



BY FAITH

GALATIANS DEVOTIONAL

BY FAITH



GALATIANS 1:1-10

Written by: Jacob Parton

Thought:

Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia is tackling a specific problem: false teachers have infiltrated the church community and are peddling teachings against the gospel. Even worse, the Galatians seem to have abandoned Paul's message and submitted to this new one. Like a lioness protecting her cubs, Paul fiercely acts. He writes to challenge the false teaching, to defend his own message, and to steer the church back onto the tracks of grace.

Paul's message about Jesus comes through from the start: Jesus surrendered himself to our sins through His death to deliver us from this dark age, or in other words, the Old Creation. Yet, God the Father raised Him from the dead, revealing Jesus as Lord. God commissioned Paul to announce this good news, so that others may live in Jesus' grace. Elsewhere, Paul calls this the "New Creation." Paul outlines later in greater depth the contrary teaching from the false teachers. All we know so far is that it hinges on obscuring Jesus' grace, or dragging Christians out of the New Creation and back into the Old.

For me, the gospel was a bit of a mystery and something I had to wrestle with for a number of years. Was it about me making the world a better place? Was it about me going to heaven when I die? Was it about me becoming a better person? It was an exhausting journey, with Christians and pop culture giving me a spectrum of answers. Thankfully, through reading different theologians and the New Testament more extensively, my revelation of the gospel came clearer. Whilst the gospel does provide answers to my initial questions, those questions weren't the gospel itself. The gospel is an announcement that God's kingdom has come through Jesus' incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Now, God rules the world through love, instead of the evil powers ruling through sin. To live in God's kingdom is to be part of the New Creation and God's Family.

As we follow Paul along the tracks of grace, may we see afresh the beautiful news that our God reigns.

Meditation:

Welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit, let Him reveal Jesus to you afresh. Jesus is here and His grace is with you.

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Take some time reflecting on and accepting Paul's words of blessing:

"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

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Ask the Spirit for what He may be wanting to teach you through Paul's letter to the Galatians. Pray that He might dispel any faulty notions or misplaced emphases that you have about the gospel.

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Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You that the gospel is and means "good news." We thank You that by Your death for our sins and Your glorious resurrection and ascension, You reign at the right hand of God the Father. Teach us and lead us down the tracks of Your grace, by Your Spirit. Amen.

GALATIANS 1:11-24

Written by: Cathay Burnside

Thought:

Paul is writing to remind the church that he was called by Jesus, and the gospel he preached to them was a revelation from Jesus himself. He reminds them how he persecuted the church before meeting Jesus, and that he didn't seek out endorsement from the apostles in Jerusalem. Rather, he simply began to preach the gospel Jesus had revealed to him.

In other letters, Paul encourages believers to submit to one another and to honour church leadership, so he is not advocating for solely individual faith here. He is trying to stress that his authority came from Jesus himself, and therefore remind the Galatians that the gospel he preached is true and trustworthy, even in the current challenges they face.

As a child I moved around a lot, so the question "where are you from?" has always felt very complicated. In searching for a way to answer, I've been drawn to those who have a strong sense of who they are, and where they are from. Geographically, I'm still not sure how to respond to the question "where are you from?", but spiritually I know the answer. For Paul, he was set apart from birth and called by grace to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The same is true for me as well. The ultimate authority is Jesus. He is the place we come from, and the purpose of our lives.

Paul wants this certainty reinforced in the lives of the Galatians as they face challenges in how they live as believers. He's reminding them that Jesus alone is his vindication and authority in life. For us, it's equally important that we know who we are and where we came from in faith, so we have a firm foundation for all that we may face. In life, it matters who we follow. There are many voices clamouring for our attention, and it's good to remember that each of us has received Jesus Himself as the foundational authority in our lives.

Meditation:

Relax your body, and breath slowly and deeply. As you breathe in, pray "Come Holy Spirit." As you breathe out, pray "Be with me now."

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Many of us long for certainty, we long for firm ground beneath our feet in troubling times. We long to know "where we come from" in a sense which is deep and rich. Jesus is the beginning and end of all things, in Him all things hold together. He is our firm ground. Ask for a fresh revelation of Jesus as the foundational truth of your life.

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Pray that God would gently reveal all the other voices clamouring for your attention and devotion at the moment. Turn your attention from those voices to Jesus instead.

