



Restoration

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.
The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."
2 Corinthians 5:17

This book of devotions is a gesture of thanks to you from Lord's Gym Ministries.
With it, we hope that you will continue to "grow strong in the Lord." Ephesians 6:10



Our Mission

"...grow strong in the Lord..." Eph. 6:10

GO to people in need in Greater Cincinnati neighborhoods.

CREATE safe places.

DEMONSTRATE God's love in practical ways.

DECLARE the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit.

DEVELOP disciples of Jesus Christ.

ENCOURAGE self-responsibility.

Welcome Note

Restoration is a continuous theme at Lord's Gym Ministries. On a daily basis we witness the "old pass away behold the new" in the lives of our friends. The Lord is actively working to make, not only our friends, but also our staff, our volunteers, our partners, and our supporters "a new creation."

This is a process that takes time. It is a beautiful thing to watch the Lord's transformative power at work in so many lives. I cannot reiterate enough how grateful we are to have been used by the Lord in the this way all these years; soon to be 30.

We are also very grateful for the Lord's direction and provision. This year we saw a 110-year-old building, once a popular nightclub, transform into a Family Activity Center with the purpose of spreading the Gospel. Many times, we have pointed out that this renovation is symbolic of the transformations the Lord is working in the lives of all those He touches through Lord's Gym Ministries.

You have played an integral role in this restoration, as well as the restorations represented. You have prayed, you have volunteered and you have invested in this "city on a hill" that will bring "light" into the darkness and shine the way to Jesus.

We are so grateful for you. We have put together this month-long book of devotions for you as a sentiment of our gratitude. Please use it in your personal studies. The theme of course is "Restoration." Restoration is a process of transformation. We are a mess, branded by our sin, but the Lord has come to cleanse us, He makes us white as snow. May this little booklet help you along your restoration journey. Stand Firm.

- Scott Bowers
Executive Director

Day 1

By Vicky Gentry
Administrative Assistant

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “restoration” as the bringing back to a former position or condition. In Joel 2:25-26 the Word says: “And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you.”

This is a promise to Israel from the Lord. God’s covenant remains with His people, Israel, even in times of disobedience. God always kept His promise to Israel. After the great tribulation and the Battle of Armageddon, God will restore and save all of Israel. God is faithful and true. He will complete and follow through with His promises.

This is also a lesson for us gentile believers, His children. He is faithful in His promises to us. We are “fearfully and wonderfully made,” according to Psalm 139:14. Some of us, however, have been deeply hurt by others as a child or recently. We have sinned and have done things that cause us to feel guilt and shame. We sometimes think we will never get over these hurts. We may suffer with anxiety or depression; insecurities or anger; and many other symptoms as a result. We may feel stuck and can’t find our way out. But, God!

God knows what you have been through. He sees your pain. Remember Jesus suffered and died on the cross. He was hurt and mistreated by many. He was totally rejected. If we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior and repent of our sins, He will save us. He will always be there for us to comfort and guide us. We can always run to the Father and share our hurts with Him.

It is always good to share our hurts with a trusted friend too. When we do this, it brings our hurts into the Light (Jesus). It’s here that He can heal our wounds and totally restore us. If we keep our hurts stuffed inside, then our hearts harden with anger, anxiety, insecurities, depression, and many other bad symptoms.

Matthew 6:33 says: “But seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” I urge you to run to the Father, spend time in the Word, confess your sins, give God your hurts and allow Him to restore you back to His “fearfully and wonderfully made” creation.

Day 2

By Danny Gomez
Director of Family Activity Center

God is a God of covenants. In the Bible, we see how God chooses the Hebrews. He takes them out of slavery, takes them out of Egypt, and gives them His promises and blessings. He tells them that they will be His people and He will be their God; He will bless them and multiply them greatly. Abraham, Moses, and David are the protagonists who carry out these covenants. The redeemed people joyfully accept the pact, but throughout their journey, the people of Israel always want to experience the unknown.

The journey of the people of God becomes cyclical: The people disobey God. God raises up a prophet to warn them, but they continue to disobey. God justly punishes them. The people repent and offer sacrifices. God forgives.

What patience and what mercy God has to cope with this cyclical behavior. God, Who knows the end of everything from the beginning, always has a plan. The Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, and the Davidic covenant were progressive revelations that were advancing and pointing to a one-sacrifice covenant that would no longer be temporary.

