

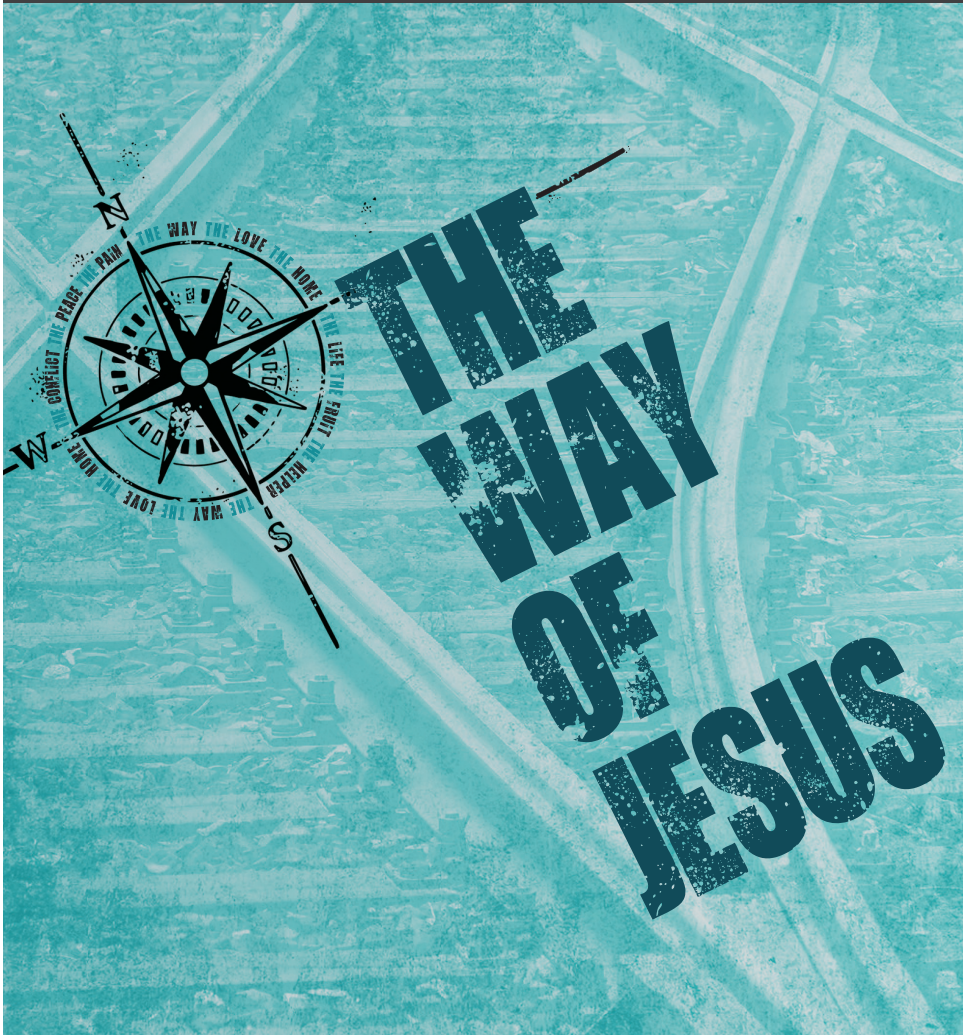
GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

# The DEVO

JUNE 22 - 26, 2020



# MONDAY

## Read John 15:18 - 16:4

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*“Man’s feelings are always purest and most glowing in the hour of meeting and farewell.” —Jean Paul Richter*

Last words are often held and remembered as treasured possessions. Throughout this last meal before Jesus goes to the cross (John 13-16), He has demonstrated and commanded that we are to love each other. He has promised them that they will receive the Holy Spirit who will unite them with Jesus and the Father and give them the peace of Christ. They will also bear much fruit in His name.

Now Jesus promises one more thing: persecution. Jesus wants us to know how to respond well to persecution. He will model it for them in the days to come. In this passage, there are four things we need to know about persecution.

1. We are to know and expect that it is coming. Jesus said: *“If (since) the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated Me first (v. 18). ... “If (since) they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also (v. 20b). ... But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: ‘They hated Me without reason’” (v. 25).* Expected difficulties are always better than unexpected difficulties as we can prepare mentally, practically, and spiritually before the struggle.
2. We are to know why persecution is coming. Jesus said: *“If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you (v. 19). ... They will treat you this*

*way because of My name, for they do not know the One who sent Me (v. 21a). ... They have no excuse for their sin” (22b).*

3. We are to know the help we have during persecution. Jesus said: *“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father ... He will testify about Me” (v. 26).* The Advocate is the Holy Spirit, the third person of the trinity. He is omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent.
4. We are to know what we are called to do. Jesus said: *“And you also must testify” (v. 27a).* We are called to live and speak what we believe as followers of Jesus. Jesus’ Great Commission in Matthew 28:20 closes with these last words: *“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Ask God to help you prepare well for the persecution and difficulties you will face in following Jesus. Thank God for the presence, power, and guidance of the Holy Spirit to testify of Christ with integrity, boldness, and great joy.

