



Theme: Good, Good News!

“Good News and Great Strength”

Weekly Memory Verse: *²⁸ Have you never heard? Have you never understood? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. He never grows weak or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding.* –Isaiah 40:28

Family Activity for the Week: Without Jesus, where would we be? He IS the Good News! Take a second to write a list of words that describe Jesus. Compare them to a friend's. Where did the two of yours differ? Where were they similar? Could you find Scripture verses that help you describe Jesus even more fully? Are there instances in your life where Jesus showed up? What did He help you feel? God is so very good to us, but in our humanness we can forget. Remind yourself and others just how loved you and those around you are!

Monday, February 8 – Read Isaiah 40:27-31. Today's readings likely came from a time when the Israelites were returning to their ruined land (or about to return) after decades in exile. There were no “Babylon to Jerusalem” flights—words like “stumble” and “walk” reflected the only way most exiles got home. The walking exiles were weary and feared that God was too. But Isaiah said God “doesn't grow tired or weary.” Israel (and we) could always trust in God, because God-given hope (not hope in our own power) renews our strength.

- ▲ Can you recall times when you have felt like the Israelites in Isaiah 40:27: “My way is hidden from the LORD, my God ignores my predicament”? Are there areas of your life that feel that way to you right now as we all deal with the conditions created by the Covid-19 outbreak? In what ways can you reconnect with the Creator who “doesn't grow tired or weary” of caring for you?
- ▲ Isaiah wrote, “His understanding is beyond human reach” in verse 28. Our need to control, our challenge with “letting go,” inevitably runs into our inability to control time and disease. Even the best health and fitness programs cannot (honestly) promise to fully halt aging or infection. How can really trusting in a God who's vastly wiser than you are renew your strength by setting you free from the need to try to control life's uncontrollable realities?

Prayer: Lord God, full of eternal energy, you remain the same creative, caring God you've always been. Help me learn more and more to trust your timeless love. Amen.

Tuesday, February 9 – Read 1 Corinthians 9:16-23. Paul sets the stage for a striking reflection on his own calling as apostle and provides a refreshing resource for our reflection on what it means to be called, commissioned to serve God and our neighbor, and proclaim the Good News. One of Paul's most oft-quoted phrases is verse 22, that he will be “all things to all people.” Among the Jews, Paul is a committed and observant Jew, as he proudly declares also in Philippians 3:4-6. To those under the law, Paul will conduct himself as one also under the law, even though he shares in verse 20 that he is not subject to that law. To those outside the law, he will appear and present himself as

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one also outside of the law, even though, in a potentially confusing turn-around, he is “not free from God’s law” (verse 21). To the weak, Paul will give himself as one who is weak, though he has reason to boast.

- ▲ As with most familiar things, one must be careful not to read “all things to all people” as though Paul is saying that “everything goes.” What Paul is driving at is not some pluralist vision of all things being equal. He is driven by the need to deliver the gospel to all people, not just the chosen people or the insiders. Why is Paul willing to do this? Why be all things to all people? Why risk appearing a chameleon of compromise? Why give up freedom for servitude?
- ▲ For Paul, this is not a question, or a matter of choice. It is a matter of necessity, of compulsion, of imperative. It is the Good News that is for all people, the gospel that drives him to reach out both to Jew and to Gentile, to the one struggling under the burden of the law and the one blissfully ignorant of its demands. For Paul the gospel is needed by both kinds of people, it is the one thing that is for all people. This is why he does what he does. We are asked what motivates us for the work that we share as co-workers with Paul in the proclamation of the gospel. Let it be the joy that is Paul’s, for the sake of the gospel, so that we may share all its blessings with all people. How do you feel God calling you to share that Good News in your home, neighborhood or work?

Prayer: God, you have placed people in my life so I might share the Good News. Help to see each person as you do and open to my heart to be all things to all people, while holding onto the truth of who you are. Amen.

Wednesday, February 10 – Read Psalm 118:5-6, 28-29. Psalm 118 was the last *hallel* (hymn of praise) Hebrews sang at Passover as they recalled God freeing Israel from slavery in Egypt. [Mark 14:23-26](#) showed that Jesus, on the dark night just before his arrest and crucifixion, likely sang, “The Lord is for me—I won’t be afraid. What can anyone do to me?” and, “Give thanks to the Lord because he is good, because his faithful love lasts forever.” Even the darkness gathering around him couldn’t stop him from praising God’s eternal goodness.

