

BE STRONG
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**SEPTEMBER
DAILY
DEVOTIONALS**

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

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SEPTEMBER 01 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Galatians 6:1 - ARE YOU TRULY SPIRITUAL?

Paul wrote and told the Galatians that if another believer was overtaken in a fault, they would demonstrate their spirituality by working to RESTORE THEM. Is that what we see going on in the church today? Hardly! Instead of working to restore believers who have stumbled into sin, most of us are working to destroy them! How? With gossip and backbiting. With the acceptance and dissemination of unsupported rumors. To assume the worst and never the best, to name just a few. That is not the work of spiritual people! Instead, it's a manifestation of shallowness and carnality, and that's where most believers are today. What about you?

Your goal in life should be to rise above carnality and become a spiritually mature believer in Christ. Sad to say however, most believers never make it to that level of life. They forever remain carnal, governed by their flesh instead of being governed by their spirits and the Word of God. This is revealed most tellingly in how they react when others around them fall into sin or failure. Time and again, Paul admonished his readers to rise above the flesh, work to help and restore one another in times of crisis, sin and failure, and thus move towards maturity in Christ (examples: 1 Corinthians 3:1, Galatians 6:1 and Hebrews 5:12). The mature saint will not rejoice in another's demise, but instead, find ways to restore that person as quickly as possible. Is this what you do? It should be, if you expect to grow up and mature in Christ. Next time someone around you falls, measure your maturity in how you work to restore rather than destroy!



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SEPTEMBER 02 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Ephesians 4:1 - ARE YOU WALKING WORTHY OF HIS CALLING?

When you work to restore fallen brethren, as it says we must do in Galatians 6:1, you're walking worthy of your calling. You're demonstrating true spiritual maturity. You're walking in the spirit and conquering the desires of the flesh. If you read all of Ephesians, you'll see that much is said about learning how to "walk" right in Christ. As an example, in Ephesians 4:17,18, we're told not to walk as the Gentiles walk. In other words, when a fellow believer commits sin or makes a mistake, instead of working like unbelievers to destroy such a one, we as mature Christians work to restore such a one in the spirit of meekness. How? Read on in Ephesians chapter 5 and God will show you!

In Ephesians 5:2, we're told to walk in love. In Ephesians 5:8, we're told to walk as children of light. In Ephesians 5:15, we're told to walk circumspectly. What does all this mean? It means that if we're to show maturity in Christ, our walk should be a careful walk of love and light towards those around us who have failed God in some way or another. There are at least six major ways to express your true spiritual maturity towards fellow believers who struggle, sin or compromise in their walk with God. If you want to mature and please the Lord with your life, you're going to have to know how to properly respond when others are "overtaken" in faults, sins and mistakes, ESPECIALLY when their failures affect you directly and personally! For the next few days, let's look at what those six things would be from the Word of God!



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SEPTEMBER 03 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Mark 11:25 - FORGIVENESS: THE 1ST MARK OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Many "faith people" love to quote Mark 11:23 and 24 but fail to include the next 2 verses. Verses 25 and 26 go right along with verses 23 and 24. If you want your faith to work, you **MUST** forgive those who have wronged you! This is the first expression of spiritual maturity at work in your life. Jesus said if you have **ANYTHING** against **ANYBODY** when you stand praying, forgive them! Notice: forgive them when praying, **NOT** when they ask for your forgiveness! No mention is made here of waiting for them to apologize to you before you forgive them. You're to do it when you stand praying the prayer of faith – with or without their apology or repentance towards you! Have you been doing that when you pray your prayer of faith?

The ability to **INITIATE** forgiveness, under all circumstances, is a mark of true spiritual maturity. In this passage from Mark, Jesus tells you to forgive in these three ways: 1) **ANYONE!** 2) **ANYTHING!** 3) **ANYTIME!** Jesus did it on the cross. He forgave those who nailed Him up there, while they stood there laughing at Him, spitting on Him, and blaspheming Him (Luke 23:34). Stephen did it, on his knees while the crowd threw stones at him to kill him (Acts 7:6). Paul did it, when all his friends abandoned him when he went before Caesar to defend himself (2 Timothy 4:16). If they can do it, we can do it today! Some like to excuse themselves by saying that they're not like Jesus when He forgave his murderers from the cross, but what about Paul and Stephen? They're no different than us – and if they forgave their enemies, we can do it too. The first expression of spiritual maturity is the ability to forgive unconditionally. It's not an easy thing to do, that's why so few have mastered this discipline, but I'm persuaded you can do it! There's no better time to start than right now!



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Ephesians 4:27 - UNFORGIVENESS GIVES PLACE TO THE DEVIL

The devil is not the main problem concerning the work of God today. The greatest problem is immaturity among the saints! One of the ways that immaturity is manifested is with unforgiveness. It gives place to the devil and empowers him to work against us for as long as we fail to forgive. This is why many "prayers of faith" go unanswered, according to what Jesus said in Mark 11:23-26. He said we must initiate forgiveness while standing to pray, otherwise God won't forgive us when we need it! Think about that! If you don't forgive others for what they've done against you, God won't forgive you for what you've done against Him!

When talking about love characteristics in 1 Corinthians 13:5, Paul says that love "thinks no evil", or, as it is rendered in other translations, does not take into account a wrong suffered. In other words, when walking in love and spiritual maturity, you forgive the people who have wronged you – and you then treat them AS IF THEY HAD NEVER HURT YOU. You don't hold their sins against them, and constantly bring it back up every time you think of them, talk to them, or see them in public. Can you do that? Most believers cannot. They want to gain a measure of revenge, and see their persecutors suffer for what they did. This is not the mature way in Christ. Jesus didn't do this, so neither should we. If you're mature, you'll understand this, and work to practice every day in Jesus.



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Ephesians 4:32 - FORGIVE EVEN AS GOD HAS FORGIVEN YOU!

