There was safety in numbers, so when the wise men finally made it to Jerusalem, and asked King Herod about Jesus, the whole city was stirred at their coming (Matthew 2:3). Just three visiting foreigners would not have had that kind of city-wide effect on the people and King, but this band of wise men was probably numbering in the dozens, or even the hundreds.

And when we see our traditional Nativity scene, we always see those three wise men worshipping the baby Jesus in the manger. For years as I was growing up, my Mom would set out the manger scene in our house as part of our family Christmas decorations. When she did, I had the responsibility for positioning all the little figurines in and around the stable. I can remember putting the three shepherds on one side of the stable, and the three wise men on the other side. Well, in truth, the shepherds were definitely there when Jesus was born, but the wise men weren't! That's another long-standing Christmas tradition that needs to be upended. The fact is they didn't show up to give gifts to Jesus until the Lord was around two years old. How do we know? Well, first of all, Matthew 2:9 describes Jesus as a YOUNG CHILD at the time they arrived with gifts. It also says Jesus was IN THE HOUSE, not the stable (Matthew 2:11). And how do we know Jesus was around two years old? Because when Herod went to Bethlehem to kill Jesus, he ordered the soldiers to kill all boys who were two years old or younger, based on the time-line given to him when he inquired of the wise men when they first arrived in Jerusalem (Matthew 2:16). So, the next time you see the nativity scene portrayed somewhere, showing the viewer three wise men at the stable with baby Jesus, just remember that this particular church tradition is actually unscriptural!



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BY MIKE KEYES, SR

DECEMBER 15 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Luke 1:18 - WATCH YOUR ATTITUDE WHEN TALKING TO GOD!

When talking to God, or in the case of today's verse, talking to an angel sent from God, it's important to maintain the proper attitude. If you look at this story, the question Zacharias asked the angel wasn't all that bad. In fact, it would be quite understandable to ask such a question when an angel from heaven comes to you with this kind of news, right? What news? Miraculous news - that your wife, who has been barren all her life - is going to get pregnant and have a son in her old age. Wouldn't you ask the same question? I would. What was his reply and question to the angel? HOW SHALL I KNOW THIS? Or, how can this be, or how will this come to pass? That's not an out-of-bounds question. It's a natural question to ask, so why was he struck mute for the next nine months, until the baby boy was born? Because of the ATTITUDE behind the question. It was AN ATTITUDE OF UNBELIEF which angered God, not the question itself. The angel specifically said as much when he said the reason why Zacharias had been made mute was because HE DIDN'T BELIEVE THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE (Luke 1:20). So it wasn't the question itself that was the problem, but the attitude of unbelief behind the question.

That's important to remember, especially when talking to God about issues or problems in life that we face. When you hear God say, from His Word, that ALL THINGS are possible to him who believes (Mark 9:23), then believe it! And when God tells you that He's for you, and not against you (Romans 8:31), don't reply with some flippant remark that is saturated in unbelief! Remember, God sees your heart, and knows the motive behind the actions, and the attitude behind the words spoken. Therefore, be sure you always have the right attitude when talking with God - which is the attitude of faith. Don't have the sarcastic, cynical, pessimistic, faithless attitude that Zacharias had. That will get you into trouble with God! Basically, in unbelief, Zacharias had asked for a sign to prove that what the angel was saying was going to happen. One minute after he was struck dumb and mute, I bet he was wishing he'd never asked for a sign! He wanted a sign, and he got one - nine months of not being able to speak! Now that's a sign you'll perk up and take notice of, right? So be very careful with not just the words you speak, but the attitude behind those words spoken. Never forget that God LOVES YOU, and always wants to move miraculously on your behalf. If something seems ridiculously impossible to you, which is what Zacharias must've thought, don't let that move you to a place of unbelief. It may be ridiculous as far as the natural mind goes, but nothing is ridiculous or impossible with God! If He's involved, it's possible, and it's legitimate. Keep your attitude right, and the Christmas season will serve as the constant reminder to you that with God, all things are possible (Genesis 18:14)!



DECEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

DECEMBER 16 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Luke 1:38 - ZACHARIAS VS. MARY

If you compare the encounters between the angel Gabriel and the two individuals, Mary and Zacharias, you find many similarities, except for the outcome of the encounter! In yesterday's devotional, we saw that the evil attitude of unbelief displayed by Zacharias angered God, which resulted in him being unable to speak for nine months! Conversely, when the same angel came to Mary with his announcement to her, we see that initially her response was almost identical as that of Zacharias. When the angel told her what was about to happen to her, her first question was just like that of Zacharias. She said, "How can this be, since I'm a virgin?" That sounds very much like Zacharias' response in vs. 18 of the same chapter. He said, "How shall I know this, for I'm old and my wife is old too?" But unlike Zacharias, Mary's attitude was one of faith, not doubt, skepticism and unbelief. When the angel answered her question in verses 36 and 37, her response was the verse we're looking at today. She said, in essence, "Okay, I don't know how this could come to pass, but I'm a servant of God, so if you say it will be, then let it be to me according to your word." That was the answer the angel was waiting for. When she said that, he disappeared and the Incarnation was put in motion.

In your own life today, which of these two characters would be more like you? Are you like Zacharias, or like Mary? When you face impossible situations, and you find a promise in God's Word that guarantees you help, deliverance and victory, how do you respond? Like Zacharias, or like Mary? Do you find yourself commenting on God's Word with a note of skepticism, fear and unbelief? Or, even if you don't understand how God will bring you victory, do you find yourself in simple faith, taking God purely at His Word? Unfortunately, most believers are far more like Zacharias than Mary, and that's why they struggle with the problems and circumstances that beset them. If that has been you for too long, its time to change! Its time to wake up and realize that, just as the angel said to Mary, **WITH GOD NOTHING SHALL BE IMPOSSIBLE**. If that's true, and we know that it is, start acting like it's true, and start talking like its true. The entire Christmas event is about the impossible becoming possible, so why not just let yourself get swept up in the power of that truth this holiday season? Why not just decide to take God at his word, and instead of being like Zacharias, you become like Mary. God's word is the final authority in life, but is it final authority in YOUR life?



DECEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

DECEMBER 17 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Luke 1:67 - RELAX! GOD STILL USES THOSE WHO FAIL!

In our past few devotionals, we've been looking at Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist. At this time of year we tend to overlook this portion of the Christmas story, but it's an important part nonetheless. We've compared Zacharias with Mary, and seen the difference in their levels of faith in God and His word. And today we're going to move beyond the faith failures of Zacharias, and see the encouraging aspect to all of this. What is it? **GOD STILL USES FAILURES LIKE ZACHARIAS - AND US!** When I say "US", I'm talking about you and me, and all believers living on earth today. To be sure, Zacharias failed God. When Gabriel came to him with the wonderful message about his wife conceiving and giving birth, he responded with doubt and unbelief. Basically, he missed it and failed with his faith -just like you and I have done many, many times! But hold on, and don't fret my friend! Here's the good news, and it's found in today's verse. Even though there was a faith failure on his part, God still anointed and blessed and used Zacharias **AFTER** that! He'll do the same for you and me.

God isn't finished with you. You may have failed Him thousands of times, but each time you come to Him to say you're sorry and to ask His forgiveness, He extends it to you without hesitation. Isn't that amazing? I think so, because if I were God, I wouldn't be as inclined to forgive as often and as freely as He does! His mercy is new **EVERY** morning, not just every other morning! He **WANTS** to use you, anoint you, bless you, and make you a player and not just a spectator. And all of that is true in spite of your failures, mistakes and sins. Listen friend, if God was waiting for me to have my act together consistently, He would've given up on me a long time ago. I've failed in faith many times, and been guilty of the same sins as Zacharias. But what encourages me is to see that after his baby was born, God still chose to use Zacharias to prophesy over the nation, and over his new born son. So don't **EVER** let the devil tell you that because of some failure in your life spiritually, God is somehow finished with you. Nothing could be further from the truth. If you want to continue on with God, He wants to continue on with you. Nothing would make Him happier! So as we approach Christmas this year, I want you to meditate and reflect on how God took a faith failure like Zacharias, and brought him through to the point where he was once again on the front lines, doing notable things for the Lord. I'm thinking of Peter as well – the one who denied Jesus three times within an hour or so of publicly declaring he would never do such a thing. In spite of that faith failure, Peter went on to become a pillar in the New Testament church. Read Micah 7:8-9. Read it and rejoice. Despite your mistakes and failures, your best days in Christ are **AHEAD OF YOU**, not behind you!



DECEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

DECEMBER 18 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Matthew 2:13 - DREAMS!

