

CITY CENTRAL CHURCH WEEK 2 DEVOTIONAL

January 9 | Jesus Understands, Part 2

“He faced all of the same testings we do.” Hebrews 4:15

Are you disappointed in people? Jesus understands, because in the final moments, those He loved and counted on let Him down. Judas, His treasurer, sold Him out and sealed the deal with a kiss. Even in His darkest hour at Gethsemane, His closest disciples, Peter, James and John, couldn't stay awake and pray with Him for an hour (See Matthew 26:40).

Are you tired of all the demands? Jesus understands. “A vast crowd brought to him people who were lame, blind, crippled, those who couldn't speak, and many others. They laid them before Jesus, and He healed them all” (See Matthew 4:23-24). You say, “But if Jesus was God how could He get tired?” Because He was both God and man. He had to be God in order to save us, and man in order to die for us. “Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime” (John 4:6).

Have you been falsely accused? Jesus understands. They accused Him of being “a lush, a friend of the riff-raff” (Matthew 11:19). Up until the time of His death they were still trying “to find something false...so they could kill him” (Matthew 26:59). And Jesus said, “The servant is not greater than his lord” (John 15:20). When you decide to follow Jesus, you're signing up for a life of advancement—and adversity! So why did Jesus go through these things? “Since he himself has gone through suffering...he is able to help us” (Heb 2:18 NLT). He walked the path you're on today so that you could go to Him knowing He understands, and that He is able to help.

Consider: Consider that the Lord wants to walk with you on your path. Take some time today and invite Him into every “heavy” circumstance you are facing.

January 10 | God Will Take Care of You

“Give all your worries...to God, for he cares about you.” 1Peter 5:7

Think about the things you worried about last year, or even last week. How many came to pass? Statistically, 10% at most! And did all your worrying make them better or worse? What about the physical and emotional toll of worry? Dr. Charles Mayo, founder of the famous Mayo Clinic, said, “Worry negatively affects the circulation, the heart, the glands, and the whole nervous system. It profoundly affects your health. I have never known a person who died from overwork, but many who died from worry.”

So when are you going to face up to the fact that you worry too much, and do something about it? The Bible says, “Give all your worries and cares to God, for He cares about you.” By committing each day to the Lord, you are trusting Him to go before you and work things out for the best. It's the only way to live! Worry doesn't work. It's like a rocking chair; it will give you something to do and keep you going, but it won't get you anywhere! Life is too big for any of us to handle alone, so when worry comes to prey on your mind attack it with the promises of God. Bring your fears to God and watch them shrivel and die. “It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at

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the center of your life" (Philippians 4:7). George Muller said, "The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith, and the beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety."

Consider: In your prayer time today church, bring the Lord every fear that has been robbing life. Cast your cares upon Him because He cares about you.

January 11 | Prayer, Not Pressure, Changes People

"But we all...are changed...by the Spirit of the Lord." 2 Corinthians 3:18

Jesus asked the question, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" (Matthew 7:3). Expecting more out of people than they're able to give will hurt your relationships, not help them. People need the freedom to be who they are. That doesn't mean they don't need or want to change, but nobody appreciates being given the message, even subtly, that they must change in order to be loved or accepted. We're more likely to change for those who are willing to accept us with our shortcomings, than for those who demand we live by their rules.

One thing's for sure: God won't change the people we're trying to change until we adopt a "hands off" policy. We must get out of His way and let Him work! Even when we think we're hiding our disapproval, people still feel it. It's in our voice and body language. Prayer is the great change agent, not pressure. If we truly love people we'll pray for them and allow God to work on them His way, on His schedule, and for His glory. Many of those who irritate us are simply being themselves; their personality just doesn't mesh with ours. Sometimes we want them to change when we need to change. Often, the things we require in other people are already available for us to enjoy if we'll just stop judging them. For change to be lasting, it must come from the inside out, and only the Spirit of God can bring that kind of change.

Consider: This is a very important message for the church at large, which includes us. It is time to increase our prayers for others and lay down our lofty expectations of people. Who have you been judging? Repent today and ask for a new heart to love others.

January 12 | The Call to Leadership

"Rise and stand on your feet." Acts 26:16

If God has called you to leadership, you'll be unfulfilled in any other slot. God told Paul, "Rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister." Notice what the call to leadership requires

- **Competence**
You must recognize your gifts, then channel your energies into where you're most likely to succeed. That means acknowledging your limitations and equipping others to fill them. To do that, you must be secure.