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Prayer

Jesus, You alone are the firm foundation, the safe place, and the one in whom all truth resides. May we be a people who build our lives on the good news about who You are and all that You do. Amen.

GALATIANS 2:1-10

Written by: Anita Schwartz

Thought:

Paul argues and shows that the gospel he preached was recognised by the Jerusalem Apostles. He has their support in this matter.

After fourteen years of teaching and preaching a “Christ alone” gospel, Paul went to Jerusalem, accompanied by Barnabas and Titus. This visit is potentially recounted in Acts 11:27-30, when they brought an offering from Antioch to the Jerusalem church in a time of need. There, Paul presented the gospel he preached to the Apostles James, Peter and John. Paul refers to them as the “pillars” of the church. Importantly, they accepted Titus, a Gentile Christian, who didn’t keep the law as he was not circumcised. This illustrated to the Galatians, who are predominantly Gentile Christians, that they don’t need to keep the law, either. Circumcision or embracing Jewish customs weren’t required to become Christians. This was Paul’s message and the Jerusalem Apostles accepted it, adding nothing. They had no complaints. They too believed and preached a “Christ alone” gospel. Though they had different mission fields, they had the same gospel.

As a child, I’ve heard many Bible stories and I learnt what I, as a Christian, should do and shouldn’t do. The true gospel I usually heard once a year, as the Easter story. The older I got the more I realised that this is the most important story. In January last year my 5 year old niece, who didn’t grow up in a Christian home, asked me why God doesn’t visit us. What a wonderful question shortly after Christmas! I started telling her about Jesus, knowing I had to share the gospel with her regardless of her age or upbringing. So, we talked about Jesus’ birth, death and resurrection and that God lives in His children today. At the end, she gave her life to Jesus. I didn’t need to pre-formulate a prayer, she did it all by herself and I was amazed how much she understood.

Right then my niece was my mission field and I shared the same gospel with her that Paul had preached centuries ago. This is God’s one and only gospel, preserved for us.

Meditation:

Welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit and let Him fill you afresh with the truth of the gospel.

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Take some time reflecting on Paul's defence of God's one and only gospel against false believers:

"We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you."

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Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any lies you might have heard and believed regarding the gospel. Ask Him to show you the truth of the gospel, which has been preserved for you.

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Prayer

Father God, we thank You for Paul's ministry to the Gentiles and the passion he had for You, Jesus. Thank You that the true gospel has been preserved for us and changed our lives. Please help us to share the good news we have in You in the mission fields You prepared for us. Amen.

GALATIANS 2:11-21

Written by: Jacob Parton

Thought:

Paul and Peter appear to have had the same missionary practice. When with Jews, they lived as Jews following the Law, such as eating kosher and allowing circumcision. Yet, when with Gentiles, they neither did nor demanded either of these things. Their approach was relational. Yet, not everyone agreed with them.

The Jewish Christians from James who came to Antioch were a particularly hardline group. They clearly thought that Jewish Christians should adhere to the Law always and that Gentile Christians should conform, too. Devastatingly, Peter cracks under the pressure and separates from the Gentiles Christians, causing confusion. To Paul, this was against the gospel and the hardline group's message was a false gospel. He says, most Jews know that obeying the Law isn't the way to receive acceptance from God. Rather, God's acceptance of the Jewish people came through his unconditional covenant with Abraham. In Jesus, God has again acted unconditionally, as Jesus loved and died for the whole world. Now, Gentiles can join God's people through "faith in Christ" or, as it could also be translated, "through the faithfulness of Christ." The Gentile Christians needed protecting from this hardline group. As we'll soon learn, a similar hardline group had infiltrated the Galatian churches and were peddling the same false message. Through Paul's words to Peter, he's actually speaking to the Galatians.

The issue in Antioch appears to centre on the church all eating together. On the surface, this could seem trivial. Personally, whilst I enjoy sharing meals with friends and family, they can also be more of a burden than a delight. (After all, twice the people, means twice the washing up!) Yet, one revelation from the 2020 lockdown has been how important and beautiful these meals are. I've certainly taken them for granted. Welcoming people into our homes and around our tables is an important sign of acceptance and friendship.

Meditation:

Welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit, let Him reveal Jesus' unconditional love for you afresh. Jesus is here and His grace is with you.

