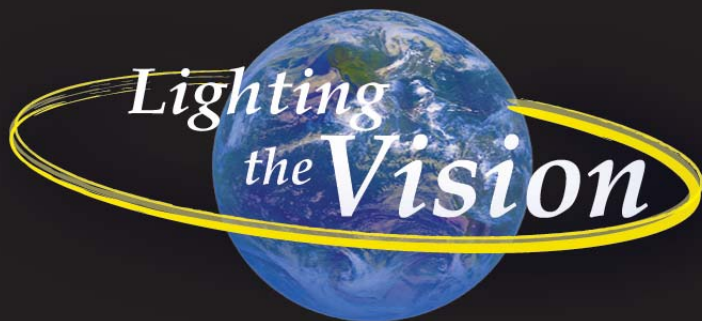


THE OPEN DOOR CHURCH



**“...and we will not neglect
the house of God.”**

Neh. 10:39

The Open Door Church

600 Miller Street
Chambersburg, PA 17201

Mike Sanders, Senior Pastor

The Open Door Church

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Dear Open Door Family,

This devotion guide is designed especially for your use during The Open Door Church's "Lighting The Vision" campaign. The subjects for each week parallel the subject of our messages each week. You'll do a week's devotions on faith, then a week on hope, then love, then generosity and finally thanksgiving.

I am convinced that our spiritual campaign will be a time of incredible spiritual growth for us as individuals and as a church. When we begin to pray, give and sacrifice, we grow. These devotions are an important part of that opportunity for maturity in each of our lives. We want God's word to be at the center of our faith and prayer. We want God's direction to be the single motivation for our gifts and sacrifices. These devotions will help you, as an individual or as a family, to personally discover God's direction in His word.

You'll see that we have included family discussion questions and on some days children's activities. You'll find the discussion questions are designed for older elementary and above. If you're doing this devotion by yourself you can use these as thought questions. I encourage you to jot down your thoughts in a notebook. The activities are for younger elementary down to preschool age. The best way to be consistent in these devotions is to find the same time every day to do them. Maybe at the dinner table or right before bedtime or at breakfast.

In Jesus' Love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Sanders". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Pastor Mike

Faith Is Living Beyond The Routine

"What is faith? It is the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead." Heb 11:1

Faith is the Secret to "Rut Free Living."

We all know what it's like to live in a rut. Too often what starts with great promise settles into a lifelong habit of routine. A couple gets married - yet somehow a promise of lifelong love turns into habit and routine. A business gets started - but before long the dream turns into drudgery. A fresh and real commitment to Christ is made - yet you find yourself settling for the average life rather than the abundant life. Faith makes the difference! Faith helps us to handle the two main things that might push us into the rut of routine...

Life's Disappointments

Disappointment can make us feel, "I guess that's all there is...I'll have to learn to settle for less." Faith energizes us to look past our disappointments and to see God's promises.

Life's Successes

Disappointments can make us bitter...success can make us self-satisfied. A little success can be a dangerous thing! Faith has the power not only to help us with our struggles, but also our successes. Faith puts success in perspective. It reminds me that I'm not the source of the success - it is God who has given these gifts to me. It also helps me to see that I'm not the reason for the success. Of course, God is pleased with my happiness. But the ultimate reason for all He does in our lives is to show the world what He is like... to bring glory to Himself.

Family Discussion Question: Is disappointment or is success the greater challenge in your life right now?

Children's Activity: Show your children how "ingrained" a routine can become by having an "unroutine" day: Have everyone sit at different places when you eat or watch T.V... or sleep with your head at the foot of your bed. You come up with ideas.... have fun with this!

Faith's Final Exam

"Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people." Acts 6:8

Know how to recognize a priceless person? Just look at their price tag! You can see what a person is worth by looking at what it takes to buy them off. I wonder how you and I would do if we had to face "faith's final exam." It is an exam that only a few Christians down through the ages have had to face. It is a test that has only one soul searching question.

Stephen faced this test when he was being judged for his faith in Acts 6. Faith's final exam is "Would I be willing to give up my life for what I believe?" We sing about giving our all to Jesus and tell Him that we'd offer our very life for him. But what if the threats were real? It's an important test, for your attitude towards dying for your faith has much to say about how you'll live your faith!

Take a look at Stephen, for example. He showed himself to be a priceless person, a person who would not back down in his faith no matter what the threat. Stephen became the first Christian to actually die for his faith. What was the secret to such a great faith? Acts 6 tells us that Stephen lived as a man "full of faith and the Holy Spirit." He had answered faith's final exam long before he faced the court that would condemn him. We're all like tubes of toothpaste. When the squeeze is put on us what comes out is whatever we're full of! This means that we don't have to "cram" for the tests of faith. Let Christ fill your heart and mind, your decisions and actions... today!

Family Discussion Question: Where do you need to be "full of faith" today?

Children's Activity: Make up some "price tags" to show the real value of some of the things in your home. Have your kids tell you how much things like furniture and appliances are worth...make up a tag and put it on those things. Then, ask them to put a price tag on a Bible...then on themselves. Remind them of the incalculable value of the Bible, of the tremendous value God places on them.

True Dedication

*"So the king and all the Israelites dedicated the temple of the LORD."
1 Kings 8:63*

What do we mean when we say dedication? To one person it may mean giving up a part of a football game to come to church on Sunday mornings, to another it may point to a decision to begin giving some of their money to the Lord's work, while to another it may add up to leaving all that they know to serve the Lord as a missionary in a foreign country. What does it mean to dedicate a temple, a church, a child... a life - to dedicate them to the Lord. In I Kings 8, Solomon dedicates the great Jerusalem Temple to the Lord, and in so doing teaches us some important lessons about the character of dedication.

