

Faithbuilders Devotional Series

Through the Bible in a Year
A Daily Devotional

September

Pastors Mike Fast & David Curtis &
Tom Garo

Day 272 – September 29th

Matthew 4:12-25; 8:14-17; Mark 1:14-39; Luke 3:23a; 4:16-44;
John 4:46-54 - Jesus heals many.

The caption at the top of a chapter in Matthew 8 says “Jesus Heals Many” then again in the book of Mark and also in the book of Luke. All of these books give the same account of Jesus healing the sick. What the books don’t say is that they all were saved and lived good Christian lives as a result. There are verses that say that “many” were saved but not “all” were saved. This causes me to take pause. If I were a man with leprosy and was taken to Jesus and was cured, would it be enough to cause me to commit my life to him? I would like to think so. But there is a big difference between being grateful for a physical healing, and calling the One that healed you Lord. I wonder how many of the people Christ healed developed the kind of faith that Christ desired. How many people looked at Christ and only saw a “Genie in a bottle.” And then I wonder how many people today come to Christ only for what they can get from Him. When you look at all the great things the Lord has done for you, do you give Him a simple nod, tell Him thanks and wave goodbye or do you bow at his feet and call him LORD?

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 244 – September 1st

1 Chronicles 4:24 – 5:17; Psalm 137; Jeremiah 52:28-30; Ezekiel 32:17 – 33:20 – Failed Watchmen

Before the invention of modern fire suppression systems it was required for a hotel of significant size to employ a watchman during the night hours to alert guests in the case of fire. One such hotel in Omaha, Nebraska had a fire on January 23, 1911 and the watchmen failed to notify the guests of the fire. Therefore, a guest who was forced to use a rope fire escape sued the hotel because of injuries resulting from his escape. The case went to the U.S. Supreme Court where the court upheld the decision to hold the hotel responsible for its negligence in alerting the guests to the fire.

My Prayer List:

Ezekiel was given a similar charge by God, a responsibility to warn people of God’s judgment. It is important to note that Ezekiel wasn’t responsible for the peoples response to his warning, he was merely responsible, as the watchmen, for sounding the warning itself.

The same is true for our sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are not responsible for the consequences one faces for rejecting the gospel, but we are responsible for delivering the message.

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 245 – September 2nd

1 Chronicles 5:18; 6:3b-15, 49; 7:1 – 8:28—News of Record

In our town, the paper has a section called News of Record, which reports every 911 incident and arrests or violations of the law. And when appropriate the names of those involved are listed in the paper. You would think that because people in this town know that they face public humiliation for breaking the law, even traffic laws, that they wouldn't have much to print, however the section never seems to shrink.

So the thought occurred to me that merely knowing about the consequences of our actions is not sufficient to prevent us from engaging in destructive or sinful behavior. While it is true that knowledge of the consequences can be a strong deterrent, many of us will choose to sin in spite of those consequences.

God's people diligently studied the Scriptures and knew about the warnings in Deuteronomy about the consequences they would face for covenant unfaithfulness, but that didn't stop them from abandoning the Lord.

May you recognize the consequences of you actions before you are forced to endure them.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 271 – September 28th

Luke 3:19-20; John 3:1 – 4:45 – Becoming Less

“He must become greater; I must become less.”

Wow, I love that verse. If I could choose just one scripture verse to summarize the purpose of my own existence here on the earth, that would be it. Upon first examination it seems rather simple. God deserves greatness, in fact there is only one person to truly be entitled to greatness and that person is Almighty God. It's the last half of the verse that's really tough. “I must become less”! How does that work? How do we become less so that God can become greater? I believe John the Baptist is a very good example.

John had large numbers of people coming to hear him preach. It would have been quite easy for him to get caught up in his own greatness and shift the focus off of Jesus and on to himself. John was able to stay focused and he continually pointed to the one greater than himself. Exalting Jesus was the purpose of John's ministry. Throughout John's life and his eventual death, he never failed to point people to Jesus. The result? He became less and Jesus became greater.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 270 – September 27th

Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-15; John 1:19 – 2:25 -
For it is written...

