

GROWTHguide

FOR THE WEEK OF FEB. 7, 2016

"It's Not Where You're Going, It's Where You've Been"



THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURES

Hebrews 11:1-6, James 1:2-4, Romans 5:3-7, 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, Isaiah 40:31

REFLECTION AND STUDY

DAY 1

When things are going well, having faith is easy; your well overflows. It is easy to "*live by faith, not by sight*" when your faith is not tested. However, when a faith test comes along, everybody struggles. Even the disciples—the very men and women who saw Jesus perform miracles firsthand—struggled with their faith. When personally faced with danger, fear, unknown circumstances and unexpected trials, their faith waived.

- Think of a time when you were faced with challenges or difficulties. How did you react? Was your faith tested?

Pray and thank God for being with you during difficult times as well as good. Ask him to help you be more aware of his presence in times of need.

DAY 2

We talked about the image of a "faith well" on Sunday. To grow in faith, you must consistently dig your well before a crisis occurs. If you are in a great place in your life, this is the time to dig your faith well deeper. Even if you are currently in a faith drought, the water is there if you seek it and dig deep enough. What does "digging a faith well" mean? Simply developing your faith day to day. How deep is your faith well? Ask yourself these questions:

- Is developing your faith a priority in your life?
- Do you have trusted spiritual advisors to help you make tough decisions?
- Do you have a plan to follow when your faith test appears?

If you have a solid plan, trust God, serve Him already, and are humble to do His will, you will be better equipped to face any test that comes along. **Pray and ask God to help you develop your faith.**

DAY 3

Read James 1:2-4 and Romans 5:3-7. Why do these scriptures tell us to rejoice in our difficulties and painful trials? Because testing of faith ultimately makes our faith stronger and develops perseverance. As the passage from Romans says, suffering produces perseverance. Perseverance develops our character and makes us stronger, which ultimately gives us hope. Faith tests are a necessary part of our growth. No matter what faith test you experience, it has value.

- Think of a painful time in your life. Did you learn anything from that situation? How did that situation make you stronger?
- Has your faith ever emerged from a test even stronger than before?

Pray and ask God to be with you and guide you through every test. Thank Him for helping you become stronger.

DAY 4

Remember the redwood trees that send their roots out and intertwine with others to strengthen and support each other. If we choose to go the journey alone, not connected with or detached from the Vine, our faith does not have the strong roots need to stand firm and survive. Often it can help us to have friends who share our faith and can shore us up, but ultimately we must place our trust in God alone.

- Do you feel connected to God and His Word?
- What are you doing day to day to "dig your well" or to "send out roots" of faith?

Pray and ask God to help you rely on Him above all others.

DAY 5

Read 2 Corinthians 4:8-9. Paul describes the terrible pressures and challenges he was living through. We know that during his ministry he was imprisoned, shipwrecked and faced all types of persecution. Yet, he remained steadfast with a message that ***"Life may knock you down, but God will never abandon you!"*** Through all the challenges he faced, he was not defeated. When you look at the history of the early Christian church, you see the church faced the same challenges. All but one of the disciples were killed. Many other Christians were killed, tortured or imprisoned. There were powerful forces working to destroy the church Jesus built when it was brand new and at its most fragile, held in the hands of just a few disciples. Yet it survived and the truth spread, converting millions across the world. This is God's power at work, and it is still at work in our lives today! " It takes courage to stand firm and trust Jesus when we are afraid, unsure and lack confidence in ourselves or others. But the best God has for us often is not far beyond what we fear the most!

- How were the early Christians able to keep their faith alive despite the persecution they faced?

Pray and ask God to renew your faith and give you strength to face any hardship.

DAY 6

Read Isaiah 40:31. What a powerful promise from the Lord! Hope is a freely given gift from God. We can find it in many ways: in his presence, in His Word, while we worship Him, when we pray. What are the things that give you hope? Is it seeing the beautiful things God has created, a sunset or a baby's smile? Is it a specific passage of scripture that speaks to you? Is it during worship? Is it wrapping yourself in a prayer shawl? Where do you look for God?

- How do you find God's hope?
- When do you feel closest to God?
- What are you doing day to day to draw closer to Him?

Pray and ask God to draw you close to Him. Ask Him to fill you with hope.

DAY 7

Today is your "Sabbath" and a time for reflection. How has God been speaking to you over the week? Use what the Lord has said to you to remold and reshape your life. If you are having trouble hearing God's voice, slow down or even stop what you are doing so that the busyness of life's demands do not squelch the whispers of God's language of love upon your heart.