The covenant with Abraham represents a great nation and a great offspring. The covenant of Moses represents God's commandments, His statutes, and His conquests. And, the covenant of King David represents the lineage of a King Whose kingdom would never end. The prophet Isaiah announced the arrival of that King 700 years before His appearance. The world would soon have a Savior and a King called the "Messiah" and through Him and His sacrifice, all the nations of the world would be blessed.

This history is what Christians more than 2,000 years ago called the history of redemption and restoration. This history points to Jesus Christ.

In your journey, how many pacts and covenants have you broken with your cyclical behavior? How many people have you promised to free from their slavery, and you haven't? How many people are still waiting for your help? Where do all the good and bad experiences of your journey point?

Day 3

By Melissa Reinert
Communications Coordinator



We live in a society that thrives on instant gratification. Literally at your fingertips you have the abilities to Google your question; order your food; or send a note to your friend. You don't even have to dial their number and wait for them to pick up, just click his or her name and text away!

It's wonderfully convenient for sure. However, this constant access to instant gratification can have a negative impact on our character and create unrealistic expectations in our spiritual lives.

We begin to assume that everything should be instant. Even change in ourselves and others. Some things, however, just take time. We still put our pants on one leg at time, for example. Similarly, every day we must follow Ephesians 4:22-24 and "put off your old self and "put on the new self." It's a process. It's God's process, a part of His design, as we grow and develop in relationship with Him.

This year, our Family Activity Center in Price Hill underwent a renovation. Often we have referred to the renovation process as a metaphor for the transformation of our friends who we pray for and minister to daily. Their transformation, like that in our own lives, like the renovation of the FAC, takes time. Look at 2 Peter 2:9: "The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."



*Our FAC transformation video can be
viewed at www.LordsGymMinistries.org*

Day 4

By Melissa Reinert
Communications Coordinator

A large part of restoration involves resiliency. Restoration takes time and there are many obstacles that pop up along the way. Over the next several days we're going to discuss the characteristics of resiliency. Let's dive in...

Resiliency is the ability to cope with whatever life throws at you. When knocked down and out by challenges, those resilient return stronger and more steadfast. So how exactly do you do that?

One key is the ability to hope when life throws the hard punches. When circumstances are difficult and beyond our control, it's easy to lose hope. That's why it's so important that we prep ourselves. We must cultivate hope. We do this by growing our faith. Hebrews 11:1, says: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." .

Look at Moses. Moses' life started off quite complicated. He was born in a time when his people, the Hebrews, were enslaved by the Egyptians. They were poor, had no rights, and endured hard labor and cruel treatment. To make matters worse, the pharaoh at the time of Moses' birth ruled that all Hebrew children under 2 be killed. Moses' mother hid him and eventually placed him in a basket and sent him down the river. He floated to safety – pharaoh's daughter.

Complications continued for Moses despite a life of luxury in the pharaoh's palace. He was always torn between two worlds and eventually chose the narrow path of God's calling.

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." Hebrews 11:24-26.

Moses answered God's call to lead the Hebrews out of slavery. He had to face a hard-hearted ruthless pharaoh. Moses had many challenges leading God's often stubborn and ungrateful people. The punches thrown were gut-pounding.

Moses remained steadfast. He kept His faith in God and built a strong relationship with Him. This increased His faith. This increased his hope. Moses saw a brighter future for his people and himself. He saw a future with God.

Day 5

By Melissa Reinert
Communications Coordinator

Confidence and resilience go hand in hand. Resilience, as we learned yesterday, is the ability to bounce back from challenges, i.e., toughness. Confidence is defined as the feeling or belief that one can rely on someone or something, i.e., firm trust.

Those who are resilient possess a deep belief, supported by strongly held values, that life is meaningful. They are confident that whatever they may face, they will get through and become better in the process.

Confidence goes beyond believing in oneself, however, when you are a follower of Jesus. As followers of Christ, we define self-esteem as having confidence in who God says we are, not who we think we are or should be or who others think we are or should be.

Psalm 139:13-14 reads: "For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful; I know that full well."

Know with confidence that you are not a mistake. You were not made wrong. You were carefully put together by the Lord with great love. He placed you where you are without mistake, as well. As for the challenges that come, yes, He knows about them, and He put within you what you need to face them; firm trust in Him.