Temptation. What a terrible sounding word. The word sounds as if we have already given in. Sometimes we think the battle is already lost just because we were tempted. But that is not true is it? We lose the battle only when we give in to temptation. Temptation comes to all people of all ages of all genders and of all colors. Temptation is Satan using the world and all the things in it to entice us, to captivate us, to cause our disobedience and to cause us to take our eyes off of the goal even if only for a moment. Even our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was tempted, in fact he was tempted many times! I love the way Jesus handled temptation. It's not just that He didn't give in; it's that He fought back. You see, Jesus is a warrior. Jesus knows how to fight and Jesus knows how to win. He used the awesome power of the Scriptures to do his fighting. What a great lesson that shows us how we can fight those same temptations. Fight your temptations with scripture and be victorious. Use the power God has given us in His word to fend off temptation.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Week 36—September 3rd-9th

2 Kings 25:27-30; 1 Chronicles 3:17-24; 8:29-9:1a; 2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4:5; Jeremiah 52:31-34; Ezekiel 29:17-30:19; 40-48; Daniel 4-9;

After Jesus healed the paralytic Luke noted that, “Everyone was gripped with great wonder and awe, and they praised God, exclaiming, “We have seen amazing things today!” (5:26) I am effected that way when I consider the way God worked through His prophets and some of the tasks and miracles that were performed. The section this week focuses on visions, prophecies and interpretations, and not just seeing the display of the visions but the fulfillment of the visions.

Bible Discussion Guide:

The dictionary describes most visions as “imaginary.” What is the difference between the visions of God’s prophets and a vision John Doe may have in the middle of the night after eating too much?

Numbers 12:6-7, “And the LORD said to them, “Now listen to what I say: “If there were prophets among you, I, the LORD, would reveal myself in visions. I would speak to them in dreams. But that is not how I communicate with my servant Moses.” Why did God speak to the prophets in visions?

Ezekiel’s vision of the Temple (chs. 40ff) could be interpreted as symbolic or literal. Regardless of which it is it seems clear that this is a vision of God’s final perfect Kingdom. How would this give hope to the Israelites? How does it provide hope for us?

What kind of credibility should we give to our evening dreams?

Do you fully believe God’s promises and prophecies will continue to be fulfilled? What could prevent you from believing they will be?

How do you handle being in the presence of God? Have you come to take for granted God’s presence in your body/temple?

As you consider September 7th’s devotional, what are the ups and the downs of being a prophet of God?

The September 8 devotional focused on prayer. How committed are you to pray, and how well do you do at it?

How do you celebrate God’s greatness?

Day 269 – September 26th

Matthew 2:1 – 3:17; Mark 1:2-11; Luke 2:41 – Luke 3:22 – Fruits of Repentance

A Voice of one calling in the desert,
Prepare the way of the Lord,

We all know who this guy was, John the Baptist, a kind of earthy guy that was living off of locust and wild honey and ran around in a camel hair robe. This is what most people think of when we read about John the Baptist. But oddly enough God chose to use him for his kingdom regardless of his appearance or quirky eating habits. We read in Luke that there were large crowds of people coming out to be baptized by him and to listen to him speak. Even though he is most known for his baptisms his words had an even greater impact on the lives of those who would listen. Luke 3:11-14 is an excellent example of his point blank approach to preaching. There were many people asking what the fruits of true repentance are. He answers them with an example for each case. When you take the time to read through them you will see examples from many walks of life. But all of them have one thing in common, charity. If one were to ask what the fruits of true repentance are? Charity.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 268 – September 25th

Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:39 – 2:40 – Strength from the Spirit

As I read through today’s readings a couple of things stand out. How amazingly difficult it must have been for Joseph and Mary to show their faces in public. The humiliation they must have faced on a daily basis, and the strength that they received from the Holy Spirit to endure.

As Mary and Joseph were traveling to Bethlehem from Nazareth to register for the national census, they would have met a large number of people on their journey. Can you imagine how their conversations must have gone?