One aspect of the Christmas story I want you to notice with me is the important part that dreams played in the whole event coming to pass. Although we're highlighting one verse in our devotional today, I want you to go back, read the whole story, and count up the number of times that God used dreams in the nighttime to guide and direct Joseph and his family. I think sometimes we overlook some of these facets of the story, but we need to see that if God used dreams then, He's still using dreams now. Now that doesn't mean we should believe that every dream, good or bad, is some message from the Lord. But on the other hand, we shouldn't be closed to the idea that if God so chooses, He will use dreams to CONFIRM things He's already dealing with you about in your heart.

Remember that Joseph was still living in the Old Covenant at the time Jesus was born. He was not a born-again Christian, because the resurrection hadn't yet taken place. So it would be expected that God would use dreams in a more direct way to guide him and instruct him. Today however, we have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. He is the third person of the Trinity, and so His voice and His witness become the primary ways that God leads us and guides us today. But again, don't count out the fact that if necessary, as God chooses, dreams can still play a part in how He leads and guides you. In fact, in Acts 2:17, dreams are specifically mentioned as one of the methods of guidance from the Lord in the last days. So when you lie down to go to bed, do so with an attitude of expectation and anticipation. Of course, not every dream is something from God - I hope you understand that. But, keep an open mind and heart, and if God chooses to bless you with a dream of some kind to help you and guide you, then praise Him for it! Its part of the Christmas story!



DECEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

DECEMBER 19 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

John 3:16 - LOVE'S GREATEST EXPRESSION

When you think about Christmas, you think about many things that are commonly tied to the season itself. There are the lights, the decorations, the manger scenes, the Christmas Trees, the singing and Christmas caroling, and many other things like that. But I want you today to think about something else with me. Think about the LOVE that God demonstrated in sending Jesus to take upon Himself flesh and die in our place. Of all the things I could think about when I think about Christmas, that's the best thought of them all! In 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, we see the classic listing of love characteristics. One of them is that love is never selfish or self-seeking. God certainly demonstrated that aspect of love when He sent Jesus, and Jesus showed it when He came to earth and died in our place. Read Philippians 2 carefully, and as you meditate on how Jesus left heaven, came to earth and took upon Himself the form of humanity, marvel at how much love is involved in such a thing. For God to love us that much, it should forever settle our concerns about whether He will be there for us in the difficult times!

It's always profitable to meditate on the love of God. I encourage you to do that too, especially at this time of year. Some of the Christmas scenery and decorations are seasonal - after New Year's people put away all the tinsel, wreaths, lights, decorations and trees until next year. But the love aspect goes on, and on, and on, and on! And thank God it does! Do you really realize how much you are loved by God? Most Christians haven't got a clue. They think they do, and they talk like they do sometimes, but really, down deep in their hearts, they've never gotten a hold of it. In fact, God the Father loves you EXACTLY the same as He loves His Son Jesus. Jesus said so in John 17:23. God doesn't love Jesus one bit more than He loves you! Do you understand that? Have you really thought about that? Can you really comprehend that? If you ever do, to the point where you really get it down in your spirit, you'll never again doubt God in any area of your life, ever! And that, to me, is the main facet of the Christmas story - God's love for you, and me! I don't ever want that to get lost in all the hustle and bustle of the season. I want to always remember, and never forget, how much I am loved for God to do what He did in sending Jesus. You do the same, my friend. No matter how lonely you are, or how alone you may be today, remember what I'm telling you here. If you have a hard time believing it, like so many Christians, then start confessing that truth daily, out loud to yourself. Say it loud enough and long enough, until you believe what you're saying. Why does Romans say that if God be for us, who can be against us (Romans 8:31)? BECAUSE HE LOVES YOU! He is madly, head-over-heels, in love with you! That's Christmas! Meditate on that today, and it WILL make your day!



DECEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

DECEMBER 20 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

1 Corinthians 13:5 - LOVE NEVER PUTS ITSELF FIRST

In yesterday's devotional, we talked about the love of God being the foundational Christmas theme. Did you do what I asked you to do yesterday? Have you taken time to meditate on how much God loves you? He loves you as much as Jesus (John 17:23), not one bit less. If you do spend time meditating on that truth, you come to understand, by our Lord's example, that love never puts itself first. Love always considers the needs and concerns of others first, and then DOES something to meet that need or address that concern. God didn't just leave us in our helpless state of sin. He did something about it. He expressed His love. He sent Jesus, and Jesus freely came. Now how about the ones in your life that could use some love? Are you reaching out to them, the way God reached out to all of us, as demonstrated by the entire Christmas event? Don't wait for the unlovely people to suddenly have a change of heart, and come running to you to apologize for the wrongs they've done against you! That will probably never happen. But loves always takes the first step towards reconciliation, just like God took the first step to bring salvation to us.