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Take some time reflecting on Paul's words about our participation in Jesus:

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

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Ask the Spirit for names of those who need your acceptance and love today. Allow Him to empower you with Jesus' resurrection life.

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Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You that You have accepted us just as we are. Thank You that Your unconditional love transforms us, so that we look and act more like You. Help us to be Your representatives in our world today. Amen.

GALATIANS 2:11-21

Written by: Emily Aduah

Thought:

Here we have Paul at his most passionate and exasperated. He launches into a set of rhetorical questions. I hear in his tone the frustrations of a parent who might ask, “how many times do I have to tell you... to pick up your toys?!” or “... stop picking your nose?!” Only, Paul’s trying to drive home a crucial point: you were saved by faith. Why do you think you need to add to it through human effort?!

In trying to get the Galatian churches back on track, Paul is reminding them that their own experience bears out the truth that we receive the Spirit and are made perfect before God by having faith in Jesus. That is how they began their journey and how they are to continue it.

Paul refers back to Abraham as an example. Abraham was given a glimpse of the way of salvation that was to come through his offspring, that is Jesus, and he responded by believing God with faith. He was therefore credited with righteousness, which, in simple terms, means he was made right with God. He wasn’t credited through circumcision or obedience to any outward laws. He was credited only because he had faith. He trusted in God with his heart.

In my own walk, I have had to battle my self-reliance. I love the feeling of being competent and relying on my own strategies for success. At times, it’s like I’m saying to God, “I appreciate you taking me this far. I’ll take it from here.” When I’m faced with a lack that I feel the need to fill with my own capacities, I have to come back again to the question of faith: am I going to rely solely on God’s grace or try to do this in my own strength? How can I grow in my trust of God?

Paul’s encouragement to the Galatians, and to us, is to live out what it means to be fully relying on God: His Spirit, His miracles, His grace, His righteousness. Then we, along with Abraham, can call ourselves people of faith who are blessed.

Meditation:

Focus your attention on the presence of the Holy Spirit, whom you have been given and who is with you right now.

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Listen to and reflect on this verse from Philippians 1:6:

"...he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

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Confess before God the ways that you have tried to add to His ongoing work of salvation in your life. Ask for His help to trust Him more today than you did yesterday.

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Prayer

Father, thank You for the experiences we have had of Your Spirit and Your work in our lives. Thank You that we can trust You to carry us through to the end. Help us to rely on You with our whole hearts. Amen.

GALATIANS 2:11-21

Written by: Paul McDonald

Thought:

Paul's letter continues to give a fascinating insight into the birth of the early church. You can feel the struggle between passion and reasoning as Paul fights for the survival of the young Galatian churches against the destructive influence of a visiting group of Jewish Christians.

His argument is well rehearsed – after all he has had to make this heart journey for himself. The Jewish people, under Moses, had entered into an agreement with God involving blessings and curses. The Jews were unable to meet the conditions and experience the blessings: Jesus dealt with the consequences of this on the cross. But there were older promises, made to Abraham, that predated the Moses' agreement and through which all people would be blessed: Jesus was the one through whom this blessing would come. The choice he places before them is: did they want to keep the blessing through the new covenant of Jesus or sign up to the old covenant of acts of the law with all its consequences?

The argument that Paul uses seems alien to us. This was the kind of scripture that I struggled with as a new Christian believer. But it is because Paul, and later Christian leaders, struggled against wrong teaching that we have our Christian community today. I may not be tempted to earn God's favour by acts like circumcision (that's definitely true), but I am prone to think I have to earn it through what I do. I can even put that on other people. I could be tempted to think that if I work hard enough on doing things for God he will make me more prosperous.

It is good to know that our relationship with God does not depend on our efforts (or surgery) but on His sacrificial love through Jesus.

Meditation:

Welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit, let Him reveal Jesus to you afresh. Jesus is here and His grace is with you.

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Take some time reflecting on Paul's words from Ephesians 2:8-10:

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith —and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

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Ask the Spirit for what He may be wanting to teach you through this passage. Pray that He would help you span the gap of time and culture in this letter to see the gospel.

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Prayer

Heavenly Father, help me to understand that I cannot make You love me more or less by what I do. Give me a passion to encourage others to experience Your gospel of grace. Amen.

