

LIVING
IT OUT



**DAILY
BIBLE
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

Be Humble and Kind

July 30, 2018

"SPLASH!" As I came up out of the water, I looked up to the bridge, hoping the girl I was trying to impress saw me. I had completed a perfect front flip into the James River from the 50-foot-high bridge. The summer after graduating college, some friends and I went hiking and then bridge jumping. Of course, since it was a group of guys *and* girls, the guys immediately started to one-up each other by jumping from higher and higher heights, then attempting more advanced jumps. Since I was trying to get one of the girls to like me, I had no choice but to do the highest and most dangerous jump (not recommended!). Thankfully, I landed it safely, and the girl, Brandy, is now my wife.

When we want something, like a spouse, there is a force within us that drives us to present the best version of ourselves, to promote ourselves, to prove how much we deserve whatever it is, and to win it. When I was first trying to impress my wife, I wanted her to see how adventurous I was. I felt I had to go above and beyond to prove it. If I didn't promote it to her, she might have missed it, then missed me, and wound up with the wrong guy. I had an *obligation* to win her heart because she deserved someone like me, and would have been miserable without an adventurous guy like myself.

Obviously, I'm embellishing a bit (my wife would probably say otherwise), but the lengths I went to to impress my wife are a great example of self-promotion. Self-promotion is the natural tendency within us to push our agenda of what we think we deserve. We promote ourselves by publicizing our skills and abilities, often in a forceful way. When we feel out of place in some way, shape, or form, our first reaction is typically to promote ourselves. Last weekend, Lead Pastor Ben Snyder talked about our call as Christians to flee the desire to self-promote and instead humble ourselves before God.

In the book of 1 Peter, Peter calls followers of Jesus to choose devotion, not self-promotion.

1 Peter 5:5b-6

^{5b} And all of you, dress yourselves in humility as you relate to one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."⁶ So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor.

Unfortunately, sometimes when attempting to pursue humility, some Christians swing to the other end of the spectrum of self-demotion. Self-demotion is when we forcefully reduce our involvement or lower our place of worth. Humbling ourselves under God's mighty power is neither self-promotion nor self-demotion. "The mighty power of God" in verse 6 is an allusion to God leading his people to the promised land. It is an emphasis on God's deliverance regardless of our circumstances. As we grow to know God in deeper ways, our devotion to him should also grow. It is our love, loyalty, and commitment to Jesus that will allow us to remain in a state of humility no matter the situation we find ourselves in.

The rest of the week, we'll look over the four ways we can increase our devotion to Jesus and humble ourselves by surrendering our cares, staying alert, standing firm, and sharing the glory.

Questions:

What is an area you have chosen to self-promote or self-demote?

How can you deepen your knowledge of the "mighty power of God"?

Next Steps:

Admit your need for God to work in your circumstances, whatever they are. Attend GrowthTrack, if you haven't already.

Also, as we close out our study on 1 Peter, read through the book this week. Today, we will focus on 1 Peter 1. Feel free to simply read through the chapter. Or, you can listen to it through StreetLights Bible. Download the app or visit streetlightsbible.com.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, sometimes I self-promote and, in pride, think too highly of myself. Other times, I self-demote, and I allow lies or fear to hold me back from what you have in mind for me. Please forgive me for both and help me to humble myself under your mighty power. You are good, and I want to be right where you want me to be. Amen.

Don't Tell God You're Just Browsing

July 31, 2018

I've been so blessed for the last five years to have a Bible study group that is filled with people who share their struggles, wisdom, and love. At our most recent meeting, a girl in my group mentioned that she had been struggling with anxiety and worries earlier in the day, so she filled up an imaginary bucket of her worries and handed it to God. She'd think some more, grab the bucket, and toss some more worries in. She had a rough day with worrying, but by the time we met, she had given those problems to God, and had not taken them back. This friend of mine has grown so much since I first met her, and to hear her talk in such a bold and honest way inspired me.

Giving our worries to God isn't a new concept. It's just that it's one of those things that is easy to say but actually tough to accomplish. We tend to share with God our cares and worries, but for those of us who lean toward self-promotion, we tend to go right back to stewing over them or trying even harder to fix it all ourselves. All this does is say to God, "I want to complain about this to you, but I can fix this myself. I'll just try harder. Thanks anyway." On the other hand, those of us who lean more toward self-demotion may justify what we're going through with, "Well, I deserve this," or "I'm just going to put this issue on the back-burner for a bit and move on."

What we don't realize is that giving God our cares and concerns is a form of showing him devotion. One way to define devotion is, "loyalty and love or care for someone or something." By giving God our cares, we are actually showing him love. We are displaying our trust in him, and we are giving him permission to come into the situation and do his will. When God tells us to cast our cares on him, he isn't saying it like a store employee asking if you need help, when in reality they're really hoping you'll say no. We can typically tell when their offer to help is not sincere, so we tell them we're just browsing, even though we know what we're looking for and really don't have a clue where it is. God tells us to let him help by giving him our cares—hoping that we really do! When we do this, we are loving him, trusting him, showing devotion to him, and not only giving permission, but *seeking* his will to be done in our lives.