Dedication means Open Declaration

Dedication is a public announcement of your intentions and commitments. Many see dedication as some inner commitment that no one can really see or understand. Not true...it is expressed in public commitments and public actions. Do you know when dedication begins to happen? When you begin to place your faith on the line in terms of public commitments. It's that willingness to declare to others that adds up to dedication.

When our forefathers penned the Declaration of Independence they turned a philosophy into a dedication to freedom.

When John Kennedy said, "We will put a man on the moon before the end of the decade" he transformed a scientist's dream into a country's dedication.

Family Discussion Question: When others look at your life, what do you think they would say you are "dedicated" to?

True Dedication

part 2

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship." Rom 12:1

There are two more lessons about dedication we learn from the study of Solomon we began yesterday. Besides open Declaration...

Dedication Means Sacrifice

They sacrificed an unbelievable amount that day! 22,000 cattle and 120,000 sheep and goats. That's a lot of T-bone steak and leg of lamb! Why? What could be the purpose of such sacrifices? What did sacrifices do for men that was so important to the Lord? Sacrifices are "A gift of trust to the Lord." As they sacrificed they declared that they trusted God to take care of their needs. They were saying, "Instead of hoarding and declaring my trust in myself, I'll give you Lord to declare my trust in you."

Dedication will inevitably involve some sacrifices. Sacrifice is ultimately an expression of trust in the Lord. You're willing to give something up because you trust Him more than that something.

Dedication Means Praise

A significant part of dedication is praise to God. Solomon's praise as he dedicated the temple centered on the fact that God had kept His promise. There is a specific praise that not only expresses, but actually increases our dedication to the Lord. The specific praise that grows our dedication is "Thank You Lord for your Faithfulness." It is a praise that recognizes that all that we have comes as a result of God's promises to us...as a result of His faithfulness in our lives.

That type of praise recognizes that I can be dedicated to God because God is dedicated to me! He is dedicated to my joy, my peace, my growth. God has dedicated Himself to my personal happiness and fulfillment. How dedicated is He? *"He who did not spare His own Son, how will He not also along with Him freely give us all things."* Romans 8:32.

Family Discussion Question: What sacrifice would REALLLLY stretch your dedication?

True Dedication

part 3

"Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven and said: "O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below--you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way." 1 Kings 8:22-23

Dedication means praise and sacrifice and open declaration. Today we learn one final truth about dedication from King Solomon.

Dedication Means Ministry

We cannot be dedicated to God without being dedicated to meeting the needs of the people He has made. Solomon dedicated this temple to the needs of the disappointed and the defeated, those besieged by sin and by loneliness, those involved in the battles and the prisons of life.

Too many make dedication the most impractical of things. It could never be lived, only talked about. There is a dedication made up of myths, fables and pipe dreams.

If you're striving to become more dedicated to the Lord, it doesn't take you long to discover that there is a whole Christian subculture in which dedication is made up of spiritual sounding words and big name conferences and fancy looking materials. You cannot practice dedication in a conference or with mere words or on the pages of a notebook. It's built out of trusting God with the practical needs of your everyday life. You might be able to learn about it at a conference and be inspired toward it with a notebook, but don't ever fall into the trap of believing that the conference is where real dedication is expressed.

Dedication Is Expressed In Ministry

It is expressed in what you choose to DO with your life to serve the Lord and to serve the people He has made.

Family Discussion Question: Can you think of one simple ministry your family could do this week?

Children's Activity: Do a simple ministry project with your children this week. (Write a card to encourage someone, make cookies for somebody or ?)

An Able Faith

"By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead."

Heb 11:4

The best way to learn faith is from people. Why? Because faith is not so much a matter of what you know as of who you are, it's built not out of knowledge but out of relationships. Take Abel, the first faithful man. Three things happened to him because he had faith. They each point out how faith will affect our lives.

He Offered A Better Sacrifice

Faith affected his generosity. What was better about Abel's sacrifice? Cain offered but Abel offered his best. Faith adds up to a willingness to give your best to the Lord. You can trust Him with it!

He Was Commended As Righteous By God

Faith affected his relationships. Righteous is a word about relationships, it points to being in a right relationship with God. Pre-schoolers define it as being God's friend. Faith gave Abel a commendation for his relationship with God.

He Still Speaks

Faith affected his influence. The most powerful tool you have for influencing this world is your faith. Why so powerful? Because actions and decisions based upon faith simply last longer. Cain may have cut Abel's life short, but Abel's faith still speaks! Want to make an impact? Seminars can hone your skills and organization can improve your opportunities and principles can enhance your planning... but it's all a drop in the bucket without faith. If you're mathematically minded: $\text{Impact} = (\text{Skills} + \text{Organization} + \text{Planning} + \text{"Whatever"}) \times \text{Faith}$. Great skills times no faith equals zero impact. A few skills multiplied by a great faith adds up to incredible impact.

Family Discussion Question: Where could you "offer your best" to the Lord right now in one specific way?

Children's Activity: Have your children take an offering to church tonight or tomorrow. Put it in an envelope, on which they write (or write with them) "My best for the Lord".

An Anchor For The Soul

"This certain hope of being saved is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls, connecting us with God himself behind the sacred curtains of heaven." Heb 6:19

The promise of hope is the promise of security in uncertain times. The Bible promises that our hope is an "anchor for our soul." It gives us an incredible confidence in the midst of the confusion around us.

Do you have that kind of confidence where it really counts. Maybe you're facing an opportunity to accomplish something of real importance. Before you've even gotten started, you've been engulfed by thoughts of failure. Possibly you've tried to break a bad habit, but your first attempts were invaded by the thought that you'd not be able to keep your resolve? Hope means confidence. Not self-confidence, real confidence.

We all need an anchor within. Without an anchor...when life is calm, you'll drift...when life is stormy, you'll crash. Hope is our storm anchor. Hope becomes our anchor as we enter God's presence. It enters the "inner sanctuary, behind the curtain." What is this about hope going backstage? It simply means the place where I can most intimately experience God's presence. When we know God offers hope, why do we sometimes still feel so hopeless? What might be missing is the living joy of God's presence in your everyday life: everyday activities, everyday decisions, everyday relationships.