“Hi there, I’m Joseph and this is my wife Mary. Pregnant? Why, yes she is. Just a few more months and we will have a bouncing baby um... savior ...uh.. Am I the Father?... well, I am sort of or at least I’m going to be.. See the Holy Spirit is the baby’s father! Hey where you guys going?”

God asks us to do some really tough things in this world and regardless of the circumstances and by the power of the Holy Spirit He always gives us the strength to get through it. All we have to do is ask!

My Prayer List:

Day 246 – September 3rd

1 Chronicles 8:29-9:1a; Ezekiel 40:1-37; Daniel 4—Sincere God Sightings

‘Nezzar had a dream that terrified him. None of his “professionals” could interpret it for him. Then Daniel showed up. Daniel knew he could interpret the dream that no one else could. Was he proud? No. In fact, Daniel’s reaction to the dream was that he was greatly astonished and perplexed for quite awhile and his thoughts terrified him (4:19). Although this was the ruler who captured and destroyed his people Daniel had genuine compassion for him. Daniel had forgiven the king and was now deeply concerned about his physical and spiritual welfare.

What did Daniel believe about the validity of the dream’s interpretation? Did Daniel doubt the truthfulness of the interpretation? He was “terrified” because he knew its fulfillment was coming. The visions these prophets experienced were very real. They knew fulfillment was a guarantee which made it all the more powerful. Daniel describes his reaction during one vision; “My strength left me, my face grew deathly pale, and I felt very weak. When I heard him speak, I fainted and lay there with my face to the ground” (10:8).

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 247 – September 4th
Ezekiel 40:38-43:27—Always Fulfilled

The visions God provided for His prophets varied in some degree as to their figurative or literal fulfillments, but their fulfillment itself was never in question. Ezekiel had a vision of the Temple that contained incredible detail. The only question that arises has to do with the time of its complete fulfillment. Was it the Temple Zerubbabel should have built or a Temple to be built during the millennial reign of Christ? However, there is also a symbolic possibility referring to the worship and reign of God (described as perfect honor and absolute holiness—43:9-12).

How much faith do you have in the fulfillment of future events? In hindsight we can observe the perfect fulfillment of hundreds of prophecies concerning Jesus Christ, but to look ahead can we believe every other prophecy will be perfectly fulfilled? Prayerfully you answer a resounding Yes. Rom. 15:4, “the Scriptures give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God’s promises to be fulfilled.” Rev. 10:7, “God’s mysterious plan will be fulfilled.” Rev. 17:17, “the words of God will be fulfilled.”

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 267 – September 24th
Matthew 1:1-17; Mark 1:1; Luke 1:1-38; 3:23b-38; John 1:1-18 –
Searching out the Truth

“In today’s fast-paced world it is easy to become overwhelmed and compromise the time that we spend studying the Bible.” –Jess Wenick

As we begin reading the New Testament we jump right into Matthew and what I like to call the “father of” Chapter. Upon first reading some may say that this chapter could just as easily be left out or that they find it boring or insignificant. Nothing could be further from the truth. I believe Luke 1:3 clears this misconception up rather quickly, “Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning...” Luke thought it wise to investigate events and accounts before he would allow them to even be written. The family tree of Jesus has been considered accurate and true since it was written some two thousand years ago. We need to be like the Bereans who in Acts 17 were said to have “noble character” because of their passion for searching out the truth in the scriptures. Spending time searching out the truths of the scriptures is quite possibly your greatest asset.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

The Sept. 30th devotional speaks about the variety of means that Jesus used to minister to others. What are some of the methods or tools that we have available when we are reaching out to the world around us?

What can you do to expand the methods or resources available to you in your attempts to minister to others?

Day 248 – September 5th
Ezekiel 44-46—Dirty Faces

Ezekiel’s vision reminds him of who is to be allowed in the Temple and how they must treat the privilege. Ezekiel was being reminded of the seriousness of entering into God’s Temple. He was made aware of the rules of admission, conduct and dress.