GALATIANS 3:19-29

Written by: Paul McDonald

Thought:

Paul continues his complex argument about the ceremonial aspects of the law that helped create the Jewish identity. He makes clear it had a value for the Jews until Jesus came. Now there is a new agreement with God where we, especially Gentile converts, are part of the great family of God by faith alone.

He reminds his audience that the original agreement and promises between God and people was with Abraham – and that this was based on Abraham's faith. The Law was given much later, through the mediator called Moses, to the Israelites who had been rescued from slavery in Egypt. They needed these laws then to form them into a distinct nation. He says the Law acted as a guardian: it was to look after them until they could take care of themselves. Now, through Jesus, we have a new agreement (or covenant) with God that is not based on ceremonial laws and its practices but on faith. Although, as Paul says, it wasn't really new: this was going back to the original plan - that the descendants of Abraham would somehow be a pointer to God for all the nations. This new covenant is for all people (Jews and Gentiles) and breaks down all barriers: not just ethnic barriers (neither Jew nor Gentile) but economic barriers (slave and free) and gender barriers (male and female).

I was brought up on a white, working class council estate in Dagenham. My family, like many other families from the East End of London, gathered for special events where there was a lot of drinking and eating, and a lot of singing. It was a revelation to me, when I became a Christian, to suddenly find I had been adopted into God's enormous, worldwide family linked not by genetic inheritance but by faith.

The challenge for me, and for us all, when there is such a large family to choose from, is to be careful that we don't include or exclude individuals based on ethnic, economic or gender decisions. We don't want to find ourselves working against God's Kingdom purposes.

Meditation:

Welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit, let Him reveal Jesus to you afresh. Jesus is here and His grace is with you.

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Paul tells us that, whatever worldly identity we may have (ethnic, cultural, economic, gender), "you are all one in Christ Jesus." He had to give a similar warning to the church in Corinth, because the rich church members were not sharing their food with the poor members during the Lord's Supper. Remember, the Lord Jesus said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Reflect on this.

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Ask the Spirit for what He may be wanting to teach you through this passage and how to apply it, personally. Pray that He would help you span the gap of time and culture in this letter to see the gospel.

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Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for adopting me into Your worldwide family. Please shape my identity to truly and uniquely represent Jesus rather than my ethnicity, culture, wealth or gender. Amen.

GALATIANS 4:1-11

Written by: Caroline Seal

Thought:

In these verses, Paul is telling the Galatians that they need to grow up into adulthood and not return to the bondage of the dark powers of this world. Obeying the Law would be returning to this bondage.

In high-society Roman culture, a child was brought up by servants and had no real rights until they came of age. This was the same whether they were biological children or adopted children. The New Testament word for adoption means “to place as an adult son” with all the rights and privileges a son of the family was entitled to. The Galatians had been redeemed from the bondage to evil and sin. Jesus paid the price for them, not to buy them as slaves, but as sons with all the rights of being part of God’s family. By submitting to the Law, Paul says they are turning their back on all that Jesus has done for them, and returning to life as slaves rather than the heirs they really are.

There are many in our church who are fostering and adopting. Our friends, the Skippers, are members of Trent Vineyard, but work in the music industry in Tokyo. They’ve adopted a little boy, Takuma. In Japan, there is no word for fostering, so when they were given Takuma, his status with them was “housemate.” He was a 4 day old baby! If anyone had any expectation of him fulfilling any responsibilities as a housemate they’d have been waiting a long time! However, as soon as he came into their lives, they loved him and treated him as part of their family. He was cared for as one of their children and he received everything the others did, because of their choice, and love for him, rather than for anything he did. We love him as much as we love them all and we can’t imagine their family without him.

God feels like that about us. He loves us unconditionally as His heirs, not because of anything we have done or will do.

Meditation:

Welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit, speak into our hearts as we spend this time with You.

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Take some time reflecting on verses 6 and 7:

"Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir."

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Ask the Lord to remind you of your status as a child of God and all that you are entitled to because of this gift.

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Prayer

Abba Father, help me to remember that You love me as I am, and that as Your child I don't have to earn my place in Your family. Thank You for all that You give me just because You love me. Amen.

GALATIANS 4:12-20

Written by: Ali Courtney

Thought:

In this passage, Paul continues to plead with the Galatians not to allow the hardline group of Jewish Christians to distort the gospel. This will take away the joy and freedom they once felt.