Family Discussion Question: How close is God to you right now? What could you do to better sense His presence today?

Children's Activity: Show your children how an anchor can stabilize us. Fill a tall plastic cup with water, place it in a basin and let them tip it over. Do this several times.... and then "anchor" the cup with play dough or with your hand. Hope "stabilizes" us.

The Change Exchange

"By faith Abraham, even though he was past age--and Sarah herself was barren--was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise." Heb 11:11

Have you made faith's great change exchange? Have you learned to exchange life's pressures for God's promises? We all live in one of two ways, under life's pressure or within God's promises. The secret to promise living is faith... believing what God has told me about Himself and His world in His word.

When you believe God's promise you belittle life's pressure. When you trust God's promise you trample life's pressure. When you count on God's promise you count out life's pressure. When you depend on God's promise you defeat life's pressure. When you receive God's promise you reject life's pressure. Is that clear? Promise and pressure are mutually exclusive... they can't exist together.

There are two common attitudes that push the promises of God out of our lives as believers. Watch out for these! (You can see them in the life of Abraham as he struggled with believing God's promise about sending He and Sarah a son). I'll have to settle for less, or I'll have to get it myself.

Although Abraham struggled with these attitudes, he ended up putting his faith in God. Just because you struggle does not mean that you cannot end up making the great "change exchange." You can be a person of genuine faith.

Family Discussion Question: Where do you feel pressured right now? As a family, pray for each other. Pray that God's promises will ease your pressures.

Children's Activity: Show how promises "push out" pressure by filling a cardboard tube with crumpled paper (paper towel or toilet tissue). Once the tube is filled show them how the new paper you put in always pushes out the old.

A Plan For Your Future

'I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a future and a hope.' Jer 29:11

We are going to look at a promise a day for the next few days, beginning with this great promise of God's plan for our lives from Jeremiah.

Hoping has to do with planning. How do you plan for the future? In order to have hope for your future you must start with God's promise. All the planning and scheduling in the world will not help if you do not have God's promise for your future right at its very root. When you start with God's promise you realize, "God has plans for me!"

God Is Planning Right Now For Your Prosperity

That may include material prosperity, but the real focus here is on significance of life. Imagine God up in heaven with a sheet of paper in front of Him. Yes, that does take some imagination! Now imagine that the paper has your name on it. Under your name is the heading, "Plans for success and significance." And finally imagine this - the paper is filled with ideas and goals and plans.

God Is Planning Right Now For Your Future

Before we plan anything we should always ask, "God, what are your plans for my future?" Our goal is not to get God to bless the future we've planned. Our desire should be to live out the future that He plans to bless us with.

God is planning right now for your hope! However discouraging things may seem at times, God has a plan for your hope! He's told us in advance, "I want to give you hope."

Family Discussion Question: How does this promise of God give you a new sense of hope in some particular area of your future.

I Can Last

"...those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." Isa 40:31

"It'll never last" Three little words so easy to say, and yet the results are so devastating! Tempted to give up on a dream? Feeling like divorce is the only way out? Feeling like the struggle of faith just isn't worth it anymore? You just want to quit, give up, bail out, toss in the towel? Isaiah 40 is for you.

Isaiah 40 contains one of the most beautiful expressions in all of the Bible about the power and nature of God. Why does Isaiah talk about this? Because our ability to last through the storms comes from Him who makes and calms the storms, our ability to endure through the long wait comes from Him who has been here forever. God's word stands forever...I can last, if I'll stand upon His word! God has measured the waters in His hand...I can last, if I'll put myself in His hands! The Lord is the everlasting God...I can last, if I'll make Him my everlasting Lord.

When you hope, you will last! That is the promise that God makes to us in these verses. Your strength will renew.

You'll soar - like an eagle. Renewed strength is the ability to dream again. You'll run - and not be weary. Renewed strength is the ability to strive again. You'll walk - and not faint. Renewed strength is the ability to endure again.

Family Discussion Question: What are you having a hard time waiting for right now?

Children's Activity: Emphasize the words *soar*, *run* and *walk* with your kids by reading the verse and picking them up to "soar" when you read *soar*, *running* when you read *run* and *walking* when you read *walk*. Read it several times until they or you are worn out.

God's Promise Of Direction

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." Prov 3:5-6

These are three commitments of life that ready you for the decisions of life. These commitments build a lifestyle that enjoys God's daily direction.

Determine your Director - "Trust in the Lord with all of your heart."

This simple phrase encourages us to ask two of life's most important questions. First, who am I trusting? Is it myself, my fears, my friends? Or... is it the Lord. Second, how am I trusting? We're encouraged to trust with all our heart. Half hearted trust is no trust at all.

Detect your Detractor - "Lean not on your own understanding".

Leaning on your own understanding is a major reason for directionless living. How do you avoid the temptation to lean? A few suggestions. Take time with your decisions. Rollo May said, "It is an old and ironic habit of human beings to run faster when we have lost our way." Talk to God about your decisions. Here's the acid test for determining your leaning tendency. Talk to God.

Declare your Delight - "In all your ways acknowledge Him."

Acknowledge means to tell others. Declare your delight. Personally... in your devotional life take time to tell the Lord you appreciate Him. Publicly... in your witnessing life tell others you appreciate the Lord.

Acknowledge Him! And the promise is, God will direct your paths. Not might, or could.... but will. How can I know God's will for my life? How can I know what decision God would have me to make? If you'll work on determining and detecting and declaring, God will direct!

Family Discussion Question: Have each person in your family answer the question, "The decision that I'm facing right now that I would most like to have God's direction in is....."