I appreciate reading Ezekiel’s response to seeing God’s glory fill the Temple. It says he fell to the ground with his face in the dirt (44:4). Ezekiel knew the magnitude of what he witnessed, even in a vision. He also knew the significance of God laying down the rules. God did not want His people to forget who was allowed in His Temple and how they were to handle entering into His presence. Those who were allowed into God’s presence were only those who had been circumcised in heart and flesh, in other words, only those who had entirely committed their life to Him (44:9). The Apostle Paul tells us that as believers our bodies are the Temple of God where His Spirit lives (1 Cor. 3 & 6). Have you come to take that for granted or does the thought of that make you fall to the ground with your face in the dirt?

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 249 – September 6th
2 Kings 25:27-30; Jeremiah 52:31-34; Ezekiel 29:17-30:19; 47:1-48:35—Fishing the Dead Sea

With the exception of a rare torrential rain the Mojave River is always dry. Seeing a fisherman reel in a fish on the bank of that river would be just as amazing as seeing one caught on the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea, 1,300 feet below sea level has many salt pillars at its south end. The Sea is 5-6 times saltier than our ocean, nearly 30% salt. In other words, if you let a cup of water evaporate, eventually almost 1/3 of it would still be full of just salty mineral. It's a fun body of water to float in. You start floating straight up and down before you get to your waist. The downside is that for health reasons you can't stay in it longer than about 15 minutes. Needless to say there are no fish in it. So, to hear that one day fishermen will stand along its bank catching fish (47:10), well, that describes a miraculous transformation.

Is God in the business of miraculous transformations? Yes, and every one of us are examples of it.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

The devotional from Sept. 26th speaks about the fruits of repentance. Other than charity that is mentioned, what are other fruits of repentance that you can think of?

What methods do you have available to you for dealing with temptation?

In what ways are you tempted to 'become more' instead of allowing God to become more?

What are some practical things you can do for God to become more and you to become less in your life?

How do you think God feels when we don't respond appropriately to his hand working our life?

What are the ways that we can and should respond to God when we recognize his working in our life, our church, our world?

Week 39 – September 24th – 30th

Matthew 1:1 – 4:25; 8:1-4, 14-17; 9:1-17; Mark 1:1 – 2:22; Luke 1:1 – 5:39; John 1:1 – 4:45

The theme for this week is ‘Beholding the Son.’ Like Simeon who rejoiced when he was finally able to see the Messiah may you rejoice as you encounter the Messiah in the Scriptures this week. From his birth to the temptation in the wilderness to the start of his public ministry this week will set the table for the remainder of the gospels.

Bible Discussion Guide

Why do you think Luke and Matthew thought it important to include the details of Jesus ancestry in their gospels?

How does carefully searching out the scriptures like the Bereans enhance your appreciation for Jesus as the Son of God?

How do you imagine the reactions that Mary and Joseph received as a result of her pregnancy?

Can you share an experience when you really sensed a strength from the Holy Spirit to get you through a challenging time?

Day 250 – September 7th

Daniel 5, 7-8—Oh To Be a Prophet

King Belshazzar offered to reward Daniel greatly with purple robes of honor, gold chains and a promotion to the third highest in the kingdom just for interpreting the writing on the wall (5:16). Daniel’s reputation preceded him. People knew he could do it. He could have opened a little shop called “Divine Daniel’s” and have made quite the living interpreting people’s dreams. Instead we read that Daniel told the king to “Keep your gifts.”

Daniel was God’s instrument to the people of his day. God gave Daniel visions explaining the future. Before you conclude, “Oh, that sounds great being a prophet!” let me remind you of some of Daniel’s feelings from his visions in chapters seven and eight: “I, Daniel, was troubled by all I had seen, and my visions terrified me” (7:15). “I was terrified by my thoughts and my face was pale with fear” (7:28). “I became so terrified that I fell to the ground” (8:17). “Then I was overcome and lay sick for several days... I was greatly troubled by the vision” (8:27). Take God’s words and work seriously.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 251 – September 8th

1 Chronicles 3:17-19a; 2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1; Daniel 6, 9—Praying Powerfully

People who knew Daniel knew that he was a man who prayed fervently. He prayed three times each day and regularly gave thanks to God. We are not let in on the details of what exactly he prayed for and about each time, that is with the exception of one instance in chapter nine.