Paul told the Ephesians to forgive one another **EVEN AS** God, in Christ, had forgiven them. The key words are "even as...". If you're to walk in spiritual maturity, you have to do what God did in Christ. You must initiate forgiveness, before those who offend you ask for it. This is what God did in Christ, so we must do the same. Romans 5:8 says that while we were sinners, Christ died for us. In other words, forgiveness was acquired by Jesus even before you and I knew we needed to be forgiven! God didn't wait for us to ask for it; He provided it ahead of time. We must follow God's lead and do the same with one another. This is a manifestation of true spiritual maturity.

In Luke 17:3,4 Jesus tell us to forgive after our offenders ask for it. Does that mean we're to wait for our offenders to ask for forgiveness before we forgive them? No, because many other verses tell us to initiate the forgiveness, not waiting for those who offend us to ask for it. So what does this verse mean in light of all the other verses about forgiveness? It means we're to forgive when our offenders ask for it, and we're to forgive when they don't! Luke 6:37 says forgive, and **THEN** we'll be forgiven. That's the same as what Jesus said in Mark 11:23-26. Even as God initiated forgiveness with us through Christ, we're to follow that example and offer forgiveness whether or not it is asked for. This is the first expression of spiritual maturity, and where the love walk really begins to take hold in our lives.



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SEPTEMBER 06 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Luke 6:35 - KINDNESS: THE 2ND MARK OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY!

If you want to spiritually mature, you're going to have to excel in kindness towards others. Jesus talked about it here in Luke, encouraging His listeners to be like God, who was kind to those who were "unthankful and evil". Once again, like forgiveness, the key is to imitate God. We're to forgive "even as" God in Christ forgave us (Ephesians 4:32), and here Jesus tells us to be kind to others like God. Ask yourself: when others think of you, would they think of you as a kind person? I know in my own life the answer has not always been "yes"! But to rise to greater levels of maturity in Christ, we're all going to have to extend more kindness, especially to those unkind to us.

God is love (1 John 4:8). That's why He's also kind, because kindness is a by-product of love. 1 Corinthians 13:4 proves this. When listing the characteristics of agape love, kindness is #2 on the list, right after patience. To walk in love demands we show kindness to others; whether they've been kind to us or not. Ephesians 4:32 says it so well. Even as God forgives, we forgive. Even as God is kind, we're kind too. Think of all the ways God shows kindness to you, and then do your best to imitate Him towards others. By performing random acts of kindness, you will not only please God, but raise the bar of spiritual maturity in your own life at the same time.



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SEPTEMBER 07 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Ephesians 2:7 - GOD LOVES TO BE KIND. DO YOU?

The second way to develop spiritual maturity is to be kind like God. Paul says here that God looks forward to an eternity of lavishing kindness upon His children. What more could be said about a God who is called love (1 John 4:8)! Do you look for opportunities to be kind to others? Most don't, but if we're to grow up and mature in Christ, we must. Galatians 6:10 says we should be doing good as we have opportunity. That means we're out there on alert, always searching for ways to show God's kindness to others. There are many ways to be kind to others, if only we dedicate ourselves to the task!

Colossians 3:12 tells us to "put on" kindness. That means we're to wear kindness like we wear clothing. If you're spiritually mature, kindness is what people are supposed to see when they look at you, in the same way that when you're out in public, people only see the clothes you're wearing, not what's underneath! Most believers are too busy to be kind, and that's a tragedy. It takes effort to be kind, more so when you're endeavoring to be kind to those unkind to you. But once you get into the habit and discipline of it, you'll never want to go back. Being kind draws you closer to God, and helps you navigate through very difficult relationships, circumstances and situations. God loves to be kind. Do you?



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SEPTEMBER 08 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Galatians 5:22 - IS KINDNESS A FRUIT YOU'RE BRINGING FORTH?

Paul gives us a list of fruits in Galatians 5. They're not the fruits of the Holy Spirit, as many translations would lead you to believe. When Galatians 5:22, don't be fooled by the capital "S" in the word "spirit". That was added by translators who weren't sure if the word should be capitalized or not. In the Greek, the word isn't capitalized, because its talking about the fruit of the born-again believer, not the fruit of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit doesn't need to bear fruit, we do! We're the ones growing and maturing, and kindness is one of the fruits that should be harvested and manifested in our lives more and more. Is your fruit tree bearing the fruit of kindness?

In John 15:4,5, Jesus tells us that He's the vine, we're the branches. The fruit on a fruit tree doesn't grow on the tree trunk, but on the branches. That's us in Christ! We're supposed to bear fruit for His glory, and that's what the Holy Spirit wants to do in each believer. Kindness is one of the fruits we're to display, and one of the six expressions of spiritual maturity. In 2 Peter 1:7, we see that there's a progression of growth that God wants for us after salvation. Notice that kindness is one of items listed. 2 Peter 1:8 says that if those things be in you and abound, you will be fruitful in life for God. You will not fall away over time, but instead, as time goes by, you'll become stronger, more fruitful and more mature in Jesus. Praise God! So take a look at the end of your branches, and see if people can see the fruit of kindness. The sustenance for the fruit is already within you, just like the life source for any fruit tree is in it's trunk. The Holy Spirit is ready, willing and able to work with you to develop this fruit, so get busy and let it happen in Jesus' Name!



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Luke 10:37 - GO AND DO LIKEWISE

When we show kindness to others who are unkind to us, we're expressing our spiritual maturity. No Bible story tells this truth better than the Good Samaritan. A lawyer came to Jesus to find out what the greatest commandment in the law was. The answer was in 3 parts. 1). Love God. 2). Love yourself. 3). Love your neighbor as yourself. The lawyer wanted to know who his "neighbor" was. Read the story and see for yourself. The Jew left for dead on the road was an enemy of the Samaritan who stopped to help. The Samaritan knew this of course, yet it didn't stop him from altering his travel schedule to help a man in need, even though that man hated him. Jesus said to "go and do likewise". Are you doing likewise?