In the face of adversity, we have our trust in God to deliver us. In Psalm 27:3, King David writes: "Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident." David was king but his life of luxury was also marred by life's troubles. Many a time he was a target for hate and wanted dead even by those closest to him.

His focus in Psalm 27, which I encourage you to read, is on trust. Although there are moments of doubt and fear (verse 9), he returns to his experiences. God saved him before and He will save Him again. David was always resilient, whether it be watching a flock of sheep, facing the giant Goliath, or dodging the unsolicited wrath of King Saul. He kept going. He kept going because he held on firmly to his trust in God – validated by his own life experiences.

Day 6

By Melissa Reinert
Communications Coordinator

At its core, resilience means the ability to successfully engage with challenges and opportunities brought to us by life. Through this we develop the competencies necessary to take on the future – and to make that future a good one. Competence is our ability to do something successfully and efficiently.

This goes beyond accomplishing a goal or completing a task well. We must also be able to develop appropriate responses to our failures and shortcomings, which undoubtedly, we will always face. This is part of our personal learning and maturing process. Here's a look at some scriptures that give us insight into how to increase our competency.

- Proverbs 15:22: "Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established." It is important to have friends we can trust and confide in. We are more likely to find success with our plans when we consider the wise counsel of godly friends. Therefore, it is essential that we surround ourselves with those who genuinely love us and seek our best interest. Godly friends are especially important as spiritual moral sounding boards. These friends provide helpful insight into our lives and circumstances. Their guidance can point us to the right path. These extra set of eyes on our lives, can create awareness of things we may not have otherwise considered. They challenge and encourage us to be our best.
- Proverbs 16:3: "Commit your works to the Lord, and your plans will be established." Whatever you do, do it for the glory of God. Whether you're studying for that difficult math test; flipping burgers or sitting behind the CEO desk... do it as if you're working directly for God. Take it a step further and commit your entire life to the Lord. Live with integrity. Work honestly. If you seek Him in all these things, with all your heart, then you will indeed find Him. You'll discover the life you're living is for His glory. You'll have hope for the future and it's sure to be a good one; as Jerimiah 29:11 says: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope."

CONTINUES TOMORROW

Day 7

By Melissa Reinert
Communications Coordinator

CONTINUED FROM YESTERDAY

Yesterday, we looked at scriptures to help us develop competency. We discussed the importance of Godly counsel and how we need to live our lives completely for the Lord. Today, let's continue with the following scriptures about our strength in Jesus and making a difference.

- Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me."
When the going gets tough, the tough seek Jesus. A life with Jesus presents us a unique kind of hope and peace that surpasses all understanding. Difficulties will always arise; you'll fail the math test; you'll lose that job; you may get sick. Christians are not exempt from life's challenges. With Jesus, however, you have a special inner strength that is given by the Holy Spirit; you can and will overcome these things. You have the hope of the Lord, life with Him on this Earth and after this Earth. With this knowledge you can respond to failures and shortcomings with great strength. You'll learn. You'll keep on. You'll do better.
- 2 Peter 1:3: "...as His divine power has been given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue." In our knowledge of God, we have everything we need for life. We have to look no further than the example of Jesus. He lived a very fulfilled life – He made a difference. Jesus didn't have fancy transportation or a nice house. He didn't wear the best clothes. He didn't take big vacations. Yet, His life was full and satisfying. It was because He loved. He loved people and He took the time to get to know them and help them. Our Lord has a servant's heart. If we're looking to grow in knowledge on how to live this life – Jesus is the example to follow.

These scriptures show us what it takes to take on the future and to make that future a good one. We need godly counsel, we need Jesus, we need to respond with strength, and we need to love others like Jesus. Not only will this knowledge help us face our future and make it bright, but the impact we'll make will change other lives – the world.

Day 8

By Melissa Reinert
Communications Coordinator

Have you ever wondered what you have to offer? This question isn't about money, time, or talent. It delves into your soul and challenges your personal core. So, what do you have to offer? My friend, you have yourself, the most meaningful and important thing you can contribute to this world. An essential building block of resilience is knowing you can make meaningful contributions.

There is purpose in contributing. Contribution is an important part of one's resilient attitude and makes the process of restoration worthwhile. "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." 2 Corinthians 9:6.