The situation on Daniel’s mind in chapter nine was the soon conclusion of the Israelites 70 year captivity. Because of the prophetic words recorded by the prophet Jeremiah Daniel knew his people would soon be returning home. And what did it prompt Daniel to do? “I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with Him in prayer and fasting. I wore sackcloth and sprinkled myself with ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed...” Within the next five paragraphs I counted over two dozen times Daniel uses the word “we” “us” or “our.” Daniel identified himself as part of an entire nation who needed to confess their sins to God. Daniel looked inside first. Daniel’s plea was answered (see 9:20-23). How committed are you to pray, and how well do you do at it?

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 266 – September 23rd

Joel 1-3; Malachi 2:10-4:6—Opening the Windows of Heaven

Many believe that once we become a Christian we can just float along; because they believe Heaven we will all receive the same generic stamp of approval. That is not the case. Your eternal destination is based on your belief, but how you spend eternity is reflective of how you lived on earth. Even the actions of believers will be judged (see 2 Cor. 5:10).

As Jesus taught the Beatitudes, known as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made clear certain rewards for “doing.” In Luke 6:23 Jesus declared that “a great reward awaits you in Heaven.” He is not describing a reward for believing but a reward for doing. The topic of rewards in Heaven is also mentioned in Matt. 16:27, “He will reward each according to his works,” and Matt. 19:21, “You will have treasure in Heaven,” and Luke 14:14, “You will be blessed...for you shall be repaid at the resurrection.”

The passage in Malachi three describes the actions of what our heart really feels. My Grandpa believed; “You can’t out give God.” Think beyond the temporary and material to the eternal. You will receive if you give.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 265 – September 22nd

Nehemiah 5:14-19; 12:27-13:31; Malachi 1:1-2:9—If You Can’t Beat Them... Infiltrate

“If you can’t beat them join them.” This was apparently Tobiah’s motto. Early in the book of Nehemiah we read of the opposition that had to be dealt with while the wall was being rebuilt. That strong opposition came from two men, Tobiah and Sanballat. The wall was rebuilt in spite of their constant resistance. Yet, now Tobiah found an inside lead.

Eliashib the priest had a close relationship with Tobiah, even by relation. Not only had Tobiah been an opponent but he was also an Ammonite which meant he was never to be allowed in the Temple, but now he was living in one of the rooms in the Temple normally set aside to store tithes and other offerings.

And it shouldn’t come as a surprise that all this was done while Nehemiah was away. We’ve read enough about Nehemiah and his “take charge” kind of attitude that it’s not surprising that when he showed up he “threw all of Tobiah’s things out.”

Don’t let little things sneak into your life that have no place there.

My Prayer List:

Day 252 – September 9th

1 Chronicles 3:19b-24; Ezra 2:1-4:5—How Big is Our God?

It’s fascinating to review the fulfillment of a prophecy. Isaiah (chs. 44,45,48) prophesied that God would use a man named Cyrus to guarantee the return of Israel’s remnant and that Jerusalem and the Temple would be rebuilt. That was 150 years before Cyrus was even born! Now in 538 BC Cyrus releases the captives. What an exciting day it had to be as 50,000 Israelites headed home. That would be a wonderful event to remember and celebrate.

The Israelites celebrated the Festival of Shelters shortly after they settled in. What kind of things do we celebrate? Do we celebrate fulfillments to prophecy? We celebrate the birth and the resurrection of Christ, definite fulfillments to prophecy.

Part of celebrating God making good on a promise is the wonder of the fulfillment. How big does God have to be to make a vision or prophecy come true? How powerful does He have to be to make things come to pass in His specific timing? How compassionate does He have to be to care about bringing things to pass for our good? Are you gripped in wonder and awe of God?