The Spiritual Art Of Rebuilding

"The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding" Neh 2:20

We are a society desperately in need of the art of rebuilding. I'm not talking about houses and cars. We need to perfect the art of rebuilding relationships: rebuilding marriages and families and friendships. We need to learn how to rebuild hope and rebuild trust and rebuild our ability to make commitments. The promise in Nehemiah 2:20 answers the question, What makes you into a rebuilders?

Expectation "The God Of Heaven Will Give Us Success..."

It is our relationship with God that grows us into expectant people. God is perfectly powerful. He is the God of all the heavens. He can accomplish whatever dream He puts in my heart. Success is a gift of God!

Dedication "We His Servants"

Nehemiah said an encyclopedia full about what it takes to be a rebuilders in these few words. He had chosen to be a servant of God. Self-centered people never do a very good job of rebuilding. They may even think they have good intentions, but the truth is they become more rearrangers than rebuilders. They try to rearrange to suit their needs rather than rebuild for God's glory.

Determination "Will Start Rebuilding"

What's the number one reason why rebuilding does not occur? Lack of determination to start! Who's going to start? In your marriage, with your kids, in your ministry. Say to yourself, "I will start". Come on, become a rebuilders! Stop relaxing, rebuild!! Stop retreating, rebuild! It may be a relationship, maybe a commitment. Determine to start.

Family Discussion Question: What's one place where you could start to practice this art of rebuilding?

Children's Activity: Get some rocks from your backyard and shine them up with your kids. Show them how pretty they are: when you wash off the dirt and put them in a glass filled with water. Talk about how God sees the hidden beauty in us.

Day Twelve

I Can Make A Difference

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5

We can't be satisfied with just making a living, we must feel that we're making a difference! Try it - just bring home a paycheck. Nothing else, nothing more. Even if the paycheck is \$100,000 a month it won't satisfy. Some of you are thinking "I'd like to try." But the truth is, we need to make a difference. Jesus gives us a promise that tells us the secret to really making a difference in this world. The secret is "remaining or abiding in Christ." What does that mean? There are 4 aspects of abiding in John 15.

- Be aware of how much you need Him.
- Don't miss this, "Apart from me you can do nothing!"
- Allow His word to mold your life.
- Seek to please God.
- Ask for His help through prayer.

Significance is not a contest - you don't win it in competition with others. Importance is a wonderful gift given by God's love. People who make a difference in this life are people who live the joy of being chosen by God, of being important to God Himself. You are Jesus' friend. Jesus starts John 15 calling us branches and ends up calling us friends. When you see Jesus as a friend it turns your thinking upside down: It's much easier to face trouble when you have a friend beside you, you're likely to stay attached to someone you know is your friend, and when it comes to asking - it's always easier to ask a friend. Your life is meant to count! You are chosen to be significant - to bear "fruit that will last." Lasting fruit means changed lives, new hope, real impact upon people's hurts. It is drawing people's attention to the eternal love of God, changing someone's eternal destiny by introducing them to the opportunity we all have to place faith in Jesus Christ.

Family Discussion Question: You are Jesus' friend! What's something you could do to treat Jesus like your best friend today?

How To Enjoy A Love That Lasts

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal." 1 Cor 13:1

It's not enough for love to just be exciting, it also must be lasting! Teenage romance won't satisfy a middle aged couple. Puppy love won't last through the dog days of life. How can you build a love that lasts longer than a 2 hour movie, or a 210 page paperback novel. Paul writes to the Corinthians amidst their turmoil and tells them the secret of love that makes relationships last. Let's look at I Corinthians 13 together over the next few days and get some clues as to what keeps love alive and vital; how you can tell if love is dying on the vine; and how you know when your love needs a miracle of resurrection.

"Love Is Patient..." (1 Cor 13:4)

(It'll take a bit of courage, but use these three statements to evaluate how patient your love really is...)

*Love is alive when it has time...
is dying when it is hurried...
is dead when it cannot wait.*

We spend a lot of life in the waiting room, don't we! Waiting together is a part of all of our relationships! But many times love also means that I must wait for someone else - wait for them to grow or to understand - wait for them to heal or to get motivated. When love begins setting deadlines it is in real trouble. There's no better example of patient love than in God's love towards us!

Love Is Kind (1 Cor 13:4)

*Love is alive when it cares...
is dying when it forgets...
is dead when it ignores.*

Kindness is the ability to do the little things well. The love expressed in kindness is learning how to turn those grand vows in a ceremony into washing dishes and dumping trash...how to turn those great hopes in a hospital nursery into changing diapers and staying up with sick children Do you ever forget to be kind? We all do! Kindness in our families, with those we are closest to, takes real effort.

Family Activity: Here's your assignment... be kind to someone in your family today in some unusual or new way. See if you can catch each other being kind.

How To Enjoy A Love That Lasts

part 2

"LOVE does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud" 1 Cor 13:4

*Love is alive when it is secure...
is dying when it doubts...
is dead when it loses trust.*

When you begin to envy another's relationships, or boast about your relationships, or become filled with pride about how well things are going for you - these are all evidences of insecurity in your relationship. If you felt truly secure you would have nothing to envy, no need to boast, you wouldn't have to build your ego by feeding it pride. Security is one of the #1 issues in relationships. Add a little insecurity to the best of relationships and love does not stay alive. This is true even in our relationship with God.

Take care not to add an ingredient of insecurity to a relationship. Common sources of insecurity are hiding something from a spouse, not being consistent in discipline with children or not contacting older parents. What one step could you take to make that relationship where you are struggling more secure? What difference might it make for you to talk to or call someone today and say "No matter what happens, no matter how ill you become or how far apart we are... I will always love you."

It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. (1 Cor 13:5)

*Love is alive when it is giving...
is dying when it is exchanging...
is dead when it is taking.*

One of the most dangerous habits we get into in our relationships is the habit of exchanging love. "You scratch my back..." that may be OK for business relationships, but it is crushing to family relationships!