So do not doubt. You have so much to offer, if only you are willing. When you personally contribute to the world, you are making it a better place. Your life has purpose. When you have purpose, you're driven. As we have learned from the previous devotions, drive fuels the wonderful and unique quality of resilience.

Contribution isn't easy, however. It takes sacrifice. Such sacrifices are challenging when you are engaging yourself to make a difference in the world around you. Such sacrifices are tiring, but oh so rewarding. Hebrews 13:16 says: "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." These sacrifices often involve sharing what you have, as well as your heart. Giving your heart along with the sacrifice; therein is the true gift – yourself. It's difficult yes; it's risky, yes; but how else are you going to make an impact.

Let's take a quick look at the life of American abolitionist and social activist Harriet Tubman. She was once quoted as saying: "Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world." Harriet was born into slavery, escaped and subsequently made some 13 missions to rescue about 70 slaves, using the network of anti-slavery activists and safe houses known as the Underground Railroad. It was risky. I'm sure there were many moments of fear. Harriet, however, had given her heart to her mission. She remained resilient. She reached for the stars and the lives of many were changed and inspired... the world changed. You know what you have to offer. You know what you must do. Get to it. Be resilient.

Day 9

By Melissa Reinert
Communications Coordinator

It's often said a person's true character is revealed in the face of adversity. Their attitude toward the trial and their response, or how they handle it, reveals who they truly are. Strong character and resilience are closely intertwined. Those who possess both know how to deal with adversity and maintain a positive disposition. They don't complain. They don't give up. They push. They succeed.

Again, resiliency is defined as the ability to cope with whatever life throws at you. When knocked down and out by challenges, those resilient return stronger and more steadfast than ever. Their character – the mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual – is the key to their strength.

Paul's approach to preaching the Gospel is one of many examples of resiliency in the Bible. After his life-altering encounter with Jesus in Acts 9, the popular Jewish religious leader became a radical Christian to the disenchantment of many. Unhappy with his message, his enemies beat, stoned, criticized, jailed, and nearly killed him several times.

One great example of his resiliency is when he was in Lystra, in Asia Minor, he was stoned, dragged out of the city, and left for dead. Once his enemies disbanded, Paul simply got up and returned to the city. His work to tell others about Jesus continued unabated. Godly resilience produces character that enables us to be undeterred, regardless of the opposition. Paul wrote in Romans 5:4: "Endurance produces character, and character produces hope."

Another who demonstrated great character in his resiliency is Job. Job lost everything – his wealth, health and even his family. Job experienced great agony deep within his body and soul. Yet, he refused to turn His back on God or give up. Despite his relentless suffering, he knew that God was in control. This allowed Job to endure. His endurance produced character and his character hope. He held tight to his faith. In the end, his faith was met with great reward.

Our character will influence our resilience and our resilience will influence our character. Work your character and resilience to your advantage. Be positive. Approach adversity head on. Don't complain. Don't give up. Push through.

Day 10

By Melissa Reinert
Communications Coordinator



We may not always have control over our circumstances, but we always have control over how we respond to our circumstances.

To motivate a life-transforming culture at Lord's Gym Ministries we use the formula, Event + Response = Outcome ($E+R=O$). This formula is a mindset that fuels resiliency.

Here's how it works: Events, are always happening, we respond to these, then there's the outcome or objective. This is predetermined. We have zero control over the events or circumstances. Although we can influence it, we don't have complete control over the outcome. We do, however, have complete control over how we respond.

Control is all about our mindset. Here's an example of $E+R=O$: The E: I didn't get the job I applied for. My R options: a. Dwell on the rejection or give up on finding a new job. b. Work to improve my skills and keep moving forward with applying for other opportunities. The O: Finding the right job in time.

Applying this formula will make us more resilient and will help us put things in perspective. This mindset will allow us to focus on handling well what we can control.

Those who are resilient are emotionally agile. They don't lend a blind eye to negative feelings nor do they allow themselves to be immersed in negative emotions.

CONTINUES TOMORROW

Day 11

By Melissa Reinert
Communications Coordinator

CONTINUED FROM YESTERDAY

Many things in life, like birth and death, are impossible to avoid. Recognizing this, control is often described as having two critical components, primary and secondary control. Primary control involves the ability to be able to change a situation. Secondary involves the ability to change how you think about a situation.