During earlier chapters, Paul has used his back story to authenticate the gospel message he introduced to the church. He set out to explain the superiority of his message over the legalism of the false teachers. Now he appeals to their emotions and shared personal history to remind them how they felt when they were first saved. He explains to the Galatians how these teachers are trying to win them over, to flatter them and to get attention and approval for themselves. Paul reminds them of both the hard times they endured together and the joy and blessing that once flowed between them.

I can recall three key times in my life where I have struggled to maintain joy and freedom in my relationship with Jesus - all during times of upheaval and transition: Moving abroad for a time, getting married and having our first baby. The changes I had to navigate felt rocky. How could I continue to relate to Jesus in the way I had before now everything had changed? I found the loss of both joy and freedom hard and was tempted to be legalistic as I tried to get things back on track. In times of upheaval we can sometimes lose the joy we once felt in our relationship with Jesus. But, remember, we don't have to earn our way back to Him by trying to be good enough for His approval and presence. The joyful times and sense of freedom will come back again, just as they did for me.

Joy, even in times of upheaval, is a mark of our lives controlled by the Holy Spirit. Let's not allow shame or guilt to take that away.

Meditation:

Quieten yourself and get ready to receive God's Holy Spirit now.

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Joy is a fruit of life in the kingdom that we should be enjoying. But, it isn't the same as being happy in all circumstances. Kay Warren describes joy as "the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and the determined choice to praise God in all things." Reflect on this.

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Allow the Holy Spirit to highlight anything that you may have wrongly believed about the gospel that has resulted in you losing your joy or freedom.

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Prayer

Jesus, give us Your joy and freedom as we live our lives in relationship with You. Help us not to try and earn Your love by doing and saying the right things, but to rest in Your perfect love for us. Amen.

GALATIANS 4:21-31

Written by: Ali Courtney

Thought:

This passage is difficult to read, as we think about racism endemic in our world. Paul's talk of slavery is jarring. Systemic racism is still woven throughout society, with pain and prejudice passed down through the generations. Lord have mercy on us, Your church, for how Your story of redemption and rescue was twisted to dominate and destroy generations of people. May You teach us again what it means to be the family of God, each one made in Your image.

Despite what jumps out to us, Paul is actually talking about how all of humanity, regardless of ethnicity, was enslaved to sin, and how each of us is now set free. Abraham was called by God into a special relationship. God's promise and power would bless His people as they lived in faithful obedience, and all the peoples of the world would be blessed through them. They were blessed to be a blessing.

Abraham and Sarah were promised that their descendants would outnumber the stars in the sky. Yet, Sarah couldn't have children, so they ended up taking matters into their own hands. Maybe God seemed slow in keeping His promise. Maybe they buckled under the immense grief of infertility. All we know is that they used Hagar their slave to have a baby. Instead of blessing the nations, they subjugated and used a vulnerable woman, and then abandoned her and her child. That is not the call of God for His people. We are called to be a people of freedom, set free from slavery to sin, to live under God's blessing and to be a blessing to others. When we use our freedom to dominate and manipulate, it causes pain and destruction. But, God always invites us to a better way; into a covenant marked with supernatural promise and provision, where places of barren-ness in our lives and in the world become fruitful and full of life.

Paul is reminding us that we are children of promise, and the family we belong to is marked by freedom. Our calling is to live in that freedom, faithfully obedient to God, and a blessing to those around us.

Meditation:

Breathe deep, welcoming the Holy Spirit. Notice your emotions, and how your body feels. Slowly turn your awareness to Jesus.

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Paul uses emotive concepts here, talking about slavery, and briefly about barren-ness. He's highlighting the freedom and life for us as children of promise. Yet, for many there may be strong emotions bubbling up as we reflect, maybe tied to pain in our own stories. Gently offer places of pain to Jesus, letting Him highlight what's in your heart.

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Ask God for a fresh revelation of freedom. Pray for the places in your life, or the lives of those around you, which need new measures of freedom and abundant life.

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Prayer

Jesus, You bought freedom for each one of us. You called us out of darkness into light, and You offer us abundant life. May we be agents of Your freedom in the world around us, and may Your kingdom come with justice, mercy and power. Amen.

GALATIANS 5:1-12

Written by: Sam McDermid

Thought:

Today's passage brings us to the very thing that motivated Paul to write this letter. As we have heard, Jewish Christian missionaries had come to the Galatian churches and told the Gentiles Christians that they had to adopt key Jewish customs, including circumcision, to be fully accepted into the family of God. For this Jewish Christian group, circumcision was not just a religious ritual. It had a deep significance. It represented belonging to the family of God.