Three men had a chance to help the stricken Jew beaten and left for dead. The first 2 were fellow Jews, one a Levite, the other a priest. Of all people who should've stopped, it should've been one of these 2 guys! Levites and Priests - they were the ones who taught the Law to the common man, the ones who were supposed to know more about how to live the Law. But they were just religious, not kind. The Samaritan was the third person to encounter the wounded man, not the first. But he understood that kindness extended to your enemies is the way to love God, fulfill His commandments, and demonstrate true spiritual maturity. Today, we need to find more good Samaritans. There's so many opportunities to be kind to those in need, if only we'll commit to availability. Will you?



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SEPTEMBER 10 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

2 Corinthians 6:6 - ARE YOU A MINISTER OF KINDNESS?

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he gave them a list of traits which all true ministers of the gospel should demonstrate. Kindness is on the list. Remember ALL of us in the body of Christ are ministers, given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18). Jesus said it was the responsibility of all Christians to go into all the world to preach the Gospel (Mark 16:15). To do this effectively, we must learn to be kind whenever we can be, knowing that our kindness is not only a mark of maturity, but also, a demonstration of our calling as ministers of Christ. Unkind Christians are hypocrites, because they purport to represent Jesus, yet fail to walk in the kindness that Jesus demonstrated in His earthly ministry. Don't live in spiritual hypocrisy! Be kind, whenever, wherever, to whomsoever!

In 1 John 3:18, we're told to love, not in word or tongue, but indeed and truth. Love can express itself in different ways, but one of the most obvious is kindness. Not just to those kind to us, but especially to those unkind to us. That's the challenging part, but that's why there are rewards offered in heaven! The rewards in heaven won't be given to those who did what was easy. They'll be given to those who "overcome" something (see Revelations chapters 2 and 3). Overcome the fleshly tendencies to be unkind to those unkind to you. Instead, rise above your flesh, and operate and live at a level of spiritual maturity that manifests the love and kindness of God day in and day out. That's the lifestyle that gets the rewards in heaven, because the rewards are reserved for those who dedicate themselves to the acquisition of spiritual maturity, and do not accept anything less in life. I pray that be you today, and every day for the rest of your life in Jesus!



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SEPTEMBER 11 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Matthew 5:44 - PRAYER: THE 3RD EXPRESSION OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Volumes can be written on the importance of prayer, yet so few of us in the body of Christ ever become strong in prayer. But if we're to become spiritually mature, we have to develop a vibrant prayer life. There is no substitute for this. In Genesis 1:26-28, we clearly see that God's creative intent for man was to give him dominion and authority on earth. God does not have dominion on earth today, we do. That's why prayer is so important, because it is the most powerful way to exercise our authority and dominion while here on earth. That's why Jesus was such a prayer warrior, and why He taught His disciples to become prayer warriors too. If you want to walk in spiritual maturity, you must become strong in prayer.

But again, as we see in Matthew 5:44, prayer is to be made for the unlovely as much, if not more, than for the lovely. Spiritually mature believers understand their responsibility here and embrace it with all their hearts. Do you earnestly pray for those persecuting you? Most believers do not. Do you follow our Lord's example, praying on the cross for those who put Him up there? Most of us would be screaming venom and threats from the cross, promising to come back in 3 days to smoke those religious hypocrites with the judgment of God! In Luke 9:54, the disciples wanted to send fire down on those persecuting Jesus, but they were rebuked because they didn't understand the proper response. They weren't mature in spirit yet. Vengeance belongs to God concerning those who seek to harm you (Romans 12:19). That means we're to pray for those who abuse us, and with all our hearts, believe for God to bless them and help them. That's hard, isn't it? But it's necessary, expected and required by God. Think of something right now who's been a thorn in your side. Be mature, pray for them!



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SEPTEMBER 12 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

1 Samuel 12:23 - THE SIN MOST BELIEVERS COMMIT FREQUENTLY

One of the ways we express our spiritual maturity is by praying, and specifically, praying for our enemies. Jesus taught this and lived it while on earth. Many others in the Bible did this too. They prayed for their persecutors, tormentors and jailers. Paul prayed for those who forsook him in his hour of need (2 Timothy 9-16). Stephen prayed for those putting him to death (Acts 7:60). They demonstrated true spiritual maturity. Do you? Will you? Samuel told the Jews that if he ceased praying for them, it would be SIN to him! Let that statement sink in. And remember, the people Samuel was talking about were not a bunch of loving, spiritual, kind-hearted people. They were a bunch of backslidden mumblers, grumblers and complainers. Nevertheless, he was responsible to pray for them. If he didn't, he would be charged with sin before God. Have you been committing this sin in your own life?

Sad fact is this: most Christians pray for themselves, and for those they love, like, respect and admire. They hardly ever pray for anyone else, but that is the true expression of spiritual maturity. Praying for others when they attack you, take advantage of you, hurt you, lie about you, cheat you, steal from you, and whatever else that's contrary to godly living. Yes, continue to pray for those you love, and for your needs in life to be met. But don't forget to pray just as much, and with just as much enthusiasm, for those who hate you, use you, despise you and malign you. Rise above mediocrity and become a true prayer warrior for God!



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SEPTEMBER 13 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Ephesians 2:8,9 - HUMILITY: THE 4TH EXPRESSION OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

For decades and generations, religion has misunderstood humility. Humility is not the blind acceptance of less than what Jesus died to make available. No, true humility is quite the opposite. When humble, according to the Word of God, you're blessed beyond all you could ask or think, and you freely, openly and enthusiastically give God all the credit for it. That's humility, and that's one of the ways we express spiritual maturity before God and men. Whatever you have, whatever you have accomplished, whatever good has come to you in life, it's all because of God. Give Him all the credit, because only He deserves it. You and I are nothing without Jesus, so don't allow a spirit of pride to ever have a place in your heart. Spend time daily thanking God for all He's done for you. Stay mature, stay humble!