Romantic love demands constant attention, real love gives constant attention.

Family Discussion Question: Are there some areas where you need to beware of the trap of exchanging love rather than giving love?

How To Enjoy A Love That Lasts

part 3

"Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." (1 Cor 13:6-7)

*Love is alive when it acts its way into a feeling...
is dying when it feels but doesn't act, or acts but doesn't feel...
is dead when it just feels its way into an action.*

Do you feel the way you act or act the way you feel? It's strange, our feelings can control our actions... and yet our actions can also control our feelings. The truth is, we get to decide which will run our lives and our relationships. Will it be the way I've decided to act or will it be the way I happen to be feeling.

But you say "I just don't feel love for my parents, my husband, my kids, my wife - our love is dead." God's advice is "Act like you love them!" "But I can't, because I don't feel like I love them!" Start acting differently anyway! You will discover the wondrous way that God works with our emotions - the fact that we can act our way into a brand new way of feeling. Don't fall into the trap of blaming your feelings - they can change if only you will decide to change.

The danger point is the place where love is dying, the middle statement above. That's the time to change. When you find yourself feeling but not acting trouble is ahead. Maybe there's "not enough time" or maybe you're afraid of their response. Go ahead and act in love anyway! Chances are good you'll be met with a surprised and joyous response. Even more dangerous is acting without ever feeling. You're just going through the motions, your actions have become matters of habit rather than matters of decision. To escape this trap renew your sense of why you're doing the things you do. You can even fall into this trap in your relationship with God. Going to church because it's a habit instead of because you love to worship Him is an example. Remind yourself, "I'm doing this because I love them... because I love him or her... because I love you, Lord."

Family Discussion Question: What are you going to do today even though you don't "feel" like it" (Work, school, project?) Have you discovered that your feelings often change when you begin to act?

Children's Activity: Show your kids how our actions affect our feelings. Have them act sad... ask if it makes them feel a little sad. Have them act angry, then act like they don't care. Then have them act happy and ask again how their actions affect the way they feel inside.

Falling In Love With Him

*"When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."" John 21:15
Read the Story of Jesus and Peter in John 21:1-22*

Who are you most in love with right now? If you are a Christian your answer should be, "Jesus Christ." One of the goals of our lives should be to fall in love with the Lord for a lifetime: a love affair with Jesus that is personal and intimate and joyous. Let's admit, it is all too easy to forget what it means to truly be in love with the Lord. Jesus' own disciples forgot... even after seeing His resurrected glory. Jesus met with Peter one day after breakfast on the beach beside the sea of Galilee. He taught Peter a lesson in love. Put yourself in Peter's sandals for a moment... you'll find a greater sense of love for Christ than you started with. A few simple words of advice about how to fall in love with Him, over and over again.

Jesus encouraged Peter to "Accept no substitutes." Jesus had a question for Peter, "Do You love me more than these?" Jesus might have pointed to the others, or to the boats and nets. He was asking, "Can any of these things take my place?" Substitutes are sometimes tempting because they are less challenging. Substitutes are often attractive because they are more "exciting and new." But they just cannot satisfy.

Develop a friendship with Christ. A friend is someone you like to be with. "Do you Love Me," Jesus asked. He used the Greek word "phileo." The English meaning is "brotherly love," the kind of love that true friends share. The kind of love that is expressed in the statement, "I like you." Have you ever thought about liking Jesus... as a friend? Learning to like Him means you'll want to spend time with Him, want to please Him and you'll really enjoy serving Him.

Don't worry about others. The surest way to destroy your love for Christ is to start comparing it to others. Whether you feel you have more love or less love than they, the result is sadly the same. You fall out of love. Peter tried to make love a matter of comparison rather than commitment. Jesus wouldn't allow it. Jesus' answer to this was, "Don't worry about them... You, Follow Me!" Quit worrying about others and start thinking about obedience, stop looking over your shoulder and put your hand to the plow, stop comparing and start committing.

Family Activity: Tell Jesus what you like about Him this morning... just like you would tell a best friend. You don't even have to close your eyes if you don't want to. Just pretend that Jesus is sitting in a chair in the room and talk to Him together.

Love One Another

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." John 13:34

How can you become a truly "loving" person? All of us can, you know! We can all develop the inner capacity to truly love others. Jesus expected that each of us could become truly loving. How can it happen? How can we begin to act differently. You'll never love better until you act differently - it's just that simple. Isn't it amazing how easily we miss this simple point. Jesus told us to start with the way we act. But how do I begin to act differently? Here's some simple keys.

Rely On God's Command To Love To Give Me Confidence To Believe I Can Love

When God says "love one another" He's not saying, "you really should." He's saying "You really can!" He never commands us to do something He is not willing and able to give us the power to do. Never! The challenge to love is not just another burden to load me down with guilt. It is God's promise to me.

Look Constantly At Jesus' Love For You

In order to love you must be loved. Your love won't go anywhere on an empty tank. The greater your recognition of Jesus' love for you, the greater your capacity to love those around you. Jesus said, "Love each other, as I've loved you." Jesus didn't hand them a book, he showed them love in living 3-D color! You can't learn love from a book, it's learned from life... from living examples.

Aim Higher Than The World Around You

Honestly, a lot of what we call love is polite selfishness. "I love you because... or I love you if... or I love you when." The truth is, we love because our needs are being met. Jesus' ideal was one of unselfish love. To reach towards this pinnacle love needs a purpose higher than itself. It has to be more than just "feeling good." Jesus' reason? "To let the world see God's love." A hurting world desperately needs to see God's love!! Unselfish love also needs a power higher than itself. John said it so simply and clearly in his letter. "We love, because He first loves us." (1 John 4:19) It's God's love for us that gives us the strength to truly love one another. It's our acceptance of his love for us that releases that strength in our lives.

Family Discussion Question: What one thing could you do to see and experience Jesus' deep love for you in a greater way... today?