But as Paul has been reminding the Galatians in the previous four chapters, the death and resurrection of Jesus initiated a new era of history. Through faith in Jesus, everyone could be accepted into His family, regardless of ethnicity, experience or background. In looking to be circumcised, the Galatians were not just going through an unnecessary, and let's face it, rather inconvenient and painful ritual, they were missing the entire point. They were missing Jesus.

I didn't grow up in a Christian family, but started going to church when I was about 14. One of the things that attracted me was how kind people were. They seemed to accept me for who I was, warts and all. They knew I didn't have a Christian background, but the leaders still asked my opinions in Bible study sessions and still including me in everything. But I was so aware that I was new to this whole Christianity thing. As a result, I constantly felt I had to prove my worth, study the Bible harder than anyone else, contribute more to discussions than anyone else, to not only fit in, but to be accepted. I missed the point that I was already welcomed, just as I was.

This is exactly what Paul is reminding the Galatians, and by extension us, that sometimes, in our efforts to feel accepted, or approved of, we miss the point. We miss Jesus, who has already accepted us, approved us, loves us, and is waiting with open arms to welcome all people, no matter our age, background, ethnicity, gender, or experience, as His daughters and sons.

Meditation:

Take a moment to welcome the Holy Spirit right now. Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you again of the amazing thing God did, through Jesus, to welcome you into the family of God.

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We all have things that we turn to, to gain a sense of acceptance and welcome. Ask God to reveal those things to you.

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Take a moment to ask God to reveal His love and acceptance once again, and for His strength not to turn to outside things for that approval.

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Prayer

Father God, we are sorry for those times that, in our attempts to be loved and accepted, we have missed the point. We have missed You. Thank You that there is nothing we can do to gain Your acceptance, but You offer it freely. Help us to walk in that freedom today, knowing that we are Your daughters and sons. Amen.

GALATIANS 5:13-26

Written by: Amy Prinsloo

Thought:

Paul's intention throughout this chapter has been to remind the Galatian Christians that they're not bound to the slavery of sin. Neither should they pursue the slavery of the Law. Instead, through Jesus' death and resurrection, they've been set free! In this section, Paul continues by encouraging the Galatians to let go of their old selfish desires, which now conflict with the new way of life they have in the Spirit.

In this passage, Paul cautions the Galatians: "you've been set free in Christ, but this freedom wasn't given so you can do whatever you want." Paul is aware of how damaging it can be when we're driven by selfishness. Quarrelling, jealousy, anger, hatred, all these things ultimately lead to us hurting each other. Instead, Paul reminds us about God's command to His people: "love your neighbour as yourself." This is just as important as it ever was. Before, people could only attempt to follow this law in their own strength, which was pretty impossible! God's Law was good, but we ultimately needed the power of the Spirit in order to live it out.

When I first encountered the Holy Spirit as a teenager, it was pretty overwhelming. I felt a joyful sensation and peace almost washing over me. Maybe you have memories of a similar encounter in your life? For a time, I thought this was the only way to experience the Spirit; in special moments maybe at the end of a service or during a worship time. A good feeling for a little while that would inevitably fade. But, this isn't what Paul is talking about when he describes what it means to live with the Spirit. The fruit he talks about aren't just one-off gifts! Instead, as our relationship with Jesus deepens, we are transformed. As we let Him change us from the inside out, we have the opportunity to become more patient, more kind and more joyful.

As we walk with the Spirit this week, would we be aware of the opportunities we have to show love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control to those around us.

Meditation:

Welcome the Holy Spirit. Allow the Spirit to fill your heart and mind with His presence. Let any thoughts and distractions just fall away as you let Him speak.

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Take a moment to reflect on the fruit of the Spirit. What might you need the Spirit to fill you with today? His, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness or self-control?

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Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with whatever it is you've asked for today. Ask Him to give you opportunities to show love, patience, kindness and gentleness to the people you interact with this week.

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Prayer

Holy Spirit, we thank You for these gifts You've given us and the freedom we have in You. Help us to let go of any selfish desires and, instead, love our neighbours as ourselves this week. Amen.