I encourage you today to pray, get God's guidance, and CONTACT those who have wronged you, hurt you, abused you, taken advantage of you, and in whatever ways, have caused you offense. Don't just let this pass, do it while it's fresh in your spirit. No, it won't be easy of course, anymore than it was easy for the 2nd person of the Trinity to come to earth, be born as a man in a stable, and humble Himself the way He did for 33 years, before allowing Himself to be crucified on the cross and made to be sin with our offenses and transgressions. But Jesus did it for you, and has loved you since the day you were born. He didn't wait for you to reach out to Him; He reached out to you first. Be like that this week, and I guarantee Christmas will be a very special one for you this year! What if they don't respond to your kindness and love? Just leave that between them and God, and you just continue to love them AS IF they were saved, on fire for God, and totally your best friend! How do you do that, you ask? BY FAITH! You love the unlovely by faith, the same way you use faith for money, healing or health, or for anything else you have need of in this life. And you DO have a need here - the need to exercise God's love inside you, and practice loving people who haven't yet taken steps to apologize or make right what they did wrong against you. Take the first step, like Peter getting out of the boat! You'll find that once you start loving like God loves you, it will be like walking on water!



DECEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

DECEMBER 21 DAILY DEVOTIONAL John 13:34-35 - ARE YOU PRACTICING LOVE?

When God sent Jesus to the earth, to take upon Himself flesh and blood to die in our place, He demonstrated the greatest act of love humankind has ever seen. In other words, God was PRACTICING love towards us, sending Jesus to be our sin substitute. That's what Christmas is, an example of love being practiced from the Divine perspective. You see, we talk about lawyers PRACTICING law, and we talk about doctors PRACTICING medicine, but you need to see that as a Christian, we're COMMANDED to PRACTICE LOVE. And who are we practicing on? Everybody else - starting with God Himself!

It's not easy to walk in love, that's why so few have mastered it in their lives. You have to dedicate yourself to it, and practice loving people who are not loveable. Jesus said that anyone can love those who love them, but the real test comes when we love those who don't love us, offend us, and have done things to harm us or hurt us. That's when we're really practicing love, when we're doing it by faith and not by feelings. God sent Jesus before you even knew you needed Him. That's an example of how you practice love in this world. You don't wait for your enemies to apologize before you forgive them. You do it as unto the Lord, with or without their cooperation! You show kindness to ungrateful people, whether they show any gratitude or not, because you're doing it as unto the Lord, not as unto them. You practice this business of walking in love, and as you keep doing it, you'll be getting better at it. The more you do it, the better you'll be at it. Just like with learning a sport, skill or occupation, the more you do it, the better you'll become at it. The more you practice, the more familiar you'll be with what you're practicing, and the better you'll be at doing it consistently. Pretty soon, you'll have practiced for so long that it becomes your natural, instinctive response. It won't be the exception anymore, it will become the rule. Just like a doctor. The more they practice medicine, the better (we hope at least) they become. The same with lawyers. The more they try cases in court, the better and more comfortable they become with the whole legal process. So this Christmas, realize that as a Christian, you're commanded to PRACTICE love to the world around you. We have practicing doctors, and practicing lawyers, but you are a practicing Christian! Let your love demonstrate that fact!



DECEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

DECEMBER 22 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Psalms 107:31 - LEARNING TO SAY "THANK YOU!"

This Christmas, how many millions of people will "celebrate" the "holiday" without once lifting their hearts, hands and voices to heaven to say thank you to God for what this event is all about? People spend hundreds, and even thousands of dollars buying each other gifts, and for what? What is this whole thing about anyway? By now I'm sure you've seen the many different ways we've mass marketed the slogan that says JESUS IS THE REASON FOR THE SEASON. Well, it's true, so how are you expressing your thanks to God for that fact? I mean really, have you spent any appreciable amount of time with your eyes heavenward, thanking God for Christmas? Thanking Him for what Christmas has meant to your eternal salvation? My friend, Christmas isn't about you, your family, your loved ones or anyone or anything else. Its all about Jesus, and God's love extended and expressed to all humankind.