## QUESTIONS

What do you think of the criticism declaring that the Church today does not adequately stress the cost of discipleship, including persecution, in balance with the advantages of Christianity?

## PRAYERS FOR HOMEWORK HOUSE

Pray for the leadership, staff and volunteers at Homework House. Pray that they would know how to support Azusa families through COVID-19—educationally, financially, and through health/wellness efforts.

# TUESDAY

Read Matthew 5:10, 10:24; John 15:18 - 16:4

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If you are extraordinarily happy, you might describe what you are feeling as *beatitude*. The noun *beatitude* refers to “a state of great joy.” *Beatitude* inherited its blessedness from the Latin word *beatus*, meaning both “happy” and “blessed.”

*Jesus said, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10).*

Jesus taught this beatitude early in His ministry. Already in His mind was the future time that will mark the lives of all followers of Jesus. In His final week Jesus will face verbal and physical abuse, arrests, trials, and crucifixion led by the religious leaders because of His life and His teachings. Jesus declares, “A *disciple is not above his teacher*” (Matthew 10:24). Those who follow Jesus with a righteous life and by His teaching can expect to be attacked by people who are threatened by the truth.

Today thousands of believers around the world experience severe beatings, imprisonments, and even death because they stand up for Christ. In our culture, our lives are seldom threatened, but we may suffer ridicule and exclusion when we stand up for righteousness’ sake. What does this look like? A person takes over a community project that is financially struggling from someone and things turn around. When both are asked about the difference in the “bottom line,” the truth comes out. The other person begins a smear campaign against the one who did the right thing. A high schooler may refuse to participate in gossip on social media and finds he

is excluded and the victim of gossip. A young single person is committed to abstinence and faces scorn and ridicule from peers. The examples are endless. When we choose to do right for Christ's sake, many will cheer, but some will mock and deride us unmercifully.

Jesus promises "the kingdom of heaven" to those who follow His example. In this case, He tells us that when we are ridiculed—or worse—for following Him, we will experience His presence, peace, and strength. The price of obedience is steep, but the reward is sweeter.

Pray for Christians around the world who are persecuted that they may have the sense of Jesus' presence, peace, and strength. Ask God to help you encourage and cheer for those around you who are struggling and suffering through both overt and subtle persecutions.

## QUESTIONS

Have you or someone you know ever been ridiculed for doing the right thing? Describe the experience. Based on this passage, is it worth it to be persecuted for Christ's sake? Why or why not?

## PRAYERS FOR HOMEWORK HOUSE

Pray for those who are serving through Homework House that they will know how to advocate for Azusa families through COVID-19.

# WEDNESDAY

## Read Matthew 5:11-12

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“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” —Martin Luther King, Jr.

Doing the right thing no matter what others may do to you is so important that Jesus goes back a second time to address the issue of persecution for believers. (See Tuesday’s devo for the first time.) Read today’s Scripture verses to understand how Jesus elaborates on the types of attacks we may experience when we follow Him.

Jesus said: *“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you”* (Matthew 5:11-12).

Jesus understood that we would experience reviling and lies, and he warned that our enemies would become so enraged by the truth to attempt murder. The church’s history tells us that the original disciples died as martyrs. James was killed with a sword, Peter was crucified, and John died in exile. John wrote that people *“loved darkness”* and *“hated the light because their deeds were evil”* (3:19-20). In our day, people continue to love darkness as much as ever, but they ignore or reject and criticize us instead of using physical attacks.

In the Old Testament, prophets like Moses, Amos, Daniel, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and others were often mocked, hated, and mistreated for bringing God's message to the people. Jesus compares their sacrifice for God with the sacrifice we make when we stand up for Him today! Our reward (v. 12) parallels the one the prophets received.

Being blessed with rewards for being persecuted sounds odd, but I take it to mean the losses in this short life will be outmeasured by the treasure of Christ in eternity. So, if you have stood strong for Christ but escaped persecution, be thankful and realize that today many around the world experience severe treatment because they stand up for Jesus.

Ask God for faith and obedience to do the right thing despite what others may do or say to us or about us. Thank Jesus for His ultimate sacrifice that forever changes our lives so that we may love Him and His world forever.

## QUESTIONS

What does it mean to you that Jesus compared us to the Old Testament prophets? In this passage, Jesus promised great reward for our faith. What do you think he meant?