GALATIANS 6:1-10

Written by: Dorinda Miller

Thought:

In the earlier chapters of Galatians, Paul has defended his ministry, theology and the message of the gospel. But, since chapter 5, he's changed his emphasis to a more practical application of his message.

Paul begins this section by calling the Galatians to gently restore anyone caught in sin. This is not an invitation to go looking for sin in others but to come alongside and help them, while being careful with our own attitudes and actions. He instructs the Galatians to bear one another's burdens, to provide help where help is needed. He then encourages them in verse 10 to "do good to all people." Lockdown has provided us with a variety of ways in which we can help those around us, whether they are part of our church family or part of the wider community. Paul uses a gardening truth to make the point that we do literally reap what we sow into our lives as he outlined in chapter 5. He then promises that if we sow in the Spirit, then good things will happen, if we do not give up.

God has often spoken clearly to me through verse 9: "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." I once arrived at a 5-day silent retreat in Sussex, feeling exhausted. At the time, I was pioneering an innovative way of delivering speech and language therapy to day nurseries. I was also part of a small team, seconded to assist an inner-city church. On the wall of my room was an oil painting of a harvest field, which caught my attention. As I looked at it, this verse came to mind, and I reflected on it at intervals during my stay. The verse also appeared in other contexts during the retreat! I sensed God was highlighting it for me. By the time the retreat ended, I felt energised and ready to continue and persevere with my roles and responsibilities.

These verses show us how we can foster the spirit-filled life and bless those around us. May we take them to heart and deepen our faith and witness in the world.

Meditation:

Welcome the Holy Spirit now, as you breathe in and out, deeply and slowly, three times.

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Spend a few moments reflecting on Galatians 6:10:

“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

Reflect on any times when you have taken advantage of such opportunities. How did you feel? What was the outcome?

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Pray for an opportunity to bless someone today. Ask the Lord to help you recognise the opportunity and to be responsive to His leading.

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Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You for these verses. We pray that You would help us to sow good seeds into our lives. Help us to carry each other's troubles and our own. May we be a channel of Your love and life to those around us. Amen

GALATIANS 6:11-18

Written by: Jacob Parton

Thought:

Today concludes Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia. He has a final word about the false teachers he's battling, before powerfully asserting the true status of a Christian.

The actual motives of the hardline Jewish Christians who'd traveled to Galatia are unknown. However, Paul certainly doubts their sincerity, saying that they only want to avoid persecution from other hardline Jewish groups. They want to be able to boast about circumcising the Gentiles Christians, too! In stark contrast, Paul exclaims that he will only boast in Jesus' cross. By Jesus' crucifixion, Paul has also been crucified and experienced a separation from "the world," or the Old Creation. Now, the only thing that matters is the New Creation, also known as the restored creation or the Age to Come that was birthed through Jesus' resurrection. As Christians, we experience some of this reality now, but until we are resurrected, we won't experience it all. Part of the New Creation reality is the beautiful diversity of the Church. We aren't divided between those circumcised and those uncircumcised. As Paul said in Galatians 3:28, in Christ: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female." We are all one and of equal value in Jesus.

Paul's view of leadership, and of being a Christian in general, both inspires and challenges me. During my second year at Bible College, I led a weekly prayer meeting that sometimes attracted half the students on our small campus. The pressure to appear as a strong leader before them was crushing and, by Christmas time, I was exhausted. I can easily follow our culture's understanding of leadership: the need to be strong, impressive, in control, admired, and even proud. Paul was the opposite. He identified with Jesus, who submitted himself to a painful and utterly humiliating crucifixion. Paul even says that he bears on his body the marks of Jesus. The cross was his boast and message.

God's grace, peace and mercy are on us. Let's live in the reality of the New Creation, staying on the tracks of grace.

Meditation:

Welcome the Holy Spirit and let His presence fill you afresh. Jesus is with you. His grace, peace, and mercy are present to you.

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Take some time reflecting on Paul's explanation of a Christian. How does this contrast to the world's understanding of a strong person or leader?

"May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation."

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Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal how you can live more in the reality of the New Creation today. Pray that you can embrace Paul's vision for Christians and the beautifully diverse body of the Church.

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Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You for enduring the cross for us. Thank You that we have participated with You in Your death, but also Your resurrection. We are part of Your New Creation and look forward to receiving our resurrected bodies. Help us by Your Spirit to stay on the tracks of grace. Amen.



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