1 Peter 5:7

Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.

Questions:

What cares, concerns, and worries do you need to give to God?

Are you more of a self-promoter or self-demoter when it comes to giving God your cares? Once you've identified this, what can you do to change this?

Next Steps:

A good way to make a new habit of giving God your cares is to keep a prayer journal. Write down the cares and concerns you've given to God. Make a habit of reviewing the journal, going back to previous concerns and writing down how God has worked in each situation. Seeing results on paper can help you recognize what God can do if you invite him in.

As we continue through 1 Peter this week, we focus today on 1 Peter 2. We encourage you to read through this chapter in your Bible. Or, you can listen to it through the StreetLights Bible. You can download the app or visit streetlightsbible.com.

Prayer:

Dear God, help me to recognize the need to give my cares to you. I cannot fix things on my own, and I know that giving my problems to you is a way of inviting you to do your will in my life. I long to be closer to you, and I long for you to use me and shape my struggles for your glory. Amen.

Know Thy Enemy

August 1, 2018

“In the days when monsters and giants and fairy folk lived in England, a noble knight was riding across a plain. The Red Cross Knight had never yet faced a foe, and did not even know his own name or where he had been born. But now he was bound on a great adventure, sent by the Queen of the Fairies to try his young strength against a deadly enemy, a dragon grim and horrible.” So begins one of my boys’ favorite stories, “Saint George and the Dragon,” retold by Margaret Hodges. Throughout the story, George battles this evil, deadly dragon. His foe is far superior in strength, and George’s life is continually at stake. George is repeatedly knocked down and left for dead, but his strength is restored to fight another day, until he finally defeats the dragon.

In many of the fairy tales I read to my children, the enemy is very apparent. They are ugly and bold and vicious. The battles are fierce and the hero often is wounded, but in the end, our hero always wins. In our daily lives, our enemy is not always so apparent. It is often disguised as a nasty co-worker who seems to be trying to tear us down. Or, it could be a friend who broke our trust, or a toddler who refuses to use the toilet (ask me how I know).

On Monday, we discussed the idea of self-promotion and self-demotion. The examples above fall into the self-promotion category. The other person seems to be the enemy and is preventing me from getting what I want. We think we should have career advancement opportunities, we deserve to have true friends who never hurt us, our children should always do exactly what we want them to, and so on. But in each of these cases, there is an unseen enemy seeking to destroy us. We cannot change the actions of the other person, but those actions are not what will ultimately destroy us. Our responses to these people—anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness—are what will ultimately destroy us. Sometimes, the enemy comes from within. We decline an amazing job opportunity because we are afraid to fail. Or, we close the door on a budding friendship because we are afraid to get hurt. In these cases, we believe lies about ourselves, and we allow the devil to defeat us with those lies.

1 Peter 5:8

Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.

As human beings, and more specifically as Christ-followers, our enemy is not another person, and it is not ourselves. It is the devil. He knows our weaknesses and will exploit them to bring about our ruin. We need to remember who our real enemy is and engage him in battle through Scripture and prayer.

Questions:

Are you more likely to view others as an enemy to be defeated, or are you defeating yourself?

What are some of the ways that the devil is attacking you through others or through yourself?

Next Steps:

As Christ followers, we have a deadly enemy in the devil. We need to take active steps to guard ourselves from his attacks. Think about your answers to the questions above. Find some passages in your Bible that you can refer to when you are feeling attacked, so you have something to fight back with.

As we continue through 1 Peter this week, we focus today on 1 Peter 3. We encourage you to read through this chapter in your Bible. Or, you can listen to it through the StreetLights Bible. You can download the app or visit streetlightsbible.com.

Prayer:

Lord, sometimes I forget who my real enemy is. I view others as the cause of my difficulties and lash out against them, or I allow my own fears to prevent me from taking important steps. Remind me that I am not alone in this fight and that through Jesus and Scripture, I can stand up to the attacks of the devil. Amen.

Don't Give Up

August 2, 2018

I am not a runner. If you are, please do not be offended. I am sure you find some joy in pounding the pavement into submission. I hate it! That is why I had such a conflict when my son asked me to enter a 5k race on a 4th of July weekend in Houston. I agreed. For weeks, I conditioned, running and walking, getting ready for the race. Finally the day came. The race started at 7 a.m., and it was already 90 degrees. I can't tell you how many times I felt like taking the shortcut to the finish line. But I went on and finally finished the race. Near the finish line, my son came running back to me and ran/walked alongside with me to the end. I love him, and I knew I couldn't quit. All the conditioning and all the enduring was just a demonstration of my love for him.

As we run the race of life, there are many places where we just want to quit doing the right things. We want to stop worrying about making the right choices. We feel drained and unable to act in the way we know would please Jesus. We become so self-focused that we don't see the next step he wants us to take. But the reality is that we show our love and devotion to Christ through enduring the trials in life that we face. Paul writes that it is Christ's love for us that controls us, moves us, and motivates us.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

Either way, Christ's love controls us. Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life. He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them.

