

MONDAY, May 18, 2009: *"I have never met one person of genuine faith who was not active in some church."*

_Charles L. Allen, Healing Words

- ☐ Ezekiel 5:11 **Therefore, because you have defiled My sanctuary...therefore I will also diminish you**

As you start your week, probably one of the last things that is on your mind is your church. But please don't make that mistake. When we separate what happens on Sunday from the rest of the week, we set ourselves up for a great fall. When we separate our "regular life" from "church life," we fail to realize that our lives are closely connected to the church. Bottom line, church is essential. Our church is the visible representation of Christ's body on earth.

Just as Israel had fields to plow and homes to tend, so do you; but Christ's eye is always focused on his "Bride" (Church) and the meeting place of that "Bride" is the church. What you do there matters; what happens there matters. Matter of fact, it sets the tone and direction for the rest of the week.

Bottom line, there are many people who live diminished lives because they do not see church as essential.

Church is just one of many options they have in life. But today, I encourage you to reflect a few moments on yesterday. What did God say to you at church? Or what was He trying to say to you? What commitments did you make yesterday at church? Or, what commitments should you have made? Your answers will have a large part in determining whether you have a week of increase or a week of diminishing returns.

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 10:24-26

TUESDAY, May 19, 2009: *"You will never maximize your potential in any area without coaching. It is impossible. You may be good. You may even be better than anyone else. But without outside input you will never be as good as you could be. We all do better when somebody is watching and evaluating."* _Andy Stanley, The Next Generation Leader

- ☐ Ezekiel 11:19 **...and I will put a new spirit within them**

One of the greatest things about our Christian faith is the assurance that God changes us. God not only redeems us, but He "regenerates" us. In other words, He makes us alive to that which is the noblest and best in us.

If space permitted, I could share with you several pivotal times in my life that God changed me. I remember when He gave me a true hunger to study His word. I remember when He gave me a passion for missions. I remember specific moments when bad habits and sinful ways were completely broken in my life. Bottom line, one moment I was going in one direction but God stepped in, changed me, and thus changed the entire direction of my life.

Perhaps you are dealing with something that you've struggled with for a long, long time. Today ask him to put a new spirit within you. He is no respecter of persons!

SCRIPTURE: Ezekiel 11:19-20

WEDNESDAY, May 20, 2009: *"Looking back, I realize that as a young man I thought a great deal about getting married – but I gave much less thought to what it actually meant to be married."* _Billy Graham, The Journey, p. 247

- ☐ Ezekiel 11:19 **Then I will give them one heart...**

Sonja and I were reflecting recently on the miracle of our marriage. We received no formal pre-marital counseling. Matter of fact, most of the advice we received was – "Don't do it!"

Looking back, we made a lot of mistakes and we could have done a lot of things differently. Yet in spite of all that, today we have a marriage (30+ years!) that brings us great joy and happiness. We feel so fortunate.

In looking for the answer, we both agreed that it was because God gave us a heart for each other. Again, as I mentioned yesterday – God changed us.

God can do the same for you today. Perhaps your love has died, pray and ask God to give you "one heart" with that special person in your life.

When God changes us, it doesn't mean that we don't have to make an effort on our part, but it does mean that our efforts are birthed in desire not just duty.

This is my prayer for you: "Oh God, use this devotional to heal a marriage today; to restore a friendship and even to retie the cords of devotion in someone's relationship with You."

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 119:37

THURSDAY: May 21, 2009: *"Chance favors the prepared."*

- ☐ John 20:24 & 26
- ☐ V.24 **Now Thomas...was not with them when Jesus came.**
- ☐ V.26 **Now after eight days...**

I am so glad that Jesus is a God of second chances. I was reminded of this recently when I read about Thomas.

After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples to encourage and instruct them. But Thomas was not there. The Bible doesn't say why he wasn't, just that he wasn't.

Maybe he was running an errand for the group. Maybe he slept in that day. Maybe he had taken a sick day. Maybe he was caught in traffic. I don't know why, but I do know that he missed a great opportunity.

But thank God for second chances! Eight day later, Thomas was there and Jesus, in his mercy, showed up again. Matter of fact, He showed up just for Thomas.

Perhaps you've missed some opportunities in your life. Perhaps there are some things you'd do differently if you knew then what you know now. Sorry – you can't go back. But, you can look forward. Jesus is truly a God of second chances. Look to Him today – He is pointing you to a better future.

SCRIPTURE: John 20:24-31