

Devotional Calendar

May
2020

Unit III.
Called to God's
Work of Justice

3



Meditate: Psalm 47

Listen: "Mighty God" by Deitrick Haddon

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0neDlq65eNg>

Pray: Tell the Lord that He Is an Awesome King and that You Praise His Holy Name

10



Meditate: Zephaniah 8:18-23

Listen: "Change Me" by Tamela Mann

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dlgLJEHF30k>

Pray: Let the Lord Know that You Give Him Your Hands to Use to Do His Holy Will

17



Meditate: Psalm 86:1-13

Listen: "Forgive Me, Lord (It's Me Again)" by J. Moss

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YDwXg7nVlyk>

Pray: Ask the Father to Search You and to Forgive You

24



Meditate: Psalm 72:1-17

Listen: "Take Away" by Yolanda Adams

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afJ80kCFLs>

Pray: Plead with the Lord to Give You a Heart of Compassion for Others

31



Meditate: Deuteronomy 8:11-20

Listen: "We Offer Praise" by Rodnie Bryant and the Christian Community Mass Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7inK80mS64>

Pray: Tell the Lord that You Will Never Forget His Goodness and Mercy

How to Do a Devotional

Daily devotionals are important to help you grow in your relationship with God. Pray, meditate, and read the Word of God, and you will grow spiritually. Devote ten minutes at the beginning of your day to clear your mind and heart and prepare to receive God. Daily devotions will prepare you for any obstacles that may come your way. Take time each morning to hear from God. Even Jesus used time in the morning to be with God. "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed" (Mark 1:35, NIV).



WHAT'S ON YOUR TREE?

by Toy Lisa Mitchell

IN ONE OF HIS MOST FAMOUS SERMONS, JESUS MARKED THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRUE AND FALSE PROPHETS AND DISCIPLES. He began by comparing prophets to fruit trees, telling His listeners that they could determine whether a prophet was sincere or false by observing whether his fruit was good or bad. “By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit” (Matthew 7:16-18). The “fruit” Jesus spoke of was the persons’ character—the sincerity of their spiritual works, and the connection (or disconnection) between their outward appearance (who they appear to be), and what is in their hearts (who they truly are).

Many people believe that God expects little or nothing from those who say they are Christians, when nothing could be further from the truth. God is a fruit inspector. People may be fooled by a person's outward appearance—nice clothes, good reputation, pretty smile, or church attendance—but, God looks deeper to determine a person's true spiritual character. We can never see what the Lord sees, so His advice to us, in discerning or judging a person's character, is to pay attention to the fruit of his or her life. If you do not give your name, you are constantly introducing yourself to others. However, people learn who you are through your private conversations, conduct, obedience to God's Word, and treatment of others (especially those who have very little to offer you). And, although there are many types of fruit trees, the Lord only recognizes two types of people, based on their fruit—good or bad. Simply put, your life is either pleasing to God, or it is not. In God's eyes, there is no gray area or in-between levels of character. If you love God and want to please Him, then it is not complicated—your life must bring forth good fruit.

God's expectations on this matter are nothing new. From the days of Adam and Eve to the years of ancient Israel, to the days of the early church, to modern times, God has always expected good fruit from the lives of His people. The problem is that in today's world, producing bad fruit is easy, so that is what most people do. Many produce bad fruit without hesitation or guilt because they do not realize or believe that bad fruit brings bad, far-reaching consequences. It requires no serious self-sacrifice, effort, or spiritual discipline, but the final cost is high, because God rejects bad fruit and punishes sin.

Those who are spiritual carefully consider the importance and consequences of their words and actions. Those who are unspiritual get lost in their feelings or caught up in the moment and fail to think about the impact that their actions may have on other people. God knows your thoughts; He

sees who you are and what you say when nobody else is looking. Take a moment to check your life—what is on your tree? What does God really see when He looks at you?

Do you try to live a fruitful life of honesty, purity, and peace? Are you one to always hurt people with your words? Do you bully others? Do you talk badly about others, betray their trust, spread lies, or go along with those who do? What kind of fruit is on your tree?

By the days of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry to Judah, their northern neighbors in Israel had already been conquered. In Jeremiah 21:14, the prophet warned the people of Judah with a simple but powerful message from God: "I will punish you as your deeds deserve, declares the LORD."

God had given Judah chance after chance to do the right thing, but they would not listen or obey. Eventually, the patience of God gave way to the justice of God; and God's people had to bear the consequences of their "bad fruit," or disobedience to God.

Some think that God is too "good" to punish sin, but if God allowed us to sin without accountability or consequence, then His goodness would be compromised, and many people would never turn their hearts back to Him. God is too wise, too loving, too just, and too holy to allow His people to continue operating unchecked in sin and disobedience. God's grace gives us what we do not deserve. God's mercy holds back judgment that we deserve and gives us another chance. But eventually, as with any loving father, God's justice steps in to discipline His children and to train them to do what is right (see Hebrews 12:6-7).

What type of person do you want to be? Are you satisfied to live a life that constantly falls short of God's righteous standards? Do you want a fruitful life that helps others and glorifies God? You are never too young to make a serious commitment to God—that is what God wants. The choice is yours and God is listening for your answer. So, what will it be—good fruit or bad?