We are God's workmanship, not our own. He made us and saved us. We are what we are today by the grace of God, and nothing else (1 Corinthians 15:10). It's true we have a role to play, and that God has chosen to limit Himself on earth to partnership with man, but nonetheless, if it weren't for God's grace manifested in our lives, we'd be dead in sins and on our way to hell. James 1:17 says EVERY good gift, and EVERY perfect gift comes from God. It didn't come from you, or from any other source besides God. The moment you start to think you're responsible for the blessings coming your way, you're in trouble! Don't open the door to the devil by thinking you're somebody special outside of Christ! Remember who you were before you found Jesus. Pride goes before a fall (Proverbs 16:18)!



SEPTEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

SEPTEMBER 14 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Proverbs 29:23 - THE WAY TO GOD'S HONOR IN YOUR LIFE

Proverbs talks a lot about the evils of pride, and the rewards for humility. Mature Christians understand that before we can enjoy honor from God, we must demonstrate humility before God (Proverbs 15:33). God wants to honor you, but He waits for your humility first. He wants you to always remember that without Him, you could do nothing (John 15:5). Immature believers think they're a somebody when they're really a nobody (Romans 12:3). That's a grave mistake, one which opens the door to the enemy, and gives him place to steal, kill and destroy. Don't give him that kind of opening in your life! Stay protected! Stay humble! Enjoy the blessings of the Lord, but when you do, make sure you remember where they came from, and who gave them to you.

In Deuteronomy 8:11-18, God warned the Jews about this. He told them not to forget Him once the blessings came their way. He told them that it was He who gave them the power to get wealth, not themselves. We need to stay vigilant on this today as well. The moment you start thinking you're so important God can't do without you, that's the moment He chooses to use someone else, and you're left to fend for yourself!



SEPTEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

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SEPTEMBER 15 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

1 Peter 5:5 - ARE YOU WEARING THE RIGHT CLOTHES TODAY

God tells us to be clothed with humility, but most believers are not. Most Christians are clothed with pride and seem to enjoy wearing those clothes over and over again! But if we're to walk in spiritual maturity, we must put on humility every day. We must live our lives in the light of the fact that apart from Jesus, we can do nothing. He is the vine, not us (John 15:1-7). We are the branches, and the life source for the branches is not in the branches, but the vine. This would seem to be a no-brainer for intelligent Christians, but to the contrary, most believers have this haughty view of themselves that makes them feel good and feel important. Unfortunately, they fail to realize that when they take that posture with themselves, they open the door to the devil, and allow him access into their lives.

I love the story in Luke, about the two men who went to the temple to pray (Luke 18:9-14). One was a Pharisee, who was trusting in His works to earn favor from God. The second man was a publican, who knew he was a sinner, and had disappointed God many times. The Pharisee took great pride in comparing himself to the Publican, reminding God about how righteous he was, and how repulsive the publican was. On the other hand, the Publican wouldn't even look up to Heaven, but just knelt and kept beating his chest in repentant sorrow, asking for God's mercy instead of His judgment. Jesus said he was the one who got His prayers answered, not the Pharisee. Why? Because he came to God clothed with humility, and God loves that. He already knows we've committed sin when we come to Him. But what He looks for is the attitude displayed by the publican. Humility! Are you clothed with humility today? Are you like the Pharisee, or the Publican?



SEPTEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

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SEPTEMBER 16 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Galatians 1:10 - THE 5TH EXPRESSION OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY: BEING UNAPPRECIATED, AND LOVING IT!

Paul said he was serving God, not men. In Galatians 2:20, he said that he no longer had a life, but Christ was now living His life through him. This kind of mentality reveals the fifth way to express spiritual maturity. Being unappreciated and loving every minute of it! In 2 Corinthians 12:15, Paul told the Corinthians that the more he loved them, the less they appreciated his love. But earlier in the same letter, he also said the love of God "compelled" him towards these ungrateful people (2 Corinthians 5:14). That simply means he would keep on loving them, whether they appreciated it or not. Most believers today don't practice that kind of mindset. They don't mind helping others, as long as those they help express an appropriate measure of gratitude in return. However, if no gratitude is expressed, most Christians move on and with indignation, declare those ingrates to be "unworthy" of time and attention.

But spiritually mature people act differently to those who don't express appreciation or gratitude. Why? Because they do what they do for the Lord's approval, not for man's approval. It's difficult to love people who take advantage of you, but the spiritually mature can do it if God asks them to. Yes, the Bible says we're not to throw our pearls before swine (Matthew 7:6), but many believers use that verse as an excuse to withdraw their love from ungrateful people, never bothering to ask God about it first. If God tells you to cease in your attempts to reach out to someone who doesn't care, then by all means obey God. But you'll find in many cases, God is much more willing for the effort to continue rather than for it to cease. And if you're doing what you're doing for Jesus and not for men, this won't be a problem for you. Once you settle it in your head that you're reaching out because you're serving Jesus and no other, the response won't matter anymore. If they appreciate you, fine, but if they don't, that's fine too! For the mature believer, it's enough to know God sees it all, and will one day give rewards to those who did their work as unto the Lord, and not as unto the response of men.



SEPTEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

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SEPTEMBER 17 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Colossians 3:16-17 - WHO ARE YOU SERVING TODAY?

The 5th expression of spiritual maturity is the ability to work for the Lord, and never mind how men receive you, or appreciate you when you attempt to minister to them in the Name of the Lord. I call it being unappreciated and loving it! Meaning to say; when you reach out and try to help people as a Christian, you're doing it for the Lord and no other. Therefore, whether people love you or hate you, it doesn't matter because you know the Lord will judge fairly one day, and you're deeds of love and obedience will not go unnoticed or unrewarded by the Lord (Hebrews 6:10). Knowing that should elevate you to a level of operation that insulates you from the responses of the people.

Don't worry about how people "receive" you or not. Don't worry about their "response" to your efforts to love them in Jesus' Name. Remember, you're working for the Lord, so if He's satisfied with you, it doesn't matter if anyone else is or not. In Colossians 3:23,24, Paul reminded the believers about this. We do what we do for the Lord and not for men, KNOWING that from the Lord we'll receive the promised rewards. That's what most believers don't know, and that's why they have problems continuing to offer help to those they think don't appreciate their efforts. It's the same principle Jesus mentioned in Luke 6:32-35. It's not hard to love those who love you. It's much harder to love those who don't appreciate the love! But that's exactly what the mature are asked to do as we live to serve Jesus. Do you measure your kindness based upon the response of those you're reaching out to? Be like Jesus and live to find His pleasure in your obedience to Him, and nothing else!



SEPTEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

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SEPTEMBER 18 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

2 Corinthians 7:2 - MOVING ON: THE 6TH EXPRESSION OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

When Paul wrote this letter, he exhorted the believers to receive him as one who had done no wrong to anyone. How can he say that, when he was the one in Acts who was guilty of persecuting the church so vehemently? Because he's grown up spiritually, and learned the 6th expression of maturity, which is to move on from failure, and live in the light of God's forgiveness and grace. Many believers need to learn to do the same thing today. They're still living in the shadow of their past sins, mistakes and failures. This is an expression of spiritual immaturity and must be overcome before God can manifest Himself the way He wants to and promises to in the Bible. Have you confessed your sins? If so, let go of them and receive your forgiveness by faith, not by feelings. You're not forgiven because you feel like it, but because God promised it in 1 John 1:9.

Many Christians labor and live under the devil's condemnation because they allow him to convince them that God is through with them because of their sins or mistakes. That's such a lie! Nothing could be further from the truth. Look at Paul as the classic example of this. In Philippians 3:13-15, he told us about his former conduct, and former sinful life. But he had enough sense to accept his forgiveness and move on from those past failures in confident assurance that God not only forgives but forgets! If God forgets your sins when you confess them to Him, why should you keep remembering them? Move on and get on with your life. You don't have to wait to feel forgiven before you get forgiven. Forgiveness comes by faith, and faith is not a feeling. You aren't forgiven when you feel it, you're forgiven when you ask for it. From that point, the mature believer exercises the discipline needed to move on, and never let the devil bring condemnation over sins already confessed and forgiven. No matter what you've done in the past, receive your forgiveness and move on! You'll never become spiritually mature until you learn to do this.



SEPTEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

SEPTEMBER 19 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Psalms 126:5 - THE IMPORTANCE OF TEARFUL SOWING

If you study the Bible on the subject of prosperity, you will come to learn about the master law of sowing and reaping. There are many verses which address this spiritual law, but whichever one you chose to meditate on, the law itself remains the same. If you want to get more money from God, you have to give more money to God. That's the way it works, for money, as well as anything else promised in God's kingdom. Jesus said the whole kingdom of God (which would include your finances) is like men planting seeds in the ground (Mark 4:26). Any farmer will tell you, if you want a harvest, you have to plant seeds first. The planting always precedes the harvesting, and many times in life, the planting will have to be done in tears, when things aren't as wonderful as we'd like them to be financially. Do you manage your finances with that truth in mind?

If you understand the truth about sowing and reaping, you're going to have to learn the discipline of tearful sowing. What is that? Its sowing when it hurts. Or, giving when everything within you says you shouldn't. Being generous when everybody says you're stupid to do so. Tearful giving is a part of the lifestyle of generosity, and that's the ONLY lifestyle God promises to bless in His word. God never promises to bless the cheapskate, the person who looks for ways to avoid giving at all costs. No, God says He will bless the generous soul, and make him "fat" (Proverbs 11:25/22:9). "Fat" means the generous soul is the one who walks in the blessings of God on a continual basis. And to get to that point, you're going to have to learn to give when it doesn't look like the wise thing to do in the natural. That's tearful giving, but as the Psalmist says, those who do it in faith, trusting God, will no doubt enjoy the rewards of their decision. The verse after verse 5 says it this way: He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. (Psalms 126:6)! "Doubtless" means absolutely, without a shadow of a doubt! If you want that kind of promised security from God, learn to give with joy, with tears if necessary, by faith, knowing God is good for His word in your life!



SEPTEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

SEPTEMBER 20 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Ecclesiastes 11:4 - LOOK AWAY FROM NEGATIVE ECONOMIC INDICATORS!

As we said in yesterday's verse-a-day, sowing must ALWAYS precede reaping in the kingdom of God. And even though many Christians have heard the sermons which present that truth, very few of them actually put the laws into practice on a daily basis. They don't tithe, and they don't give offerings above their tithe. Why? Because they're guilty of doing what this verse today talks about, observing the wind and storm clouds of life, and allowing what they see in the natural to influence their decision to give or not give to God. Listen, if you're not willing to sow in the times of financial famine (Genesis 26:1-12), you're not going to enjoy the rewards that God has promised to those who give generously as a way of life. If you give generously, especially in times of famine, when things look bad all around you, you're telling God, the devil and your circumstances that you have faith in God's word. Do you have that kind of faith? Prove it! The next time you're facing the wall financially, what will you do with the resources at hand?

The longer you look at the wind and storm clouds on our financial horizon, the less likely you'll be to sow the needed seeds which put the laws of sowing and reaping in operation for you. Instead of meditating on all the problems (real or perceived), spend time renewing your mind to God's promises on the subject of prosperity. Be like Isaac, who sowed in a time of famine, and in the same year, reaped a 100-fold return on the seeds he sowed. The Bible says that AFTER he sowed seed in the time of famine, God BEGAN to bless him. What was God waiting for? For Isaac to plant his seed, in spite of the fact there was a severe famine in all the land! You see friend, your financial well-being is not up to God, it's up to you! Your life, like everyone else's, has ups and downs, good times and bad times in the natural. Develop the habit of sowing generously, no matter how threatening the storm clouds look like, or how strong the wind is against your face! When you do, you position yourself to reap a mighty harvest of God's blessings! If Isaac can prove it in an Old Testament time of famine, you can prove it today in your life, no matter how negative your "economic indicators" may be!



SEPTEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

SEPTEMBER 21 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Amos 9:13 - ITS TIME FOR ACCELERATED RETURNS IN YOUR LIFE!