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Week 37 September 10th – 16th

Ezra 4:6 – 8:36; Esther 1:1 – 10:3; Daniel 10:1 – 12:13; Haggai 1:1 – 2:23; Zechariah 1:1 – 14:21

This week’s theme is on courage. In the readings this week we will read about the courage of people like Esther and Mordecai whose actions saved the Jewish people. We will also examine the courage of the Jews who began to return to Jerusalem after the time of captivity to rebuild the temple of the Lord

Bible Discussion Guide

What is the biggest hindrance for you in making necessary changes in your life?

What do you miss from the past that causes discouragement for you in the present?

Has the importance of what God has for you to do changed any at all even though the past may have been more successful or significant?

How can you take that discouragement and turn it into an encouraging thing?

Day 264 – September 21st

1 Chronicles 9:1b-34; Nehemiah 11:1-12:26—Imagine

Robert Louis Stevenson wrote, “To arrive is better than to travel hopefully.” I can’t imagine the joy as the exiles arrived and occupied Jerusalem. They were essentially POW’s in a foreign land for 70 years and now they had returned home. Can you imagine that kind of delight? It is more than just delight. It is security, rest, peace, comfort, relief, etc.

Can you imagine what it will be like when you go Home? Or maybe I should ask do you imagine what it will be like. God wants us to think about Home. Col. 3:1-2, “Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God’s right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth” (Col. 3:1-2). “And the enemies of the cross of Christ think only about this life here on earth. But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior” (Phil. 3:19-20).

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

How do you respond when it appears that all hope is lost in a given situation?

Can you share an experience in your life when you were very aware of God’s hand working in your life?

How is your relationship with God a source of courage?

May you be encouraged and be an encourager this week?

Day 262 – September 19th
Nehemiah 7:4-8:12—Starting Off Right

Often we appreciate something more when we go without it for a time. When the people returned home they took it seriously. They took advantage of a fresh start and made the best of it. Their response to getting serious about their relationship with God through the reading of His Word was terrific. “All the people assembled together as one person... and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had given for Israel to obey... from early morning until noon and read aloud to everyone who could understand. All the people paid close attention... when they saw him open the book, they all rose to their feet. Then Ezra praised the LORD... all the people chanted, “Amen!”... they bowed and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground... The Levites read from the Book and clearly explained the meaning of what was being read... All the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the law.”

Paul told Timothy to “focus on reading the Scriptures to the church” (1 Tim. 4:13).

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 261 – September 18th
Nehemiah 3:1-7:3—Working Together

Nehemiah, like Daniel held a prominent position in the kingdom where he had been exiled, but he was burdened for a need at home in Jerusalem. He had a plan for rebuilding the wall around the city which “God had up in his heart” (2:11). Nehemiah organized an enormous undertaking. Men, women, and those from every profession worked together to fortify their home. In doing so they encountered opposition from the enemy. In spite of the resistance the wall was completed in good time and the opposition was silenced.

The church is described as a body with many different parts working together with a common purpose. God has put the body together and asks for “harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other equally” (1 Cor. 12:25). “God’s men and women, joined together for special tasks, can solve huge problems and accomplish great goals. Don’t let the size of a task or the length of time needed to accomplish it keep you from doing it. With God’s help it can be done” (L.App.).

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 253 – September 10th
Daniel 10:1 – 12:13; Ezra 4:24 – 5:1; Haggai 1:1 – 15 – Courage to Change

In the past few years I have watched Dr. Phil on a number of occasions. I appreciate his bluntness and what I call ‘drphilisms’. One of my favorite ‘isms’ is when he asks his guest ‘how’s that working for ya?’. Having read Haggai again I realize that he didn’t come up with the question. Apparently God used that question as an effective tool to show his people that they were not meeting his standard (Hag. 1:5, 7).

This question is a tool to help someone see the deficiency in their own actions. Once that objective has been accomplished the real work of change begins. Zerubbabel and the remnant of God’s people responded in obedience and had the courage to change.