Love On A Donkey

"He answered: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind;' and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Luke 10:27 Read the story of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-36

Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan is a parable about love. The story is so simple that we often miss its incredible applications for our everyday lives. It is the story of three different types of people... three different responses to needs.

Those Who Create Needs

The robbers in this story created the needs that the Samaritan would eventually meet. How did they become such takers rather than givers? Their actions were the result of a single attitude: "My needs are more important than others needs." Or, to say it in a word, they were selfish. Self centeredness creates an avalanche of needs... it always has.

Those Who Have A Need

The circumstances of life bring about real needs in peoples lives. Needs that time will not heal. Only Christ, through us, can meet those needs.

Those Who Meet Needs

Thank God for those who look beyond the barriers to meet a need. They don't let race or schedules keep them from helping others. True love towards my neighbor is reaching out to them in their time of need. Has God put someone in your path to show His love to?

Family Discussion Question: How can you help someone in need? Why is it important to reach out to others?

Love That Lasts

"Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? Will God? No! He is the one who has forgiven us and given us right standing with himself. Who then will condemn us? Will Christ? No! For he is the one who died for us and came back to life again for us and is sitting at the place of highest honor next to God, pleading for us there in heaven."

Rom 8:33-34

Do you feel loved? At times, all of us wonder how loved we really are. Our doubts grow out of accusations from without. They grow out of condemnation from within. The question is, "Who's opinion is most important to you?" We build real confidence when we recognize that the only one who has the right to judge us says, "Not guilty." That should take care of accusations from without. Our doubts are calmed when we see that the one who has the right to condemn us has chosen instead to love us. How do I know He loves me? He died for me, He arose for me, He reigns for me, He prays for me!

You are loved! Jesus said about those who trust in Him, "I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one shall snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, and He is more powerful than anyone else." John 10:28-29 "No one shall snatch them out of my hand." No one shall because no one can! God is absolutely powerful. What a wonderful picture! My ultimate security in life is not bought by what I do with my hands. It is not built out of what I refuse to touch with my hands. It is based upon the fact that I've placed myself in His hands. This is eternal security. It is not a matter of holding on. It's a matter of being held.

Nothing can separate me from Christ's love! That's a confidence that builds conquerors! Some people are contained by their fears, others conquer their fears. Which is happening in your life? We can all have a confidence that's built on being convinced of God's love for us. God's love can "convince a conquering confidence" into our hearts.

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Rom 8:38-39

Family Discussion Question: What can separate you from the love of Christ? (You've made it more than 1/2 way through this guide...you deserve an easy question)

Family Activity: Do something to celebrate completing more than half of this devotion guide together today.

Day Twenty

How To Be A Generous Person

"But just as you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us --see that you also excel in this grace of giving." 2 Cor 8:7

In II Corinthians 8-9 God encourages our generosity. It seems strange that we as Christians need encouragement to give when God has given so much to us. But we do! These encouragements are a very important part of our *Journey of Faith* devotion guide. We want this time of giving as a church to focus on God's direction to us in His word. We want our giving to be an out-growth of what we hear God saying to us as individuals.

Generous People Are Faith People

Generosity doesn't depend on circumstance. When have circumstances ever been an encouragement to give? Generosity is now and always has been an outgrowth of real faith. In fact, faith always results in generosity. Why? Because we have a generous God, and our faith makes us more like Him. Because our faith causes us to see our possessions as less important and to see God's purpose and God's people as more important.

Want to be an excellent giver? Develop a vibrant faith! Generosity grows out of the celebration of faith. Giving is not the result of cold calculation, but of warm hearted jubilation. Giving starts with joy and it results in joy. Because of this joy, once you begin to give you never want to stop!

Family Discussion Question: Who's the most generous person you know? What can you learn from them about being a giving person?

How To Be A Generous Person

part 2

"Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have." 2 Cor 8:11-12

Generous People Are Follow Through People

Ever have a great idea, a wonderful thought... and never did anything about it? Paul talks in these verses about how to transform our generous thoughts into a generous lifestyle. How can we combat the feelings that often come between our generous intentions and our generous actions?

Sometimes our own selfishness comes between us and our best intentions. That may be blunt, but we all know that it is true. We want to give, but then think about what we'd have to sacrifice. The gift of Christ motivates us to complete our intentions in the face of our selfishness.

Sometimes our own pride comes between us and our best intentions. Paul reminded the Corinthians, "Your gift is acceptable according to what you have." When we think, "I can't give that... it's not enough." God says, "It is acceptable! Give and let Me use your gift! (Remember that the "bottom line" with God is not the amount but the attitude.)

Sometimes our own needs come between us and our best intentions. How can I help them when my needs are so great? (Remember that the "bottom line" with God is not the amount... but the attitude.) "I wanted to give, but now look at what's happened." The most generous people know how to both give and receive. They have learned that the ability to graciously do both is found in our giving God.

Family Discussion Question: What's one thing that really puts you in a "giving mood"?

How To Be A Generous Person

part 3

"Each one should give as you have decided in your heart to give. You should not be sad when you give, and you should not give because you feel forced to give. God loves the person who gives happily. And God can give you more blessings than you need. Then you will always have plenty of everything--enough to give to every good work." 2 Cor 9:7-8

Generous People Are Happy People

Give Cheerfully!

There are two enemies of cheerfulness here. One is giving grudgingly. You give because you "should", not because you want to. Giving becomes a duty, a rule to be kept. The second enemy is giving under compulsion. You give because you "have to", not because you want to. This pressure can come from the inside ("what'll they think of me if I don't give") or from the outside ("you'd better give or else..."). Either way, it ruins the joy of giving.

God's invitation to joy in giving is, "Give what you've decided in your heart to give." You decide! Your heart! This is the center of joy in giving.

The impact of cheerful giving is wonderful and lasting...