We're living in a time when time as we know it is running out. Because of this, God is more than ready to step up the timetable when it comes to the financial laws of sowing and reaping. That's what this verse in Amos is referring to. It's a prophetic reference to our day now, exhorting us to continue to give generously, **EXPECTING** a shorter and shorter time between the time we sow, and the time we reap. Why? Because time is running out, and much work still needs to be done evangelistically worldwide. Always remember that prosperity's purpose is soul winning, nothing else! It takes money to win souls, and the more you have the more you can give, and the more we can get done to reach souls before Jesus returns. So as time in this age comes to a close, understand the time is coming, and I believe is upon us now, when the reaper will actually overtake the sower! Isn't that a wonderful way to live!

How do you get into this kind of financial flow? Give as you have never given before! Never mind the gloomy economic forecasts, or the lies the enemy will whisper in your ear about what will happen to your finances if you give generously to God's work. God's system of finance is not controlled by, or dependent upon, anything in this world that is organized and controlled by men. Now of course He will **USE** those systems to bless us, but He's not dependent upon them! All He requires is our commitment to a generous lifestyle, and once that has been established, the laws of sowing and reaping **WILL** work, no matter what things look like to the contrary. And as we give and sow our seeds, we have every right to expect God to speed up the whole process so that it will seem to us as if the reaper has indeed overtaken the sower! Imagine sowing your seeds to God and getting returns so fast you can't hardly believe it! That's what has been prophesied for our time, and for your life, if, you believe it, act on it in simple faith, and sow your seeds into the kingdom of God. Its time!



SEPTEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

SEPTEMBER 22 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

2 Corinthians 9:8 - DO YOU KNOW WHY GOD PROMISES TO PROSPER YOU?

Over the past 30 years or so, much has been taught about Divine prosperity. Some of what has been said is scriptural, most of it unscriptural. Because of that, many Christians have an erroneous understanding of prosperity, and don't have the first clue as to WHY God promises prosperity in the Bible. Never forget this: PROSPERITY'S PURPOSE IS SOULWINNING; NOTHING ELSE! If you remember that, you'll be able to avoid the deception that is rampant within Christian circles about the subject of prosperity. What did Paul say here to the Corinthians? That God wanted to bless them abundantly SO THAT they could abound in every good work of the ministry. This is not what many are preaching prosperity for. They just want you to line their pockets with your money, and they don't mind mis-representing the scriptures to do it. Beware! Pray before you just give to anyone who is tugging on your emotional purse strings! There are many good churches and ministries doing their best to reach souls, but there are also many, many churches and ministries that are BAD GROUND to sow into.

It takes massive amounts of money to fulfill the Great Commission (Mark 16:15-20). That's no problem for God, there's plenty of money on earth to complete the task. But when Christians start hoarding money unto themselves, the whole process begins to break down and the only one left dancing is the devil! Much of what is preached as prosperity today isn't prosperity at all. Its greed disguised as prosperity. You need to really take a hard look at how some preachers are living, and ask yourself if this is appropriate, given the fact that millions are lost, dying in their sins, and have no avenue in which to hear the life-saving gospel. Of course, God wants you to be blessed, and there's nothing wrong with that, to a point! But how much is enough? How big a house does someone need to live in? How expensive a car does it need to be? When does it stop? As a missionary, I've devoted more than 25 years to labor amongst third-world people whose idea of prosperity is quite different than that in our country. In the Philippines, prosperity is many times just having enough to buy a bicycle! Someone will say: "Well, God can afford to be lavish with me! After all, He can afford it!" I've heard that for so long it nauseates me! Yes, God WANTS to lavishly bless us, but not so we can just lavishly heap possessions unto ourselves. We're to be lavishly blessed so we can give lavishly to finance the work of ministry! That's what prosperity is all about, not about how much I'm able to acquire, accumulate and possess in this life, but how much I'm able to channel into the work of reaching and changing lives, one life at a time!



SEPTEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

SEPTEMBER 23 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Romans 1:16 - DON'T BE ASHAMED!

In this very revealing passage, Paul tells us why we should never be ashamed of the gospel. According to what he says here, how is the gospel to be defined? IT IS THE POWER OF God UNTO SALVATION TO EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES! That's why you're never to be ashamed when you share the good news with someone. No matter how they respond or react, always remember the gospel of God IS the power of God! It doesn't just contain God's power; it IS God's power! Let that truth sink in for a moment.

If you're standing in faith for God's power to manifest in some way in your life today, get busy and start sharing the gospel with people in your areas of influence. That's where the power is to be found, and so that's where the power to help you will be found also. In Romans 10:17, it says faith comes by HEARING, and HEARING by the Word of God. Why? Because the gospel of God is the power of God unto... Unto what? Unto anything you need! Salvation, healing, prosperity, answers to prayer, spiritual counsel or guidance, deliverance, whatever! That's why its called the GOSPEL! The word "gospel" means "good news!" As people hear it, faith gets deposited down inside their hearts, and when they release that faith through words and actions, God's power goes to work. In order for you to receive the power of God, you have to know where its to be found first. God's power for anything you need today is found in the announcement of good news! It's the announcement that releases the power, so don't be ashamed to announce and proclaim the gospel! Share it today. Share it often. Share it without apology! Jesus would. How about you?



SEPTEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

SEPTEMBER 24 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

1 Peter 3:15 - ARE YOU READY TO PREACH?

Peter told his disciples to be ready to give an answer to anyone who wanted to know about Jesus. Are you ready to do the same today? In Romans 1:15, Paul made a similar statement to the Roman Christians. He said he was **READY** to preach the gospel in Rome. Are you ready to do the same at work, or at school, or wherever you're going today? You should be, because that's your primary assignment in life. Get ready, be ready, stay ready! Ask yourself this question: Am I living my life out of the overflow in my heart? Those who are living life out of the overflow of their hearts are the ones who are always ready to give people answers and share the gospel effectively. Is there that Divine overflow in your life today?