We all will realize at some point that either our actions, beliefs, or thoughts will need to be changed because they are in conflict with God’s will. The question you are faced with is do you have the courage to change. To make a change requires admitting mistakes and humbling ourselves to see that God’s way is best.

May you have the courage to do just that.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 254 – September 11th

Ezra 5:2; Haggai 2:1-23; Zechariah 1:1 – 5:11 – Ghosts of the Past

I don't know what it is about human nature that makes us nostalgic. I have observed that in just about every area of life there is something about 'how it used to be' that we view as better. And as we read in Haggai this can be a discouragement to us in the present.

As the people began to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, they soon realized that it would not be nearly as impressive as the temple Solomon built. Instead of disregarding that fact, the Lord acknowledged it (Hag. 2:2-3) and then encouraged the people to press on in spite of that fact (2:4-5). His message was, that regardless of how less impressive of a building it was, the people were to continue on in the building of it.

No matter what task God has given you to do, whether it is business, ministry, family, whatever it is, you are to take courage and do it regardless of how much better or more successful the past may have been.

May you take courage and fulfill your tasks, know that God is with you.

My Prayer List:

Day 260 – September 17th

Ezra 9-10; Nehemiah 1-2—Thinking of Home

From the chapters in Ezra we read that he wept. From the chapters in Nehemiah we read that he also wept. It was not just Ezra and Nehemiah that wept but the people as well. Ezra and the people wept over their sins. Nehemiah wept over the trouble and condition of Jerusalem. All of these prayers were due to an emotional connection they had with their home. And more than their home Israel was also that spiritual connection with God: A spiritually healthy Israel meant a spiritually healthy relationship with God. Ezra, Nehemiah and the people wanted everything about their home to be just right and everything about their relationship with the Father of that home to be just right.

Fellow believer, because of Christ you have a clear title to a bit of property. Perhaps you've had it for a few years. You have to walk through a valley of deep shadow before you arrive there, but when you do... How does the way you live now display your anticipation of arriving home and seeing your Father?

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Does the idea of rewards affect how an athlete runs the course?
Should the idea of rewards affect how we run the course of life?

Day 255 – September 12th
Ezra 5:3 – 6:14a; Zechariah 6:1 – 8:23 – Surprising Support

Support and encouragement can come from many different sources and sometimes it can be a little surprising to us. I would imagine that God's people experienced some anxiety and discouragement when the governors of neighboring provinces began to investigate the work they were doing on the temple. There was no guarantee that Darius would honor the edict of the Babylonian King Cyrus who had gone before him.

However God saw it fit to encourage his people by showing that King Darius fully supported them and included instruction for the governors in the area to support the effort.

It can be very encouraging when our efforts are validated by those who are in authority over us. I am sure that you have experienced this kind of encouragement from parents, teachers, or bosses in your life. So the question is, when was the last time you encouraged someone who has to answer to you?

May you be a surprising source of encouragement for someone today.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 256 – September 13th
Zechariah 9:1 – 14:21 – Day of the Lord

We are all familiar with the concept of a doomsday prophet, who attempts to strike fear in the hearts of people to bring about repentance today. I remember first seeing them as a child in such movies as Ghostbusters and Superman.

Well today I want you to consider the possibility that courage is also an appropriate response to the coming events in the Day of the Lord. How is it that a description of those events can be an encouragement to us? It is only because of the victory that we have in Jesus.

Zechariah 14:9 says, “And the Lord will be king over all the earth. On that day there will be one Lord—his name alone will be worshiped.” Wow! Now that is something to get excited about. What an encouraging picture. The Lord reigning on earth and He will be the only one receiving praise and worship from His creation. I don’t know about you but that seems far more encouraging to me than the political corruption and idolatry that I see in the world today.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

What are your top 10 reasons you want to go to Heaven? Like it or not there are some who have serious concerns about Heaven. What are just one or two reasons/issues that would keep you from wanting to go to Heaven? (perhaps things you are hesitant about)

What do your emotions do when you think of Home/Heaven? How does the way you live now display your anticipation of arriving home and seeing your Father?