- You bring praise to God, many will praise God for your obedience, and for your generosity in sharing.
- You supply the needs of God's people.
- You build significant relationships.

Family Discussion Question: Can you recall a time when giving a gift brought a real sense of joy in your heart?

How To Be A Generous Person

part 4

"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." 2 Cor 9:6

Generous People Are Sowing People

To the uninitiated, basketball can be the most disorganized looking sport. Everyone runs up and down the court with no apparent direction. They do, however, have plays in the game. One of the few plays I do understand is called the "give and go." You give somebody else the ball and then you go towards the basket. They give the ball back to you, and you score. I'd like to pick up on that to suggest a play that we desperately need to see executed more often in our families: the give and grow. Paul's advice to us as families is simple here, found in one two word direction.

Sow Generously!

Sow generously and you will reap bountifully. It's the simplest addition... sparingly = sparingly, bountifully = bountifully. It's the simplest agriculture. If you plant a lot of seed you can expect a large harvest. How does a family sow? Families can give themselves in hospitality - opening your home in order to meet people's needs. Or how about ministry? - going out from your home to meet people's needs. Or what about stewardship? - using the resources God has given to us to bless others.

Paul says that we are made rich so that we can be generous. That's an eye-opener!! Our riches are given not primarily to encourage our luxury... but our generosity. God's riches are not an invitation to luxury, they are an opportunity for generosity. We should all carry around stickers that say "opportunity." Stick them on everything that God places into our hands: our paycheck, our car, our house... an opportunity to praise God, love people and express our faith.

Family Discussion Question: What do you need to put an "opportunity to praise God" sign on right now?

Children's Activity: Write "opportunity to praise God" on several 3X5 cards. Ask your kids what to put them on today.

How To Be A Generous Person

part 5

"Those who cry as they plant crops will sing at harvest time. Those who cry as they carry out the seeds will return singing and carrying bundles of grain."

Psa 126:5-6

Generous People Sometimes Cry

Tells us "those who sow in tears will reap with joy." A missionary tells about understanding the significance of this verse for the first time. During a time of drought the tribe with which he was working saw their supplies of corn stretched to the limit. He recalled seeing a father take one of the last bags of dried corn out of his family's store room. This corn could have been pounded into meal to make the cakes that were the staple of the family's diet. But, instead, he took the corn to the field where he sowed the seed into the ground. The missionary saw tears flowing down the man's cheeks, and he understood. It hurt to put into the ground what might be his family's last meal. Yet he knew that without sowing that seed his family would certainly starve the next year. So he sowed with tears knowing that he would one day reap with joy.

What's the lesson? That we should give away our last meal? Of course not! The lesson is.... it's not always easy to "generate generosity"! When we talk about "giving cheerfully" it can sound as if giving is always an easy thing to do. That simply is not true. For those who give there is often the strange mixture of sacrifice and joy. You know that you're doing what is right and yet it is often hard to let go. That's true when we give our time, our money, our talents or ourselves. But the truth is... there is an inevitable law of sowing and reaping at work. It's a natural law. It's a spiritual law. Those who sow in tears WILL reap with joy.

Family Discussion Question: Can you remember a time when it was difficult for you to give something? (Even preschoolers can think of an answer to this question!)

How To Be A Generous Person

part 6

"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." Gal 6:7-9

Generous People Are Blessed People!

Don't let anyone steal the blessing of generosity from you! Not the cynical, who can always find a reason to be miserable. Not the selfish, who try to turn God's law of sowing and reaping into their personal fund raising scheme. And not the overly philosophical, who can drown your joy with a million questions. The simple truth remains. God has decided to reward our attitude of generosity with His blessings.

And what blessings they are! Sure they can sometimes be measured in dollars and cents. But more important are the joyous blessings of significant relationships, eternal impact, meaningful ministry, hearts full of hope and a deepening relationship with God. Read that list again! Dwell on each phrase, each blessing. These are the real and lasting blessings of a generous heart. And God promises not just a few of these blessings, scattered here and there throughout our life. No, He promises a bountiful harvest of blessings! Of course, we don't "give to get." But that shouldn't keep us from recognizing His reward! It is unbiblical and unchristian to act or think as if our giving happens without God's blessings.

Family Discussion Question: Where do you see "the harvest" of God's blessing in your life right now?

Family Activity: Get a plastic cup and put some potting soil and grass seed in it. Water it and let your children see over the next few weeks how "when we sow, God grows."

Two Coins

"As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. 'I tell you the truth,' he said, 'this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.'" Luke 21:1-4

Two Very Small Copper Coins

Two mites, two 1/8ths of a penny. What could such a small amount buy. How could such a pittance be of any value to a poor widow? It wasn't enough to make a difference; to buy a meal or rent a room or purchase a robe. It was seemingly only enough to remind her of all this widow had lost, all that her life now lacked. Yet, they were all that she had. She lived in a society in which a woman without a husband was not allowed to provide for herself. These two coins had become her only security: all that she had left.

Two Very Large Copper Coins!

Two of the most talked about, most adored pieces of money in all of human history. More valuable than the treasures of royalty for their impact. More rare than the rarest of coins for their teaching. What could these two coins buy? They earned the highest praise of Jesus. Jesus looked at this woman and saw not a poor widow, but a woman of wonderful faith. These two coins became her lasting legacy, summing up all that she had done right.

There is a hidden fear for many of us in the reading of this story. If Jesus commended this woman for giving all that she had, might not He also ask the same of us? He does! He asks us to be willing to trust Him with our all. And if He ever challenged us to actually give it all away, be assured that He would not stop meeting our needs. Can you imagine the reward of that kind of genuine generosity?

Family Discussion Question/ Children's Activity: Make up a story together. How do you think God rewarded this poor widow when she got to heaven. Enjoy this by going into the wildest and grandest detail you can imagine.