We witness and share our faith in many ways. We preach in many ways. We need to be aware of the fact that people are watching us all the time, and many times its not so much what we say about Jesus, but the lives we live that convey the message effectively. When you live your life out of God's overflow in your heart, you're constantly ready to share because you're constantly basking in God's presence. You're not trying to "find a message", or "find a verse" to share. They're just coming up out of you, and you're not even thinking about it. If Christians spent as much time with the Lord in prayer and Bible study, as they do with the carnal pursuits of this life, we'd all be much more able to witness effectively. We'd consistently be ready because we'd constantly be overflowing with God's love, God's mercy, God's patience, forgiveness, forbearance, etc. When Moses came back to the Jews after he had spent time in God's presence, the Bible says his face glowed so brightly the people asked him to put a veil over his face! What was he doing? Preaching out of the overflow! He wasn't trying to glow; it was just the by-product of time spent with God. And that's how you get ready and stay ready! Take the time to spend time with God! In doing so, you'll be ready at all times to preach the gospel and give answers to those who have questions!



SEPTEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

SEPTEMBER 25 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Luke 6:22-23 - HOW DO YOU KNOW ITS TIME TO LEAP FOR JOY?

Everybody loves to be happy. Everybody loves to have things going their way. When good things come your way, and good news abounds in your life, it's easy to leap for joy. But Jesus said there were other times when leaping for joy was appropriate. He tells us to leap for joy when everybody is against you, lying about you, persecuting you and refusing to even talk to you, because you're obeying God and doing your best to live right and do right in His sight. Is this easy? Of course not. You can't do it unless you keep your eyes on the Lord and stay VERY focused on Him and Him alone. Why? Because it hurts when people lie about you and say all manner of evil against you falsely. It's not easy to take, but that is what Jesus teaches us to learn to do. Can you do it? Most believers can't!

I've had to practice what I'm preaching to you, more than once. It's not an easy thing to do, but it is the mature thing to do. In fact, Matthew 5:44 exhorts us to pray for those who use us and spitefully come against us. The natural, immature thing to do is to want to fight back, defend yourself, accuse your accusers, and exact your measure of revenge. That may feel good for your flesh, but its disaster for you in the spirit realm. And when you're tempted to do that, remember what Jesus said to do. Leap for JOY! Joy! Imagine that! Not leaping for sorrow, or anger, or retribution, but for joy! Remember, the joy of the Lord is your strength, and in times like that you need God's strength to pull you through. So let joy have its way, and leap for joy in the midst of tests, trials and difficulties with people. If you can learn to do this apart from your feelings, you'll be well on your way to insulating yourself from what people say or do against you, and that is certainly something to leap for joy about!



SEPTEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

SEPTEMBER 26 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Romans 4:16 - CALLING THINGS THAT BE NOT...!

Abraham is called the father of our faith. Why? Because he acted in faith like God, and basically, set the example for all of us to follow afterwards. What did he do that made him so "God-like?" He called things that were not as though they were. You and I have to do the same if we're to ever be pleasing to God, because Hebrews 11:6 says without faith it's impossible to please God. Faith chooses to look at things through God's word, rather than by how they may appear through our five physical senses. This takes a discipline and a dedication that most believers aren't willing to undertake. It's so much easier to just accept things the way they appear in this world, rather than choosing to change them by faith if they contradict God's word. This is the difference between the Abraham kind of faith, and the Thomas kind of faith (John 20:29).

Most Christians are like Thomas. They won't believe in something unless they can contact it, or verify it, or feel it, by their five senses. Abraham, on the other hand, chose to take God at His word, and believe something was true even though his five senses said it wasn't. Remember there are two kinds of truth. There's physical truth, and spiritual truth. Spiritual truth is a higher truth, and always supersedes physical truth. As an example: your body may tell you you're sick, but God's word tells you you're healed by the stripes of Jesus (1 Peter 2:24). It's true you're sick physically, but that truth can be superseded by God's word if you choose to make it so! How? By agreeing with what God said and putting His word in your mouth to bring what you desire to pass. That's what God was doing when he changed Abram's name to Abraham. Abraham means "Father of many nations". At the time he was so named, he was father of no one, and his wife was barren! Yet, he chose to believe God, and as a result became the great man of faith that we read about today. Follow in his footsteps today as well. Stop calling things as though they appear in the natural world. Start calling things as though God's word is final authority, because it is!



SEPTEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

SEPTEMBER 27 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Romans 5:5 - YOU CAN LOVE LIKE GOD LOVES!

When a person accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit comes to not only recreate their spirit, but also to take up a permanent dwelling within their spirit forever. When that happens, the love of God is “shed abroad” in that person’s heart, making them capable of loving like God does. Now, it doesn’t take a genius to look around and see that in the body of Christ, very few of us love like God loves, but nonetheless, it’s possible. Not only is it possible, its commanded! In several places in the New Testament, the Bible specifically commands Christians to walk in love. One of the best examples of this is John 13:34,35. Not only did Jesus command us to love in that passage, but He also said it would be the only way Christians were to identify themselves as true believers. Think about that!

Walking in love like God requires exercise, discipline, and a commitment to be pleasing to the Lord. You have to practice walking in love, and the more you do, the better you get at doing it. There are opportunities every day to walk in love, because we’re always surrounded by people who aren’t walking in love! So, each time you’re confronted with the decision in how to react to things people say or do around you, make the choice to walk in love! When you do, you’re exercising your spirit and bringing it to the place where it becomes so strong, nothing the devil tries can succeed against you. This is the way it was with Jesus. Satan tried everything in the book against Him, but without success. The Bible says Jesus was tempted in all points like we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). The love of God within Jesus so strengthened Him that no matter what the devil threw at Him, it was repelled forcefully, and authoritatively. And although Jesus will forever be the only Man to walk this earth sin-free, we can come to the place where God’s love so dominates our lives, we become mirrored reflections of Jesus Himself! Jesus told His disciples that when they saw Him, they were looking at His Father. Well, for us today in Christ, let’s dedicate ourselves to love to such a degree, that when people see us, they’re really looking at Jesus! It’s possible! It can be done! I’m on the journey and getting better at it every day. How about you?



SEPTEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

SEPTEMBER 28 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Romans 6:11 - ARE YOU DEAD OR ALIVE?

When you accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, you were translated out of the kingdom of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God Son (Colossians 1:13). When that happened, you died to the flesh, and became alive unto God in spirit. This is what Paul was trying to get the Roman Christians to understand. He was imploring them to cast off the works of the flesh and put on the new man in Christ. We must be doing the same thing today if we're to be pleasing to God, and "meet" for the Master's use. Remember, your flesh is still dead to sin, and it's your eternal enemy. It never wants to obey God, and always wants to rebel against God. You must control it, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:26. For this to happen, it will start with a mind-set that considers the flesh dead, even as it continues to rise up and usurp authority daily. To live above the flesh, you must consider it dead, and treat it as such.

You can't live in the spirit while your flesh is allowed to run rampant in your life. You have to "kill it" and reckon it dead each day. This is what Paul was talking about when he said that he died "daily" (1 Corinthians 15:31). You'll have to do the same if you want to rise above carnality, and truly become spiritual in Christ. Die daily! That doesn't mean you kill yourself physically, obviously. Rather, it means crucifying the flesh, and considering it dead in your life. You give it no place for expression, and constantly, daily - you keep it subdued under your spiritual feet by meditating and doing the Word of God. It's a day to day battle, but a battle that must be won! And remember, yesterday's victory over the flesh doesn't guarantee victory today! Each day is a new day, and a brand-new opportunity for both your flesh, and your spirit! So, as you rise each day, ask yourself; Will I be dead or alive today? Which way will I go? Will you let your flesh have its way, or will you treat it as a dead entity, and walk in the newness of life in Christ? Only you can make that choice, but depending on how you choose, you'll either empower the devil, or empower God. You are the deciding witness!



SEPTEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

SEPTEMBER 29 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Romans 7:21 - SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY!

We are created as tri-part beings. We are spirits, we have souls, and we live in bodies. Spirit, soul and body. If you read Romans 6,7 and 8, you find an extensive discourse on the battle all of us must wage and win daily. It's the fight between the desires of our flesh against the desires of our spirit. Paul had this struggle, and we all have it today. Yet, sad to say, most believers spend most of their time pampering the enemy, coddling the enemy, and sleeping with the enemy! How do they do that? By giving place to their carnal appetites and desires. Are you one of those? I hope not! As an example: look at how much money the world spends on making the flesh look better, younger, stronger, whatever! The cosmetics industry is huge, all driven by people's fleshly desires. Now there's nothing wrong or sinful with doing your best to look nice and presentable because we're all Ambassadors for Christ, but at the same time, you have to understand that as your enemy, your flesh will never be satisfied with what you pamper it with today. It will always want more tomorrow, and this is the deceptiveness of sin.

So keep everything in balance, and don't give place to your flesh. Its dead to sin and wants to drag you to hell if it can. It wants to do three things: eat, sleep and sin, and not necessarily in that order. The more you cater to it, the more dominant it becomes in your life. Eat one Krispy Kreme donut today, and your body will want a dozen of them tomorrow! And if you're not strong enough to resist, you'll go out and give it what it wants! Paul said we're to subdue our flesh (1 Corinthians 9:26-27). That word "subdue" in the Greek means to "beat the body black and blue". The flesh isn't going to want to pray, or read the Bible, or attend church, or do anything that your born-again spirit wants to do. So, you have to MAKE IT OBEY! There's no other way, because it won't cooperate on its own. It can't, because its dead to sin! Recognize this and make the appropriate choices daily. Instead of sleeping with the enemy, kick that puppy out of bed and never let him in again!



SEPTEMBER DAILY DEVOTIONALS

BY MIKE KEYES, SR

SEPTEMBER 30 DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Luke 21:5,6 - **DON'T FALL IN LOVE WITH ANYTHING TEMPORAL**

When the disciples told Jesus how impressive they thought the temple was, Jesus simply said there would come a time when nothing of what they saw that day would be left standing. History is full of examples of this kind of erroneous mentality towards the temporal things of this world. How many wars have been fought, and how many lives prematurely lost, over the conquest of more land, more gold and more power? And where are those kings, those dictators, those tyrants today? Gone and forgotten, except for perhaps a footnote, or a few paragraphs in some history textbook. The point should be well taken for us today, and we should not fall prey to the same kind of mentality. As Christians, we are NEVER to be deceived by the allure of the temporal. Ever! Yet, how many times do we hear Christians talking about how much they LOVE their house, their car, their clothing, their time-share properties, their work or their business? That's the wrong kind of thinking my friend, and if that's the way you're looking at the things you "own" in this world, you better wake up and change the way you relate to your earthly possessions.

As for what Jesus was referring to, He was referring to the fact that in about 70 years, the Roman army would come through and totally level Jerusalem, including the marvelous temple the disciples were so enamored with. Recent disasters which we've all seen on TV, and even experienced in person, testify once again to the futility of putting your love, your affection and your attention towards the things of this world. Devastating tsunamis have killed multitudes in Asia and the Far East. Earthquakes have killed thousands all over the globe. We have huge hurricanes that claim thousands of lives and take decades to recover from. In the USA, we have deadly tornadoes every spring, killing hundreds and destroying entire towns in just a few minutes of time. Whenever I view scenes of all the wreckage, carnage and destroyed property, and as I look into the faces on TV of the survivors of such calamities, I'm again reminded of the word of our Lord here in this passage today. Friend, you're a fool if you think ANYTHING you own or have in this life offers you any sense of security or protection. Stocks, bonds, investment properties, savings, businesses, all of it - can be lost in the blink of an eye. Things may look impressive today with your investment "portfolio", but something unforeseen could happen tomorrow, something beyond your control, and you could lose everything. So, the lesson for today is this: KEEP YOUR AFFECTIONS ON THINGS ABOVE (Colossians 3:1-6), not on things of this earth. In Christ, spiritual things are secure, earthly things are not. Never forget that!