In today's verse, the Psalmist is exhorting his readers to stop their busyness long enough to say "thank you" to God for His goodness, and for His wonderful works towards them. Well, one of the most wonderful of all the wonderful works would certainly be the Incarnation, the 2nd person of the Trinity becoming a man, being born of a virgin in a lowly stable in Bethlehem. I'd call that definitely a wonderful work, how about you? If you have even the slightest notion of what Christmas is all about, then stop long enough to lift your eyes, hands and voice to the Lord, and say THANK YOU! Say it again and again, and let it be the most natural, and prominent aspect of your personality! Christians should be the most grateful, thankful and appreciative people on earth, because they KNOW what Christmas is all about, and they KNOW what Jesus came to do to secure our salvation. In Psalms 107, over and over, the writer stops to just throw up his hands and proclaim God's goodness, and to say THANK YOU for it all. He's not just doing it for himself, but he's also encouraging others to do the same. I'm doing that to you now. Learn to be thankful. Practice being grateful. Tell God how much Christmas means to you. Let Him know you understand and appreciate His work. In doing so, you'll become a much richer, fuller and satisfied person, and Christmas will truly be to you the wonderful event it really is!



DECEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

DECEMBER 23 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Philippians 1:6 - GOD WILL FINISH WHAT HE STARTED IN YOU!

Everybody feels like a failure from time to time. I've had those feelings many times over the years, and you have too. But when I'm tempted to view my life as a failure, or my ministry as ineffective, or whatever, I'm blessed to meditate on today's verse. Remember this my friend. When you feel like giving up, stop and remind yourself of the glory and the rewards that await you in heaven as a child of God. There's a reason why God talks so much about the rewards waiting for those who see their work through to the end without faltering or falling away. He knows there are ample opportunities to quit, especially when things are not working out the way we know they should. It's not always easy to stay steadfast and committed to the Lord's work when you're feeling like a failure, but you must! People's eternal destinies depend upon it! The work God started in you **WILL** be completed **IF** you stay in the game and don't quit or give up. He needs you to stay on the court and keep moving forward - for your sake and the sakes of all those He sends you to in His name. Remember, the rewards waiting for us don't have to do with just having nice things or being recognized by the Lord. Most importantly, our rewards have to do with the line of people in heaven - people who are there because we didn't quit or give up running our race for God Almighty. That's the reward to end all rewards! And as we approach Christmas this year, be reminded of this truth as you look at the plan of salvation, and the way in which that plan was carried out.

The Christmas event was not the end, but the beginning of our Lord's earthly walk and ministry. As miraculous as the Incarnation was, it was still only the beginning. Jesus still had to grow, become a man, enter into His ministry, and fulfill the requirements of the law in order to become the spotless sin sacrifice on the cross. That whole process took more than 33 years! And in your life, the process of sanctification will take time too, so don't let the devil condemn you or convince you to quit and give up. The work that God started in you when you got born again will continue, and He **WILL** see you through to the end of your life in victory and triumph. In spite of the mistakes made. In spite of the sins committed. In spite of the moments and times of failure or compromise. God will continue to work in you, and through you, for His glory and your victory! Christmas was the beginning, but God brought Jesus through to victory in the end. He will do the same for you as well! Be encouraged therefore, and keep your eyes on God. He will **FINISH** what He has started in you!



DECEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

DECEMBER 24 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Luke 1:41 - REPRODUCTIVE TISSUE?

As we continue to examine different facets of the Christmas passages found in the Bible, this one jumped out at me as I prepared to write this devotional to you. When Mary greeted Elizabeth in this passage, the baby boy within Elizabeth's womb jumped and leaped for joy! I wonder how that sits with certain "doctors" and all the others who make up the abortion industry, who claim that unborn babies are nothing more than "reproductive tissue". Apparently when Mary and Elizabeth got together, this "reproductive tissue" could hear, understand, and respond when those two adults were conversing with earshot!