The Ingredients of Thankfulness

Understanding the right ingredients is all important! Heloise wrote in her “hints” column that the best way to cook a moist turkey was to “Put a cup of water in the cavity of the turkey, cover with tin foil and bake.” A reader wrote back to complain. “The turkey came out fine, but the plastic cup in the turkey melted!” Imagine that person trying to squeeze that cup into that turkey reminds us that directions must be specific!!

What are God’s specific directions for developing a thankful heart? What are the ingredients that result in thanksgiving? Here’s your “Thanksgiving recipe.”

Recognize God's Grace

When was the last time you sent your boss a thank you note for that month’s check? Of course you don’t... you don’t thank someone for what you earned. That’s why a recognition of God’s grace is such an important ingredient of thankfulness. When we recognize that all we have is a gift from Him, it makes us into thankful people.

Understand God's Righteousness

“Righteousness” means that God ALWAYS does what is right. Beginning to get a glimmer of how righteousness ties in with thanksgiving? Sometimes life doesn’t feel like a gift - doesn’t look all pretty with a bright bow on top. Thankfulness then results from the knowledge that God is righteous. When life seems to have been unfair, when it seems to have cheated you, remember that God is righteous. His purpose will reign in the end.

Thank God With Other People

Of course you can and should give thanks all alone. But the truth is: if you don’t have a place to give thanks with others you’ll soon stop giving thanks at all. You need to hear others give thanks. You need to share what God’s doing in your life with others. Thankfulness is like bananas...it grows best in bunches.

Family Activity: Start making a “Thanksgiving List” today... during this week before Celebration Banquet see how many things you can write down. Try to fill several pages... or you might even use a piece of poster board.

How To Say, "Thank You!"

"Thank you." Those two words are incredibly significant and deeply spiritual. One of the greatest skills we can develop in life is the skill of saying "thank you". Nehemiah had obviously developed this skill. In chapter 3 of this book there are 3 important lessons about saying a simple "thanks".

Be Specific

Recognize the person. Say their name when you're saying thanks. A thank you is a wonderful opportunity to let another person know how important they are to you. Also, be specific about what they have done. It's one thing to say, "Thanks for dinner." It's better to be more specific, "Thanks for cooking the sauerkraut just the way I like it."

Be Sensitive

The best words of thanks recognize not only an action but the heart behind the action. Jesus showed this kind of recognition when he noticed a child's humility, a widow who gave two mites, a woman who poured perfume on his feet. How encouraging it was to people as He looked beyond the bare bones of their actions to see and recognize the valuable attitudes of their hearts.

Be Searching

Find ways to invite your mind to think about those whom you might want to thank. It bothers me that I often rush through life without taking time to thank those who have meant the most to me. Does that bother you also? I have a question written on my weekly schedule to force me to think about thanking people: "What 5 people will I write a note of encouragement to this week?" You might try something like this to help you to mentally search out those whom you want to thank.

Family Discussion Question: Who do you need to write a note of thanks to...today? Take a minute right now to thank each person in your family for something they have done recently? Be specific. Be sensitive.

Thanksgiving Living

"No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus." 1 Th 5:18

We all know how a Thanksgiving turkey fills our stomachs. How does thanksgiving living fill our lives? What does thanksgiving DO to us? To understand the result of thanksgiving you need only look as far as the objects of thanksgiving. What we're thankful for becomes the faith focus of our lives. If we're not thankful at all we end up living a faith without focus. Thanksgiving has the power to bring God's perspective and focus to our everyday lives!

When I thank God for his blessings it impacts my attitudes.

We all know what it's like to be around the person who thinks the world "owes them something." That kind of thinking fills a person with ingratitude and bitterness. What about the person who recognizes through thanksgiving the wonderful truth that God has "given them everything." That's the person with the truly magnetic personality. The attraction is in their attitude of continuous joy. You cannot find that attitude in our world apart from thanksgiving.

When I thank God for his Character it impacts my character!

Thankful people become holy people. As you thank God for His patience, you develop endurance. As you thank Him for his unfailing love, you'll grow an ability to love even the unloveliest...to love even in the worst of times. As you thank Him for His grace, you develop a giving attitude. Praise not only pleases God, it changes us!

*When I thank God for His Son it gives me
a new sense of security and victory.*

The results of the gift of Jesus are staggering, truly "incredible." Thankfulness is the proclamation of our trust in the truth that Jesus loved us and gave His life for us. When your faith focus becomes Jesus Christ then your life focus becomes victory!

Family Discussion Question: Sometimes we get into habits of thanking God for the same things. What "new" thing could you thank God for today?

"Thanks be to God for His Indescribable gift!"

2 Cor 9:15

Let me call your attention to the most important "thanksgiving" we have to offer. We should give the greatest thanks for our greatest gifts. The Bible reminds us that the gift of Jesus Christ is so great it is beyond description.

Thanks for that great a gift demands more than a card or a few words. Thanks to Jesus is given as we give our lives back to Him. As Habib Bardowell wrote in his song, "I'm giving my life away; to the One who gave His precious life for me." Emphasize the "give" in ThanksGIVEing this year. Give Jesus your past, depending on Him for forgiveness and freedom. Give Jesus your present, trusting in His direction for today. Give Jesus your future, count on Him for the hope that you need.

Family Activity Have each person in the family give a gift of thanks to Jesus. Sort of like Christmas... only it's us doing the giving and God doing the receiving. Take the time to make this a special celebration. Here are a couple of ideas about how to specifically do this.

1. Write on a card the answer to the question, "The thing that I most want to thank Jesus for during this last year is...." Then take those cards and have each person wrap their card as a gift to Jesus. Have an actual present opening where people open someone's box or card or bag other than their own. Read what each person in the family is thankful for.

OR

2. Make a "thanksgiving tree" and decorate it with statements of all the things that you're thankful for as a family. The tree can be one of your larger houseplants. Make little slips of paper to write the thanks on and simply COVER the tree with statements of your gratitude to God!