LESSON

11

Background Scripture:

Zechariah 8

Print Passage:

Zechariah 8:1-8, 11-17

Do Good

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"These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts." (Zechariah 8:16)

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"God's grace is God's undeserved favor" is the phrase Pastor Mackey repeated during his sermon. As Star reflected on the pastor's words, she could not help but reflect on how she has been treated by some of the girls at church. Star had a very rough childhood. She grew up in poverty, with a mother who was addicted to illegal drugs. Star spent time in juvenile detention for shoplifting to get food. Eventually, Star's mother was arrested and sent to prison. The courts gave custody of Star to her aunt, and Star was sent to live with her in Texas.

Star is not shy about how far she has come. When Star befriended a few of the girls at church and told them her story, her honesty and transparency backfired. The girls at church began to judge and exclude her. They even made weak excuses for not wanting to sit with her during worship. Star was deeply hurt and eventually dropped out of participating in youth activities. When Star's aunt asked her what was wrong, Star explained the situation and said, "If God loves me, why are these people judging me?" Star's aunt explained that everyone in the world has sinned and disappointed God.

"None of us have been all that faithful to God or God's commands. But God chooses to show grace and forgive us. Shame on anyone who dares to judge or condemn you for what you have had to deal with. Young lady, you are strong, beautiful, and blessed to have survived all that you have been through. God can use your painful past to bless you and others."

Is there ever a reason among believers to judge someone for their life circumstances? Why or why not?



Zechariah 8:1-8, 11-17

1 The word of the LORD Almighty came to me. **2** This is what the LORD Almighty says: “I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her.” **3** This is what the LORD says: “I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the Faithful City, and the mountain of the LORD Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain.” **4** This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each of them with cane in hand because of their age. **5** The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there.” **6** This is what the LORD Almighty says: “It may seem marvelous to the remnant of this people at that time, but will it seem marvelous to me?” declares the LORD Almighty. **7** This is what the LORD Almighty says: “I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west. **8** I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God.”

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11 “But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as I did in the past,” declares the LORD Almighty. **12** “The seed will grow well, the vine will yield its fruit, the ground will produce its crops, and the heavens will drop their dew. I will give all these things as an inheritance to the remnant of this people. **13** Just as you, Judah and Israel, have been a curse among the nations, so I will save you, and you will be a blessing. Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong.” **14** This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Just as I had determined to bring disaster on you and showed no pity when your ancestors angered me,” says the LORD Almighty, **15** “so now I have determined to do good again to Jerusalem and Judah. Do not be afraid. **16** These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; **17** do not plot evil against each other, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this,” declares the LORD.

Intersect

Who was Zechariah? He was a prophet, born in Babylon. According to Nehemiah 12:1, 16, Zechariah was a Levite whose name means “Yahweh remembers.” Interestingly, in Zechariah 8, the phrase “This is what the Lord says” appears ten times, followed by a divine promise for God’s people, the Israelites. The text refers to God’s jealousy, which is not to be compared with sinful, human jealousy. God loves His people and is jealous against sin and anything else that is hurtful to them. Therefore, God wants His people to do what is right and to make right choices.

Zechariah encouraged the people concerning God’s promise of restoration and reaffirmed God’s promise to rebuild the Temple that was destroyed by the Babylonian invasion. God promised that once the Temple was rebuilt, He would dwell among them. The people of God would be restored to their land in Jerusalem and live there in the presence of God. In verse 14, God says, “Just as I had determined to bring disaster on you and showed no pity when your ancestors angered me”; God was referencing His punishment of their ancestors’ sin that included allowing the Babylonians to invade Israel, destroy Jerusalem and carry the people away as captives. In the final verses of our biblical text, God commands the people to live honestly and peacefully with each other by (1) speaking nothing but the truth; (2) being fair; (3) not doing evil against each other; and (4) not lying. These things God hates, and as God’s people, we should hate them too.

Inside Out

Respond to the questions below.

1. Why was the Lord jealous?
2. How did God show grace to the Israelites?
3. In Zechariah 8, we see ten promises of God. What are the promises?



There's an App for That!

Write a poem where each line begins with the words "I AM." As you write, complete each sentence and write about how you will apply this lesson to your life in the following areas:

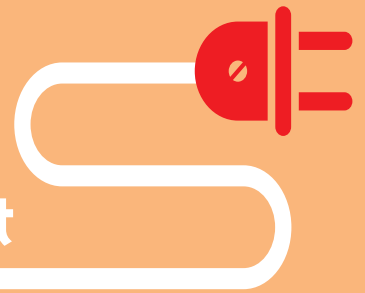
I AM going to speak the truth _____

I AM going to be fair _____

I AM not going to do evil _____

I AM not going to lie _____

Share your "I AM" poem with the class.



Connect

Over and over, God showed grace toward His chosen people. Did they deserve it? No. But God made the choice to give His people, even today, what they do not deserve, such as His love, mercy, and grace. It is important to plant this truth deep within your heart, so you never begin thinking you deserve God's favor. We don't deserve God's grace, but God gives it to us anyhow!

Stepping Out!

This week, you are challenged to join with God in the work of ministry and identify an older couple (or widow or widower) in your church whom you can help. Share your experience at the next class session.

Media Mission

Visit https://www.ted.com/talks/john_legend_redemption_song and listen to "Redemption Song" by John Legend. After listening, share your thoughts on the video with the class.