When have you ever felt like you needed a fresh start? Have you ever felt ready to recommit with all your heart? What brought you there and what kept you from staying there?

Consider the process mentioned September 20th. Reading and studying God’s Word, followed by confession amongst one another, which is then followed by worship and praise, lastly followed by committing to follow and obey Him.

Tobiah found a “backdoor.” Do you have things that don’t belong in your life that have come in through the backdoor?

Week 38—September 17th-23rd

1 Chronicles 9:1b-34; Ezra 9-10; Nehemiah 1-13; Joel 1-3; Malachi 1-4

“Think of—

Stepping on shore, and finding it Heaven!

Of taking hold of a hand, and finding it God’s hand.

Of breathing a new air, and finding it celestial air.

Of feeling invigorated, and finding it immortality.

Of passing from storm and tempest to an unknown calm.

Of waking up, and finding it Home.”

--Hazel Felleman

This week’s passages describe a period after the exiles have returned home. Interestingly, Christians today are also referred to as exiles, strangers, aliens and sojourners. Heb. 11:13, “All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.” (NASV) Like the Israelites we will one day complete our days of travel and return home.

Bible Discussion Guide:

As honestly and thoroughly as possible, reflect on what you believe about Heaven. Are all your beliefs Biblical or are some based on traditional thinking?

Day 257 – September 14th

Ezra 4:6; 6:14b-22; Esther 1:1 – 4:17 – Courage from above

On March 11, 2007 Morgan Tsvangirai, founder of Zimbabwe’s Movement for Democratic Change, was forced to cancel a prayer meeting because the attendees were in grave danger from riot police. Tsvangirai himself was beaten and jailed later when he attempted to visit the 40 some supporters who were arrested at the prayer gathering. Reflecting on that experience, Tsvangirai said, “Far from killing my spirit, the scars they brutally inflicted on me have re-energized me...”

For men like Tsvangirai and Mordecai, whom we read about today, the courage to stand against oppression and persecution, does not merely come from ones own internal fortitude. Rather it is in God that they find the courage to take a stand when governing authorities are in conflict with God’s will.

When you face potential persecution or humiliation for your Christian faith, may you have the courage of a Mordecai who stood up to Haaman, or of peter and John who stood up to the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:29).

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 258 – September 15th
Esther 5:1 – 10:3 – Independence Day

A few years ago there was a movie titled Independence Day. Having an affection for action-adventure movies I thoroughly enjoyed the movie. One of my favorite scenes is when the President, played by Bill Pullman, encourages a rag-tag band of fighter pilots who were about to face an invading alien force. Speaking to a group who faced certain death and the potential destruction of the human race, he inspired them to victory.

Facing a similar fate of total destruction and annihilation because one man didn't like the Jews, God's people had lost hope. That is until they received the king's edict from the hand of Mordecai giving them permission and encouraging them to band together and defend themselves.

Mordecai was an encourager. He encouraged Esther to take full advantage of her station as Queen of Persia to help her people. Then he encouraged his people to defend themselves in the face of certain destruction

May you like Mordecai encourage the people around you.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 259 – September 16th
Ezra 4:7-23; 7:1 – 8:36 – Adopted by God

“If God is for us, who can ever be against us?” – Romans 8:31b

Three times in the seventh chapter of Ezra, the text says “the gracious hand” of the Lord was upon Ezra. Also in 7:28, Ezra states that this was a great source of encouragement for him in knowing that the hand of the Lord was on him.

There is a similar source of encouragement for us today as New Testament believers and partakers of a new and better covenant. Paul picks up on this theme in Romans 8:31. As believers who have been adopted into God's family (Rom. 8:15), we share in his treasures (Rom. 8:17) for we are co-heirs with Christ.

So take courage believer! As one who is now adopted by God, know that there is nothing that can separate you from his love (Rom. 8:35). There is no greater source of joy or encouragement for us than to know that the One who created us has also redeemed us and has secured our salvation.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____
