

# St. Paul: Weekly Devotions

*Devotions on week's readings  
for 09.20.15 (Pentecost 17b)*

## **Day One: Jeremiah 11:18-20**

*Because the Lord revealed their plot to me, I knew it, for at that time he showed me what they were doing. I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter...*

The prophet Jeremiah had a really hard job. Some pastors are called to quiet churches. Some are called to conflicted congregations. Jeremiah was called to preach to a whole country, to the people of Judah, who thought of themselves as pretty good folks. And he was commanded to tell them that they had been unfaithful to God, and that their nation was going to be defeated by Babylon and taken into captivity.

As you may imagine, his sermons were not popular. In fact, they were considered unpatriotic. Other prophets, whom God said were false prophets, gave much happier messages. They said that "God is on our side and we're going to win!"

Now some men from Jeremiah's home town have

decided to kill him to stop him from preaching God's Word. In our text God reveals that he will protect Jeremiah and punish his enemies. So Jeremiah is saved... but that doesn't mean he escapes without injury.

Jeremiah was still struck, threatened, thrown in a dungeon and kept in a cistern. He lived in fear for his life and was, many years later, murdered. But at each step God permitted him to be in danger for a reason – to enable him to preach the truth.

How has God spared you? If God had given you what you deserve, you'd be in a bad place.

At the same time, how has he allowed you to face challenges? God saved his servant, but he allowed him to share in the struggles that God also faced. Jeremiah and God both were hurt by the sins of God's people. Have you shared God's pain for people?

It is an agonizing honor to be a co-worker with God.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, Jeremiah was faithful. He remained with your word, no matter what. Give me that same spirit of steadfastness, to hear and obey your word. Amen.*

**Day Two: James 3:13-4:10**

*What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

How much do you need in order to be happy? When I was 5 years old, my allowance was 25 cents per week, and I was excited to get it. Every week, I would take a nickel of that money and put it in the Sunday School offering basket. The rest I spent on candy.

Of course, as I got older a quarter was not enough. My allowance grew. (My chores did too.) At 13 I worked on a farm. At 14 I got a job in a furniture store. At 17 I began working in a machine shop, each year making more. And each year needing more to meet my needs and make me happy.

I have been pretty poor. And I have been rich (by comparison at least). But I have never had enough to

keep up with my dreams and desires. Each time I got more, my wants increased even further.

What would you do if God gave you more than you “needed?” If you need \$100,000 to be happy, then what would you do if God gave you \$150,000? Since it’s extra, would you use the extra \$50,000 for others? Or would your need for a 2<sup>nd</sup> home, or a boat, or a new car suddenly increase?

The truth is that God can never give us enough to make us happy. Our appetites expand. And though God gives us more than we deserve, we are never satisfied.

James says this is the source of all our fighting and misery. Not poverty – but insatiable desire. Maybe it would help to spend some serious time with that question today. What do you really need to be happy?

Who do you need in order to be happy?

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, give me what I need. Not what I want – not all that I circle in the catalog – not what all my neighbors have. Give me what I need... a living relationship with you! Amen.*

### **Day Three: Mark 9:30-37**

*[Jesus] said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.” But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.*

I can understand why the disciples might not understand what Jesus said. That happens to me all the time. But why would they be afraid to ask Jesus about this statement?

Sometimes I was afraid to ask a question in class. It might have been because I wasn't paying attention, and I didn't want to teacher to realize that I'd been daydreaming. Or it could have been because I thought that I was the only one who didn't get it, and I didn't want to look dumb. On the other hand, there were times that I was excited about the topic, but if I got really engaged in it and asked questions I knew that other students would roll their eyes and think that I was just showing off.

Surely none of those reasons would apply to Jesus and his disciples! Maybe it was because they didn't really want to know the answer.

Have you listened to a doctor describe what was wrong with you, and you wanted to ask a question like, “will it hurt?” But you didn't ask it because you didn't want to hear what he'd say. Even if he said no, you probably wouldn't believe him.

But if the disciples had just listened to Jesus on this day, imagine how different their lives might have been a short time later! As they saw Jesus arrested and tortured and killed, their distress would have turned to excitement, waiting for the last of Jesus' words to come true... “he will rise.”

Now... what are you reluctant to know about God's plan for you? If you accept the truth, not only about how hard it might be, but also about his blessing and promise, how might your challenges be changed?

*Prayer: Dear Jesus, I am afraid that you will not give me what I really want. In fact, you may ask me to endure some suffering or loss. And yet, if it is your plan, how could I be afraid? Remind me that your plans are always best, even when they lead past the cross. Amen.*

## Day Four: James 3:13-18

*Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom that comes down from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

I read an article in the Business Insider about the problems of really intelligent people. I listed some things you'd expect, like people thinking that you are bragging, and people expecting too much of you. But the last one on the list was one you might not expect. Smart people complain that the more they learn, the more inferior and unprepared they feel. They realize more and more all the things they do not know.

There is an attitude that often passes for wisdom in our world. James identifies it as bitter jealousy and selfish

ambition. It's when we see what others have, and the honor that they receive, and we want that. It's when we seek to promote ourselves so that we will feel good about ourselves.

That often looks like wisdom, as you stroke your chin and pronounce judgment on others. But it leads to disorder and division.

But James says that the wise person will show "the meekness of wisdom" because the true wisdom from above is only a tiny sliver of the wisdom of God. And so the wise person, who has been given some little wisdom from God, is always aware of our need for him. This kind of wisdom is gentle, and brings peace and mercy, because that is the character of God.

**Prayer:** *Father in heaven, you have all knowledge and wisdom. Grant to me enough that I may be a blessing to others. Amen.*

These devotions help us to think ahead about the Bible verses we will read in worship next week. They are written weekly by Pastor Don Neuendorf. You can learn more about our worship or our church at [stpaulannarbor.org](http://stpaulannarbor.org)