The fact of the matter is this: abortion is murder. The ungodly can try to sugarcoat it all they want, but that's what it is in God's eyes. Murder. And those who perform the abortions, and those who consent to having it done to their unborn babies, as well as those who try to legislate and "protect" legal abortion (such as Planned Parenthood personnel - and one of the two major political parties in the USA), will stand someday before God to be judged for the sin of murder. John the Baptist was not yet born, yet he could recognize, understand and respond to Mary's salutation. My friend, when a baby is growing in its mother's womb, it's not just "reproductive tissue". It's a human spirit - spirit and soul, growing and getting ready to enter the world in a physical body. God is the Father of spirits (human spirits included - see Hebrews 12:9), and spiritual life begins at the moment of conception - period. Any action that purposely and intentionally terminates the developing physical body of a human spirit inside its mother's womb is murder as far as God is concerned. You see, human reproduction requires a partnership between God and us. Only God can create the human spirit, but waits for a man and woman to do their part physically (specifically, husbands and wives according to God's plan for family procreation, not just men and women per se). So, when we do our part God does His part, and nine months later a human being is born - a spirit living in an infant body that continues the growing process that began in the womb at the moment of conception. That process of reproduction will never change, no matter how politically incorrect it may be for certain ones! Don't ever apologize for defending the life of the unborn - it's a fight worth fighting. Remember John leaping for joy when Mary and Elizabeth met!



DECEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

DECEMBER 25 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Luke 2:10 - GLAD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY!

When the angels appeared to the shepherds in the fields, they told them they had good news of great joy. This is the essence of Christmas - glad tidings of great joy. But there's more to what the angels said. Not only is it glad tidings of great joy, it is **FOR ALL PEOPLE!** Jesus didn't just come for a few. He didn't come only for the "elect", which some say are the ones that God has chosen for salvation. He didn't just come for the Jews. He came **FOR ALL MEN.** All men can rejoice on this day, because the gift of God's son was a gift for all men for all time. **ANYONE** can enter in, rejoice, and glorify God for what took place more than 2,000 years ago on the first Christmas night. Jesus came so that we could be free. Are you free today? That's what He came to do - set us all free!

When you celebrate Christmas today, maybe with family, loved ones or friends, make sure you objectively analyze your life and see if you're really and truly living in the freedom Jesus came to provide us all. All that God did in sending Jesus was for this one purpose. He wanted us free from sin, and from the penalties of sin. Jesus came to do that, and He did it! Now it's up to us to walk in the light of that triumph, and enjoy the fruits of His sacrifice and hard work. Are you free today? Are you celebrating Christmas from a position of spiritual freedom? You should be, and if for any reason you're not, you can decide today to change that. You can decide to move beyond mediocrity, and move beyond a convenient concept of Christianity. You can be great for God! It's up to you! Jesus came to make all that available to you. Take advantage of it, and honor the Christmas story by becoming the strong, anointed and on-fire Christian you can be. It's all up to you now. Make the right choice, and Merry Christmas!



DECEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

DECEMBER 26 DAILY DEVOTIONAL Luke 5:15 - THE FOUNDATION FOR YOUR HEALING

Because Jesus walked with such an anointing for miracles and healings, His crowds were huge wherever He went. But in order for the people to get their healing, they had to first HEAR what He had to say. Notice in today's verse, there are two elements that are mentioned. They HEARD, and then they were HEALED. It says they came to HEAR and BE HEALED of their sicknesses and ailments. The same truth applies to you and I today. Romans 10:17 says that faith comes by hearing the Word of God, and that without faith we can't please God. Over and over again in the gospels, we read where Jesus told the healed people that it was THEIR FAITH that brought healing to their bodies. Not His faith, but theirs. If ever you need healing for YOUR body, nine times out of ten it will be your faith that gets the job done. Once in awhile God moves by His Spirit, and the gifts of healing or the working of miracles takes place apart from the recipient's faith (or lack of faith). However, that is the exception and not the rule.

If you want your healing, you should do what these people did when they came to Jesus. You should first take time to HEAR the Word of God, and then you'll have faith in your heart to use to appropriate your healing. How do you hear the Word? There are several ways available. First, you can go to a meeting and listen to the preacher deliver to you the Word of God on the subject of healing. Second, you can read books or listen to recorded messages which give you the Word about healing. Third, you can just open the Bible yourself, and find the verses and meditate on them. Out of those three options, I suggest sick people start with option number three first, and then if other options open up they can take advantage of them. Within the Bible, which is the Word of God, are all the verses that contain the promises which bring healing to those who are sick. If you're suffering with any kind of sickness or disease, follow the pattern the people in our Lord's time followed. Get the Word, listen to it 10,000 times if necessary, and fill your heart with the faith that comes from hearing the Word. At that point, you can use your faith to reach out and receive the gift of healing for your body. Many people just want to come to a meeting, and have somebody else lay hands on them and have their faith do the job. But it doesn't work that way in most cases. God expects each of us to cultivate our own faith, and to stand on our own when it comes to things like healing. Sick people can hear and be healed today – the power of God is always present to heal! They just need to let God's word create in their hearts the faith that makes the power connection. To all those standing in faith for healing today, Jesus has this message - according to YOUR faith, you can be healed in Jesus' name!



DECEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

DECEMBER 27 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Mark 13:2 - THE WORLD OF THE TEMPORARY

In today's passage, Jesus reminds His disciples that the world around us is always a temporary world. Things always change. Nothing stays the same. Today's beautiful buildings will one day be old and ready to be torn down. Today's hot cars will one day be rusted junk. We need to constantly remind ourselves of this truth because the world has a very strong pull on those who get their eyes off of spiritual things. I can remember the neighborhood that I grew up in. Nothing is like it was back then now. Everything has changed. All I have are memories about how it looked, and what we did there growing up as kids. The same with cars. All the cars that were so hot in the 60's are now long gone. And that's the truth Jesus was trying to convey to His disciples. They were so impressed with how beautiful the temple was, but Jesus let them know that eventually it would be torn down.

The only things that are un-changing are spiritual things. God never changes. His Word never changes. His faithfulness is constant from generation to generation. Jesus is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. These are the things we need to be thinking about as we go through our lives on earth. As nice as your possessions may be, and as much as you may like them or even love them, they're all just temporary. Everything of this earth is wearing out! We live on a cursed-by-sin planet, that's why everything begins to decay the moment it's built, because things we build come from raw materials that are cursed with the curse of sin. Until Jesus returns to lift the curse of sin, whatever we build today begins to wear out the day we build it. The same is true with the human body. God said from dust we are, and to dust we shall return (Genesis 3:19). Our spirits are eternal and will never die, but our bodies come from the ground and are therefore cursed – that's why we physically grow old and die, or see birth defects or crippling diseases and deformities. Remember these things, especially as we approach the New Year. Let the New Year be a year where you really concentrate on the un-changing spiritual truths of God and His Word. Let His Word become, as never before, the foundation for your life in every way. Don't let the temporal nature of this life sway you and distract you. Things are always changing in this world, but the things of God are always safe and sure!



DECEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

DECEMBER 28 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Philippians 4:13 - YOU CAN DO IT!

As you approach the New Year, its time to take stock of where you are with God, and in what areas you could make spiritual improvements. And no matter what may be the areas of weakness or chronic failure in your life, you CAN overcome them in Jesus' Name. Today's verse is all about doing the impossible by finding strength to overcome in Jesus. Listen to what the verse says. **YOU CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHO IS YOUR STRENGTH.** How many things can you do in Christ? ALL things! Not most things, but all things. So whenever you hear people talking about the things they just can't get the victory over in their lives, you need to know what that really is. When you say you CAN'T do something that you know God wants you to do, you're basically insulting God and making a mockery of the power of the resurrection. The fact is, most times people have not dedicated themselves to victory as much as they need to, and that's why their victory has been so elusive. This is true for me as much as it is for you. There are no excuses that will be accepted on our judgment day.

If you want victory seriously enough in your life today, make it your New Year's resolution to finally, once and for all, tap into the Lord's strength and triumph and prevail over any areas of weakness in your life. I don't know about you, but I know in my life there are things that could be better as far as my walk with God is concerned, and I'm determined that the New Year is going to a year of great triumph and advancement towards spiritual victory in those areas of my life. How about you? The Lord's strength is readily available to you, so today and right now, ask for His help so you can take advantage of His power resident within you! Deciding to do what's necessary to overcome against your spiritual areas of weakness is the first step towards victory. Make that your New Year's resolution. I believe that if you do, the New Year will be the best year you've ever had in Jesus!



DECEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

DECEMBER 29 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Acts 6:4 - TWO THINGS YOU CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT

I've been reading through Acts lately, and when I got to today's verse, I was reminded all over again about WHY the leaders of the early church were so anointed, and mightily used by God. If you begin with verse 1 of chapter 6, we see the church multiplying in terms of growth. And what does the devil do? What he always does when revival breaks out and people are getting saved. He introduces strife into the congregation, hoping to destroy the flow of the Holy Spirit. The apostles are therefore forced to confront this unpleasant situation, but in doing so, they reveal a spiritual truth here that you and I need to walk in the light of today. When they realized that they were being sucked into this vortex of strife and endless debate, they immediately backed off and told the people to pick mature, seasoned believers to handle this mess. Why? Because they had two main priorities that they couldn't afford to let go of, and they are the same two for you and I today.

