

Weekly Devotional Guide – April 12th – April 17th

Monday, April 12: *Mark 7:24-30* -- Were the words of Jesus overly harsh?

You came for the broken, the sick, the outsider, and the sinner. You bring salvation for all people completely independent of religious merit but totally dependant on Your grace. This woman knew that as a Gentile and as a woman dealing with unclean spirits with her daughter, she would have been considered untouchable to a Jew, especially to a rabbi. You did not turn her away but engaged with her. We are all spiritually broken, sick, and condemned and are alienated from You because of our sin. Give me unwavering faith to not be deterred by who I am not, but have the faith to lay my concerns at Your feet because of who You are. Lord, often You speak in parables, using metaphors to get a message across. Your word pictures of small dogs or puppies under a table of children was a test of her faith and unlike the disciples, she got it. She knew that You were speaking of the order or hierarchy to who you had come. But she believed in the abundance of Your mercy that even the crumbs from Your table were enough. Like the dogs, she had nothing to offer, but she recognized Your authority and understood her dependence on Your mercy. She was not demanding her rights, as is common today. She was not saying that she deserved anything but was instead asking for what she didn't deserve on the basis of Your goodness. Help me to recognize my desperate need for Your mercy. It's only when I realize that I have no leverage in my position before You that I will hear and understand Your voice and call on my life. Let my genuine faith provide courage and hope to act on my trust in You and at the same time humbly approach Your throne with my requests. Jesus, I humbly lay at Your feet placing myself at Your mercy. I lean on Your grace alone. Amen

Tuesday, April 13: *Mark 7:31-37* -- Why do you think Jesus used this method to heal the man?

You are a loving and compassionate Lord. You treat each person as an individual. You know each of us personally and your response to each of us is customized for what we each need and who we are. I am touched by your response to the personal needs of the deaf man in today's reading. You showed consideration for the feelings of the deaf man when you took him away from the crowd. When a deaf person starts to hear again, every sound would seem very loud. It would not be pleasant for the man if he were in a noisy crowd. You couldn't tell the man what you were doing so You used actions to get his attention. You showed the man what you were going to do, by first touching his ears. In those days people believed that spit could cure people and the man could see that You were intending to cure him when you spit. By touching his tongue You communicated to him that You would make a difference in his speech. You then showed the man that the power to cure would come from Your Father above when You looked up to heaven. Your actions showed that You understood human reaction and emotion. You demonstrated Your love to this man just as You demonstrate Your love to me. Thank You, Lord, for knowing me so intimately. You respond to me based on who I am and what I need. You understand my pain. It is personal. You are a loving God and You are compassionate with what I am going through right now. Help me to also consider the personal needs of others and respond in love. Allow me to treat each person as an individual and have compassion for them. Let me find ways to respect who they are and have concern for the challenges they face in their own life. And even when I don't know what they are going through, let me respond in kindness. Lord, I thank You for loving me and teaching me how to love. Thank You for my personal relationship with You. You are a loving Father and I worship You. Amen

Wednesday, April 14: *Mark 8:1-21* -- What does hardness of heart mean to you?

Lord, I pray that you would keep my heart open and tender and keep my mind stayed on you. There is so much in this world that can certainly lead me away from your goodness even though you have shown me time and time again of your goodness and faithfulness to me. Even in doing good Lord, I need to be aware of my motivation and ensure that you are glorified in my words and actions. I pray that my words would not cause undue hurt to someone as I seek to serve in your name. May my words and actions bring glory to you. Help me to understand and accept that there will be people who refuse to see your goodness, you just ask that we may try to sow seeds where we can,

Thursday, April 15: *Mark 8:22-9:1* -- What do you do when you are angry at God?

Things in life don't always turn out the way we want them to. The blind man didn't ask to be blind and had hardships because of it. Peter wanted You to be King and didn't want You to die. The way of the cross was hard and painful. We all go through stuff we don't like and sometimes it makes us angry. There are often times when I pray for things that I want and it doesn't happen. There are times I pray for things I don't want and it happens anyway. Forgive me when I think of You as a big genie in the sky who should only give me good things and prevent the bad. Lord thank You for listening when I complain to You and that You wait for me when I am too angry to even speak to You. Thank You that You welcome me to share my honest feelings with You. You know what's going on inside of me anyway, but You want me to be able to come to You with honesty and openness. You not only keep loving me when I am mad, but You keep providing for my every need. You always answer my prayers in ways that are better for me even when I don't understand. I only see in part but You know what is best. When I share my feelings with you remind me that You are sovereign and all-knowing. Help me when I face trials that seem so huge that I struggle to trust You. No matter what happens in my life, help me remember how great Your love is for me. You faced suffering and death out of Your love for me. One day I will understand the mysteries that are here. Take my focus off of me, my needs and wants, and instead find joy and peace from the hardships of life as I get involved to help other people through their tough times. Warm my heart with Your love as I release all my concerns and hurts to You. I know that if I trust in You and believe in You, that I can have Your peace even in the hard times. We pray this in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Friday, April 16: *Psalms 41* -- Why is what is promised (verse 1-3) so different from David's experience (verse 4-9)?

It is good to regard the weak with a generous heart and to be kind. Help me to consider the poor and lead me to take appropriate actions toward those who are helpless and weak. Through loving others, I know that I too will be blessed. You promise to deliver me in times of trouble and to protect me, but it doesn't mean that I won't have trouble. You promise to sustain me and to heal me, but that doesn't mean that I won't experience times of anxiety. There may be periods of illness, times of troubles, and when enemies intentionally slander me, But in the midst of troubles, Your goodness remains. Your promise of protection is not dependent on me always getting it right. I recognize that I am a sinner. Doing good to others does not erase my sins. Only Your death on the cross can do that. Lord, thank you for all the blessings you have poured out on me. Thank you for your promise to deliver me in times of trouble, sickness, and slander. Father, help me today to enjoy your pleasure and your presence in the midst of all the challenges and difficulties of life. Amen

Saturday, April 17: *Ecclesiastes 2:17-26* -- Do you see work as a gift from God, drudgery, or both?

There was a time in my life when climbing that corporate ladder was what was most important to me. I poured my effort and skill into my career where it had taken priority in my life. It became my identity. I was seriously stressed and obsessed with my work because it was who I was. It became an overwhelming weight on me that I couldn't sustain. That changed when in my desperation I re-committed my life to You and opened my heart to Your Spirit. You changed my mode of operation from being career-driven to being people-driven. Although I continued to pour out my heart into my job, I was more focused on helping other people achieve success and it was very fulfilling to see people learn and grow. I worked through people to accomplished the corporate goals, but I still hung on to my work identity. Then the day came when I lost my job. All those hours, all that dedication, all that passion blew away in the wind and I was left not knowing who I was. But You were there with me and transformed me to be God-driven. From You, I have learned that working is a gift. It not only provides for my financial needs but I find satisfaction in continuing to learn new things, by utilizing my skills to add value for my employer and to contribute alongside fellow workers. I have learned to be a good steward with the results of my labor and to be generous with my finances, my time, and all that You have given me by creating balance in my life. My job is not who I am. My family is not who I am. I am a child of God and my identity is now in You. Your Word gives me guidance to do my work with honesty, integrity, and honor. I want to please You in whatever I do. It doesn't matter what the job that I am tasked with, I commit it to You. Let me find joy in what I am doing in all aspects of my life and do it well. Guide me to be an example of Your love at work, at home, at church, in public, and in private. You are my source of wisdom, knowledge, and happiness. In work, in retirement, in play, or anything I do in life, let my fulfillment come from You. Use what You have given me to make a difference for You. Amen