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- **Courage**
Scott Peck said, “The best decision makers are those willing to suffer the most over their decisions but still retain their ability to be decisive.” Good leaders are not necessarily the smartest or most creative people, they’re just the ones with the courage to step out and go first. So, “Be thou strong and very courageous” (Joshua 1:7).
- **Clarity**
Your life’s vision may come at once, but the steps are revealed over time. Don’t allow a lack of answers to leave you paralyzed. Be clear about your goal, even though you’re not certain about the details.
- **Coaching**
Without a good coach you’ll never be as good as you could be. If you’re hoping to learn everything from personal experience, you’ll have to outlive Methuselah!
- **Character**
You can lead without character, but you can’t be a leader worth following. Character provides the moral authority to bring together the people and resources needed to get the job done. Your talent has the potential to take you places where your character can’t sustain you. That thought should keep you on your knees.

Consider: Has God created you to be a leader? If so, what are you currently leading? If you are not leading anything, go before the Lord and ask Him to speak to you about where He would want you to step out.

January 13 | Living Fearlessly, Part 1

“You are my servant; I have chosen you.” Isaiah 41:9

Have you ever wondered how animal trainers are able to control a five-ton elephant and keep it from running away? They do it by controlling the animal’s thinking. When a baby elephant is being trained, a rope is put around its leg and then tied to a wooden post secured in the ground. The elephant, which is not yet very strong, pulls at the rope but is unable to break it or to pull up the post. Eventually it gives up. From that point forward when the elephant’s leg is secured it believes it cannot get away—even though it is fully capable of escaping. It remembers its struggle. That’s one reason it’s said, “Elephants never forget.” And we are like that too.

Our thinking limits us, just as an elephant’s does. Usually it’s because of fear. The truth is, fear can steal your dreams. You may be afraid of failure or rejection, you may not want to make a fool of yourself, or be afraid of trying because you believe you can’t succeed. If you give in to these thoughts and believe that you can’t achieve your dream, you’ll be right—and therefore unable to achieve your dream. Often what we fear has no connection to reality.

Here’s the good news: fear can be overcome. The first step to overcoming is to believe God when He says “You are my servant; I have chosen you...do not fear, for I am with you...I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (v. 9-10).

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Consider: Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal every thought that is limiting you. Take those thoughts captive and ask the Holy Spirit to release vision over your heart and mind.

January 14 | Living Fearlessly, Part 2

“Do not fear, for I am with you.” Isaiah 41:10

The words “fear not” keep showing up in the Bible, all the way from Genesis to Revelation. Why is that? Because God understands that fear is not only our biggest enemy but our constant companion, and He wants to help us overcome it. One author writes: “Think of your comfort zone as a prison you live in—a largely self-created prison. It consists of a collection of ‘cannot, must, must-not,’ and other unfounded beliefs formed from all the negative thoughts and decisions you have accumulated and reinforced during your lifetime. Every fear is like a bar in that prison.” But the good news is that because fears are feelings, the faulty ones can be removed by faith.

Does this mean you can live totally free from fear? No. Writer Michael Ignatieff says, “Living fearlessly is not the same thing as never being afraid. It’s good to be afraid occasionally. Fear is a great teacher. What’s not good is to constantly live in fear, allowing it to dictate your choices and define who you are. Living fearlessly means standing up to fear, taking its measure, and refusing to let it shape and define your life. Living fearlessly means taking risks, taking gambles, and not playing it safe. It means refusing to take ‘no’ for an answer when you are sure that the answer should have been ‘yes.’ It means refusing to settle for less than what is your due, what is yours by right, what is yours by the sweat of your labor and your effort.” And let’s add—what God has promised and planned for you.

Consider: Are you playing it safe? Living fearlessly means taking risks and gambles. When is the last time you stepped out in faith on something the Lord spoke? Consider asking the Lord how He wants you to step out, and then do it!

January 15 | Living Fearlessly, Part 3

“I will uphold you with my...right hand.” Isaiah 41:10

When you know that what you’re doing is in sync with God’s will, you can be confident He’ll provide what you need and fight for you. God told His people, “When you go to war against your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army greater than yours, do not be afraid of them, because the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, will be with you” (Deuteronomy 20:1). Then God added something else: “Is any man afraid or fainthearted? Let him go home so that his brothers will not become disheartened too” (Deuteronomy 20:8).

God knows that when you allow fear to rule your heart, it’s fatal not only for you, but to those around you. Playwright David Mamet wrote: “On June 5, 1944, thousands of American paratroopers jumped into Normandy. Four men refused to jump. Can anyone imagine the rest of these men’s lives? What prodigies of self-excuse, rationale, or repression they must have had to employ. Their lives, in effect, ended the day they refused to leave that plane...We all die in the end,

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but there's no reason to die in the middle." You don't overcome fear overnight. But gradually, day by day, you can get it by the scruff of the neck and bring it under control. "The people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits" (Daniel 11:32). The word "know" means "to be in relationship with, or to be intimate with." Want to overcome your fears? Spend time in God's Word. Prioritize your prayer life. Get to know God better.

Consider: Assess your relationship with the Lord. Are you spending time in His Word? Are you making prayer a priority? "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8).

Devotional resource adapted from Jentezen Franklin, <http://www.jentezenfranklin.org/daily-devotions>