They told the congregation that they could not jeopardize their PRAYER TIME, or their Bible STUDY TIME. Those two things were more important to them than anything else, and they were determined to not let anything disrupt their daily routine concerning these two things. This is exactly what we must do today if we're to be strong and stay strong for the Lord. Notice the wording of today's verse carefully. They made a decision. They decided to GIVE THEMSELVES to prayer and ministry to God's Word. They GAVE THEMSELVES. In other words, they prioritized these two things, and made them first place each and every day. We must make the same commitments to prayer and Bible study if we're to become the strong believers we want to be. In yesterday's devotional, we looked at Philippians 4:13. In that verse, we saw how that through the strength of Christ, we can do ALL THINGS. Well, how do you tap into God's strength? How do you become strong - able to resist any temptation that comes against you? By doing what they did in today's verse. By making a decision to let God's Word, and time spent with Him in prayer, be the focal point and top priority each day. On my desk in my office I have a plaque which says: THE TOP PRIORITY IS TO KEEP THE TOP PRIORITY THE TOP PRIORITY. Bible study and prayer are top priority, but the challenge is to keep them top priority in our lives. That's your challenge for the New Year, and mine too. Let's triumph together for the glory of God!



DECEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

DECEMBER 30 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Luke 17:6-10 - FAITH IS YOUR SERVANT

If you read the whole passage from Luke 17, beginning with verse 1 through verse 10, you find a marvelous truth revealed by Jesus about faith. When Jesus told them to forgive unconditionally, they asked Him to increase their faith. In response to that request, Jesus taught them to understand how powerful their faith really was. He said that if you had faith like a mustard seed, you could plant your seed of faith the same way you plant a mustard tree seed. You speak your faith to plant the seed, and once planted, it will come up and produce a harvest! But in verse 10, Jesus makes a final statement which we need to understand. He called faith our SERVANT. In the same way we would command a servant to obey, and expect him or her to do whatever we commanded, so it is with faith.

Your faith is a spiritual servant that does whatever you command it to do. How do you command your servant called faith? By speaking a faith command according to the Word of God. When you use your faith to appropriate one or more of God's promises, you're actually given your spiritual servant a command it must obey! That's how Jesus illustrated the usage of faith to His disciples back then, and we need to understand that same truth today. When you tell your servant to go do something, do they stand there and think about whether or not they're going to do what you ask? No, of course not. They'll go do what you told them to do because you're the boss, and they're the servant. Well, as far as God is concerned, faith is your spiritual servant, and when you give the faith command, it must go to work on your behalf for the glory of God. Not most of the time, but every time! Without fail. Why? Because God watches over His Word to perform it (Jeremiah 1:12). If you declare your faith to appropriate a promise God offers you in His Word, your faith WILL go to work as your servant to bring that thing to pass in your life. So today, I want you to see faith in this new light if you've never seen it this way before. We walk by faith, not by sight. That means your faith servant is available 24/7 to assist and help! It takes no breaks. It needs no vacation. It has no expiration date. Praise God for that!



DECEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

DECEMBER 31 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Philippians 3:13 - DON'T LOOK BACK!

This verse is a great verse to end the year with. Paul told the Philippians he wasn't looking back, but looking forward. He told them to follow his example to do this one thing, which had three parts to it. The first part was to forget the things of the past, and you and I need to constantly practice that truth like Paul did. So as you look back at the year now about to pass, whatever went on that you know wasn't pleasing to God, make sure you ask for His forgiveness, receive it by faith (not feelings), and start the New Year fresh with the Lord. Don't look back with sadness, sorry or regret over mistakes or sins you may have committed this past year. Use this marker on your calendar, the last day of the year, to regroup and move on with God. That's what I'm doing, and I encourage you to follow Paul's example and do the same.

No matter what you may have done, or not done, which you know was sin or just things that were dis-pleasing to God, let go of it by asking forgiveness from God, and receive that forgiveness by faith. First John 1:9 says that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So take God at His Word over that promise, receive your forgiveness and don't look back ever again. Start the New Year fresh, with a clean heart and in right relationship with God. And purpose in your heart to make this New Year the best year you've ever had in Christ. That's the way to finish the old year, and ring in the new! Note: my latest book addresses in detail this all-important truth – ADVANCING UNDER FIRE! It's available for purchase in print or digital format through Amazon Kindle, Nook and Apple.

