

Day One

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible verse that is the basis of this morning's devotion from Portals of Prayer is Ephesians 5:1 – "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children." Reading the immediate context, that we are to be imitators as dearly loved children imitate their father.

Knowing that we are dearly loved is the key. If we don't know that we are dearly loved by God, then our imitation is done in order to gain something. We imitate in order to gain favor – to gain the love of the one we imitate.

But that's not what Paul is writing here. We are to imitate God because we have been dearly loved by Him. We are to do it in response to what we have received. As Paul goes on to write in Ephesians 5:2, we are to love as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us.

There are certain aspects of Christ's love for us that we can't imitate. We can't die as a sacrifice for sin. We can't give our life as a ransom for all who are prisoners of sin. We can't undo the curse of Adam that hangs over our heads.

But we can imitate Jesus in His choice to love. We can, by the power of God alive in us, choose to love those who are hard to love. We can choose to love our enemies – to love those who persecute us. We can choose to love the unlovable.

And in so doing, we become Jesus' hands and feet as He works through us to reveal Himself to those in need of His love and peace.

Day Two

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Today's devotion focuses on the use of the Shofar (the ram's horn trumpet). Joel 2:1 is a call to blow that trumpet – to sound an alarm – to grab the attention of the people. The author of today's devotion from Portals of Prayer gives a description of the uses of the Shofar. And that raises the question: What does God use today to get our attention?

"When the shrill sounds of the *shofar* blasted among the Jewish people, they stopped and took note. God involves Himself in human history and reminds us that he is and He cares. Just think for a moment: the Creator of the universe is greatly concerned with us, His creation. He hears the sound of the *shofar* as a reminder to Himself that we are His and He loves us.

According to Jewish tradition, the *shofar* sounded at the beginning of creation. At Jericho, the sound of the *shofar* brought down the walls as Israel marched around. The *shofar* heralds each new month and each new year. One is to hear one hundred blasts of the *shofar* on Rosh Ha Shannah, the Jewish New Year.

The *shofar* is to herald the return of the Messiah, our King. For with His return we will be called to the judgment seat. Those who are in Christ will spend eternity with the Lord in heaven. Those who are not believers will be conscripted to hell. Which would you prefer for yourself? your family? your friends? the uncounted billions around the world?

The sound of the *shofar* should be the alarm that wakes us up to the urgency of reaching a lost world for Christ.

Day Three

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Isaiah 2:3 is the focus of this morning's devotion from Portals of Prayer. In its immediate context, God is speaking about the last days – about the end times. Usually conversations about the end times focuses on wars and rumors of wars, the mark of the beast, Armageddon and more.

Here in this verse, God is telling us that in the last days nations will flock to His holy mountain. They will be drawn to Him. They will come to Him in order to learn from Him. The Christian Church is evidence that we are in the last days. We are all numbered among the nations – the Gentiles – who have been drawn to the mountain of the Lord.

The mountain of the Lord is a theme throughout Scripture. There is Mount Zion, Mount Horeb, Mount Carmel and the Mount of Transfiguration. All of those mountains were places where God met with man. We could add to that Mount Calvary. On that mount, God and man were present in the person of Jesus Christ.

On that mount, Jesus bore the sin of the world. He endured all of its consequences. He died the death that we deserve as descendants of Adam, so that we could live. So when Isaiah talks of going up to the mountain of the Lord to learn from Him, we go to the cross where we learn from Jesus the way of salvation.

Jesus comes to us through the Scriptures to teach us His ways – to show us the way of salvation – to create in us the faith that clings to the hope that is our in Jesus and the forgiveness of sins He won for us through His life, death and resurrection.

Day Four

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“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” Even though God tells us here not to be anxious, He is actually recognizing that anxiety comes upon us for a variety of reasons.

What God is saying is that, in those anxious times, don’t become inactive. Don’t become a victim. Do something. Develop a plan and work the plan. There is nothing worse that we can do when we get anxious than to let our worries overcome us – paralyze us. The only defense is to do something in spite of the anxiety we feel.

And God gives us a plan. He gives us direction. He tells us to pray – to make our requests known to God. He invites us to tell Him what is causing us anxiety. He invites us to unload our burdens.

What He, who already knows what burdens us, is telling us to do is to speak it for our own good. Naming the “demon” is the first step to moving through the anxiety. By bringing it to God in prayer – by bringing it out into the open – anxiety’s power over us is diminished. By bringing it to God in prayer, we are saying to our anxiety that we are moving forward trusting in our heavenly Father to lead us through to the other side – to bring us to those quiet waters and green pastures that David wrote about in Psalm 23.

The cross and the empty tomb remind us that we are on the winning team. We have been joined together with Jesus in His victory over sin and death. Our future is secure. We are more than conquerors in Christ and there is nothing in all of creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Day Five

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Today’s devotion from Portals of Prayer focuses on special times of reflection. The text is Isaiah 58:1-2 in which Isaiah is instructed by God to declare to God’s people their transgressions. Isaiah is to declare their need for a Savior.

God then tells Isaiah that His people seek Him daily and delight to know His ways. So God’s people are sinful beings who delight to know God’s ways. How can that be? Sin is rebellion against God and His ways. How can you delight in what you are rebelling against?

First, we need to remember that God is speaking to His people – to those He has chosen to be His own – to those who are already members of His Church. This is not a message to those outside that relationship – to those who don’t yet know the one true God.

Luther would say that we, as blood bought children of God, are saint and sinner at the same time. By the power of God’s Word at work through the waters of Baptism, we have died with Christ and been raised to new life. In Christ we are a new creation – a new person who delights to know God’s ways.

But we still live with our sinful flesh (inherited from Adam) that is still in rebellion against God. We still sin. We still fall short. Seeing our sin – reflecting on our sin – points us back to the cross where Jesus died the death that sets us free from the power of sin. He died the death that we deserve so that He could then give us new life in His resurrection that He shares with us.

Day Six

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The series on 2 Corinthians 12:9 here in Portals of Prayer concludes with a focus on YOU. God gets personal in His revelation. All that He promises, all that He has fulfilled in the saving work of Jesus Christ is for YOU.

“Today is our final consideration of 2 Corinthians 12:9. This verse became personal to me when a dear family friend was diagnosed with cancer, rocking the world of everyone who knew him and his wonderful family. As I meditated on each word of the verse, it gave me great hope to pray it on behalf of our friends.

Perhaps you or someone you love has something difficult going on right now, some thorn you’d like removed. In these circumstances, we can fall into the trap of comparison. Why is this hard thing happening to me but not to this other person? Sometimes we might even ask why things are so good for us right now when other people are suffering. Peter wanted to know if John’s future would be the same as his own (John 21:22).

Jesus gave the antidote to comparison: relationship. He didn’t want Peter to compare; He wanted him fully engaged in his own relationship with Christ. He wanted Paul to know, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, *Paul*.’ He wants us to know that promise is for us, too, and for whom we pray. We can confidently fill our own name into the blank: ‘My grace is sufficient for you, _____, for My power is made perfect in weakness.’”