## PRAYERS FOR HOMEWORK HOUSE

Pray for the mental health for the Homework House staff during COVID-19.

# THURSDAY

## Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10; Roman 8:28

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Paul said: *“That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong”* (2 Corinthians 12:10).

A 1993 study of the Soviet archives revealed between 14 and 18 million people were imprisoned in the Gulag labor camps from 1929 to 1953. The types of prisoners ranged from petty criminals to political prisoners. Paul regarded himself as a prisoner for Christ’s sake (Ephesians 4:1).

Many years ago, a man was arrested in the Soviet Union. He was sentenced to twenty years of hard labor in the Siberian gulag. Seven days a week and fourteen hours a day, he worked in fierce cold in the winter and with swarms of ravenous insects in the summer. Some men died from exhaustion and disease, and most of the survivors became bitter and hardened. This man, though, found Christ through the faithful testimony of a fellow prisoner, and his days of labor took on a new meaning. He learned to thank God for the meager food ration, and he learned to experience joy in that desolate place. A few Christian friends there were the light of his life, and he was able to find peace. On the day he was released, the man walked out of the gates and kissed the walls of the prison camp. “Here,” he explained, “I found God, and He found me, and I am so thankful.”



Suffering is to be expected as a follower of Christ. We naturally try to construct our lives to avoid it if possible; but sooner or later, suffering weasels its way into our experience. We can either embrace it as a tutor to teach us the deepest, richest lessons of life; or we can despise suffering and our hearts grow cold and hard.

Weakness is not fun and is not pretty, but admitting our weaknesses to God is the first step to trusting Him and experiencing His great strength. Paul was so convinced that suffering produces good that he took pleasure in it. But suffering itself did not produce wisdom, perspective, and strength in Paul's life. Suffering for Christ's sake is the key; trusting Jesus to turn it into something good (Romans 8:28) produces fruit in Christ's name (John 15:16).

Thank God for his love and grace that can bring good out of our suffering and help us reach out to others, helping them to know the love of God through Jesus Christ. Pray that God will give each of us a ministry that will set every prisoner free in His love.

## QUESTIONS

How do you normally respond to suffering (especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic)? How would it help to believe God can turn suffering into something good in your life?

## PRAYERS FOR HOMEWORK HOUSE

Pray for unity for the Homework House leadership as they navigate COVID-19.

# FRIDAY

**Read Colossians 4:2-3; Ephesians 6:19; 2 Thessalonians 3:2**

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Paul said: *“And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains”* (Colossians 4:3).

God’s heart is for His world. As we grow closer to Jesus, our heart for the world will also grow. Taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth was commissioned by Christ to every believer (Matthew 28:18-20). While not all of us are called to be on the front lines spearheading church plants and hacking away at the proverbial brush to advance God’s kingdom, we are called to do *something*. There are many opportunities to participate in missions at Glenkirk Church (even considering COVID-19).

Many of you already support missionaries in prayer and give them financial backing. I am ashamed to admit that it has been my pattern to give a monthly/yearly check for global missions, but I fail to pray for them on a regular basis. Paul asked for both money and more often prayer for his mission work. Here are things we can pray daily this week:

Pray for OPEN DOORS (Colossians 4:2-3)

- Pray that God will open doors of ministry, blessing partnerships and friendships.
- Pray that God will lead his people past barriers to hearts ready to receive the Word.
- Pray for boldness (Ephesians 6:19). Missionaries are regular people who fear rejection and pain, too.

- Pray that the Holy Spirit will give words that communicate effectively in other cultures and languages.
- Pray that missionaries will overcome the fear of failure, embarrassment, and rejection.

Pray for PROTECTION (2 Thessalonians 3:2-3)

- Pray for strength and stamina as missionaries encounter antagonistic spiritual forces.
- Pray that God will keep them safe from physical harm.
- Pray that God will change the hearts of those who are resistant to His Word.

There are many other things you can pray for missions and missionaries, and there are many programs and ministries you can financially support. The question is where God is calling you to become more involved in loving His world today.

## QUESTIONS

If you do not already support missions in some capacity, what steps will you take this week? How have you been a part of a mission project and what benefits did it receive from your participation and support?

## PRAYERS FOR HOMEWORK HOUSE

Pray for the Homework House staff to be wise stewards of their resources as they implement safety protocols.

## Sources

- Jean Paul Richter's quote can be found at <https://www.powerquotations.com/quote/mans-feelings-are-always-purest>
- Martin Luther King, Jr.'s quote can be found at [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/martin\\_luther\\_king\\_jr\\_109228](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/martin_luther_king_jr_109228)
- The story in Thursday's devo can be found at <https://godbegod.com/strength-in-weakness/>