The devil wants us to be discouraged by our circumstances and just quit. Peter encourages us to stand firm against him.

1 Peter 5:9

Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your family of believers all over the world is going through the same kind of suffering you are.

In the same way that I had to prepare for that race, we need to prepare to grow in our ability to stand firm. As we stand firm in the little trials we face, we grow

in our ability to trust God in the middle of those trials. Our faith muscles get stronger, and we are able to stand in the face of more difficult circumstances. Those muscles get stronger because we are becoming more accustomed to surrendering ourselves to the Holy Spirit. We trust that He is working in our lives and preparing us for the future. The knowledge that the Holy Spirit is at work within us is encouraging. We know that he is the source of strength that helps us stand firm during the darkest storms of our lives. This is “spiritual conditioning.” And it will prepare us for the life race we are running.

Many times we feel that if only our circumstances would change, we could do better. If only we had more money, a better boss, a different job, a better spouse, or better kids, *then* we could really make a difference. The truth is we make a huge impact when we *endure* the difficulties in life rather than escaping them. When we allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives and give us the strength to stand, we provide hope for those around us who see our struggle, our response, and our glorifying of the Lord.

Questions:

When you face trials in your daily life, do you look for a way to escape, or do you ask God to help you endure?

What can you do this week to work on your “spiritual conditioning” in preparation for the difficult circumstances that you may face?

Next Steps:

Get involved in a group. Through those relationships, the Holy Spirit will bring encouragement and help you focus on Jesus when difficult times come to your life. Start building those relationships now.

Be observant this week. Look for someone who is going through difficult circumstances and be the voice of encouragement for them. Help them to focus on the source of strength that will help them endure the trials that they are facing.

As we continue through 1 Peter this week, we focus today on 1 Peter 4. We encourage you to read through this chapter in your Bible. Or, you can listen to it through the StreetLights Bible. You can download the app or visit streetlightsbible.com.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for the great gift of salvation that you provided. I know that gift does not mean that all is going to be well in life. In fact, I know you tell me in your Word that I will face trials. Help me to keep my focus on you so I can develop the spiritual strength to stand firm no matter what life throws at me. Thank you for your Holy Spirit who guides and comforts me. In Jesus' name, amen.

My Today is Not My Forever

August 3, 2018

My now ex-husband made our divorce as vicious, bitter, and acrimonious as he had always promised to make it. He had threatened that if we ever divorced, I would be lucky to see my daughters every other weekend because according to him, he was the better parent and thus would be their caregiver. Oh, and he would also get the house, so I had better find a new place to live. My ex-husband was verbally and emotionally abusive to me for many years, and even when he became physically abusive in the last year of our marriage, I was still holding out hope that he would finally get the help that he needed. But there came a night when I was, for the first time, truly afraid for my life and the lives of my sleeping daughters—I had that gut instinct that things could go horribly wrong that night. I locked myself in my bedroom, called for help, and got a civil protection order the next day. I was terrified in the courtroom with the magistrate, even though it was just the two of us. I had never been in a courtroom before. I recounted through tears what had led up to this court appearance. I felt like a failure, like I had done something wrong in our marriage. Like I had failed somehow.

I never knew what new schemes and lies my ex-husband would come up with during the divorce proceedings. My attorney said that he had never seen someone like him in his 30-year career. But, something else happened during these months—for the first time, I discovered strengths that I never knew I had, and I discovered that God had already put a group of wonderful people in my life who helped me through this incredibly tough time. (My family was also very supportive, but they all live in Germany.)

1 Peter 5:10

In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation.

Just like Peter told the early Christians, God will lift you up again after your suffering. What is lost will be returned and restored to you in eternity. So do not despair! Looking back a few years later, I can see that God had a plan for me for a better life. He helped me through the divorce by putting good people at every step of the way to guide me and support me. I got the civil protection order, the magistrate (in the end) saw through my husband's schemes and lies, I am my

daughters' legal guardian, and I got to keep the house. And after some bizarre, and in retrospect, even sometimes hilarious online dating experiences, I did finally meet a wonderful man with a good heart. What kept me going every day during those difficult times was the thought that *my today was not my forever*, and I feel blessed to see now what God had in store for me all along.

Questions:

When was the last time that you went through a difficult time? Are you going through a difficult time now? Are you asking God for guidance as to what you should do to navigate through this? Are there good people in your life, who love you and whom God placed there for you? Are you reminding yourself that your today is not your forever, that there will be an end to your suffering?

Next Steps:

Look at the people in your life to see whether anyone is suffering and think about how you could help them through their difficult time. If you are suffering, look for people that God has placed in your life to help you make it through. Write down things you can look forward to again once your suffering has passed.

Today, we complete 1 Peter by going through 1 Peter 5. Feel free to simply read through the chapter. Or, you can listen to it through the StreetLights Bible. Download the app or visit streetlightsbible.com.

Prayer:

Dear Father in heaven, thank you for having a plan for my life. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to grow and find new strengths by helping me face difficult times and guiding me through them. Thank you so much for placing wonderful people in my life and for walking beside me at all times. Amen.