- ▲ The Psalmist asked, simply yet profoundly, “The Lord is for me.... What can anyone do to me?” To what extent are you able to trust that God is indeed “for” you? How much stronger is your level of trust on a sunny morning when all is going well than on a cold, gray day when you’ve received sad news? During a year full of good news, personally or globally than during a year like 2020?
- ▲ Robert Emmons, who researches happiness and gratitude, wrote, “It is vital to make a distinction between feeling grateful and being grateful.... We cannot easily will ourselves to feel grateful, less depressed, or happy... being grateful is a choice... that endures and is relatively immune to the gains and losses that flow in and out of our lives.... [T]his perspective is *hard to achieve*—but my research says it is *worth the effort*.” How did Jesus singing Psalm 118 just before he faced the cross show his choice to be grateful? How can you nurture gratitude for even basic gifts like shelter, food—and life itself?

Prayer: Loving Lord, my goal is to remember that you are for me, so I won't be afraid. My goal is to never forget that your faithful love lasts forever. I don't always reach that goal, yet. I ask your continued presence with me to help me grow toward the goal. Amen.

Thursday, February 11 – Read 2 Corinthians 11:23-33. Scholar N. T. Wright writes about what makes this passage unusual: “In Roman culture, one of the standard things every public figure could do was to list his achievements... the teachers who have influenced the church in Paul’s absence have been going in exactly that direction... they have wallowed in a culture of fame and success and showy rhetoric. To answer them, Paul lists his own ‘achievements’, all of them things any normal person in the Roman world would be too ashamed even to mention.”

- ▲ Roman culture was not radically different from ours. Monuments, civic buildings and other sites bore inscriptions praising wealthy donors; civic assemblies featured the voices of the powerful; public culture revolved around power. Boasting in weakness challenged the very values on which most boasts were founded— values antithetical to the good news of a crucified savior. What draws you to follow the good news of a crucified savior rather than the lure of power or wealth?
- ▲ Wright posed the profound challenge of Paul’s message. “Somehow the church in Corinth, and the church in the world of today, have to learn to stand normal cultural values on their head, to live the upside-down life, or

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rather the right-way-up life, of the true servants of the Messiah.” How can letting Jesus rework your values give you greater resilience that basing your life on trying to gain power or applause (which can easily slip away)?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, when you lived on earth, no one would have worn a piece of “cross” jewelry. Yet you changed the world more than all the self-important emperors, then or since. Teach me how to follow in your powerful footsteps. Amen.

Friday, February 12 – Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. Later in 2 Corinthians, the apostle Paul honestly told his Christian friends of the many difficulties he faced as a traveling preacher. He related that he had prayed earnestly for God to remove a “thorn” in his body, an unspecified physical ailment. Whatever it was (perhaps poor eyesight), it clearly was a hindrance to his missionary travels. God did not take the ailment away. Yet Paul’s trust in God was such that he took that experience as a message saying, “my grace is enough for you.”

- ▲ Paul did not blame God for his ailment—he called it “a messenger from Satan,” not from God. He said he “pleaded with the Lord three times for it to leave me alone.” How good a case can you imagine Paul, who often traveled on foot, making for God to give him full health? Did having his physical struggle continue mean God didn’t care about him? Or was he right in seeing it as a further message about God’s grace at work in his life?
- ▲ Our culture, like the Roman and Greek cultures of Paul’s day, values being “strong.” We often define “strong” as “standing on your own two feet,” being tough enough to handle any problem. Yet scholar N. T. Wright called “My grace is enough for you,” one of the most comforting, healing, reassuring and steadying “words of the Lord” ever recorded. In what ways have you found that “when I’m weak, *then* I’m strong,” that relying on God’s grace makes you stronger than you could ever be on your own?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I’m not as invulnerable as I sometimes think I am. I’m grateful that your grace is with me even in times of struggle, and your power can work through the weakness I wish I didn’t have. Amen.

Saturday, February 13 – Read Philippians 4:8-9. If we read this passage abstractly, it may sound syrupy and naive. But again, the apostle Paul wrote, not in some peaceful meadow or Sunday School room, but in a chilly, damp Roman prison cell. God’s people have proved Paul’s challenging words true over and over through the centuries. What we train ourselves to focus on can weaken or strengthen our relationship to God and to other people.

- ▲ Paul linked our ability to live in God’s peace with the mental “diet” we select. His counsel was, “If anything is excellent and if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things: all that is true, all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely, and all that is worthy of praise” (verse 8). How well do those words describe what reality TV or celebrity tweets seem to focus on? Can they help you live with more peace and a stronger connection with God?
- ▲ The Greek phrase rendered “focus your thoughts” means more than “keep in mind” or “think about.” It is instead about reflecting carefully upon them so that they may shape our conduct. These good qualities are not just good for the head, but things that need to be put into action. They can become our strength to live out the Good News. How can you (with help if needed) train yourself to focus your thoughts that way? How can focusing mainly on the good in those you care about improve your relationships?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, teach me how to think your thoughts. Guide me into a thought life obsessed, not with fear, anger or ugliness, but with all that is excellent and admirable. Amen.