With primary change, we can take the initiative to modify a difficult situation in a bold act. Other times, most often, altering our situation just isn't possible. This must be accepted, and secondary control must take charge. This involves finding the most positive way to think about the situation.

As followers of Jesus, a great way to approach secondary control is to remember that God is ultimately in control and, no matter how it may seem, He has our best interests at heart. “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” Jeremiah 29:11.

Even when our circumstances are undesirable; it's important to also remember that the Lord works those situations for our good. “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.” Romans 8:28

Often times in life, we need to just let go and let God.

“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary and His understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint.” Isaiah 40:28-31.

Day 12

By Scott Bowers
Executive Director



When riding my bike across the United States I was so impressed with the different farmlands and crops being raised. I believe we have witnessed a demonstrative agreement about our spiritual growth play out between the farmer and God.

Growth is a partnership with God as we respond to God's Word.

This reminds me of the book, "The Pursuit of Holiness" by Jerry Bridges.

Bridges uses this metaphor in his book as follows: "A farmer plows his field, sows the seed, and fertilizes and cultivates – all the while knowing that in the final analysis, he is utterly dependent on forces outside of himself. He knows he cannot cause the seed to germinate, nor can he produce the rain and sunshine for growing and harvesting the crop. For a successful harvest, he is dependent on these things from God.

YET, the farmer knows that unless he diligently pursues (discipline) his responsibility to plow, plant, fertilize, and cultivate, he cannot expect a harvest at the end of the season. In a sense, he is in a partnership with God, and he will reap its benefits only when he has fulfilled his responsibilities.

Farming is a joint venture between God and the farmer. The farmer cannot do what God must do, and God will not do what the farmer should do." (pages. xi-xii, Preface)

The growth started with a vision by the farmer, implemented with cultivation, sustained by discipline, and motivated by faith.

How is your spiritual growth? Are you doing the basic things necessary such as reading God's word, obeying it, praying, having a quiet time, and worshipping/fellowshipping at a good church? Something to think about.

Day 13

By Scott Bowers
Executive Director

Eph 6:12-13 reads: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then..."

Paul says our battle is not with people! Hit the pause button. Let that comment sink in! With whom is our battle? Paul makes the audacious statement that it is with powerful beings from a spiritual realm. That is an intense allegation and sobering reality! If his comment is true, which I believe it is, then it is a statement that should get our attention. It gets mine.

Paul then goes on to encourage us to do everything in our power to “stand firm” against the beings from this spiritual realm. He lists seven things, using the metaphor of a Roman soldier’s fighting equipment used to protect himself and engage in the battle. Paul says, in Ephesians 6:13-18 (and expounded upon by John Stott in his book *The Message of Ephesians*) to:

- Wear the belt of truth. This is grasping that God has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. Our conduct is, to be honest and truthful.
- Wear the breastplate of righteousness. We are to grasp that our righteousness, or justification, is through Christ’s shed blood, atoning death, and resurrection. We have our righteousness in Christ – he enables us to fight temptation.
- Wear the boots or sandals of readiness. We stand firm with the boots. This is knowing and sharing the good news of the Gospel. This includes salvation and how to walk out our faith.
- Hold on to the shield of Faith. This is resting in knowing that God is our protector.

CONTINUES TOMORROW

Day 14

By Scott Bowers
Executive Director



CONTINUED FROM YESTERDAY

Today, we continue our look into Ephesians 6:13-18, learning about what it means to put on the full armor of God.

- Wear the helmet of salvation. This is standing fast on knowing that we have the assurance of our salvation and eternal life in Christ.
- Wield the Sword of the Spirit. This is meditating, understanding, and recalling God's infallible word for both defensive and offensive purposes.
- Pray without ceasing. We have direct access to the God of the cosmos Who we call Father, and Jesus Christ is there interceding on our behalf.

These seven tactics, when collectively brought to bear in our daily thought process, will help us to withstand the personal attacks that we encounter in our spiritual battles. The fight is a relentless one. We will battle or wrestle until the day we die.

It is a staggering thought to know that from now on, since coming to know Jesus, we are in a spiritual battle with unseen forces and not people. Press the pause button AGAIN! Let the idea of spiritual warfare sink in. This is not science fiction or a dream of Paul's.

Day 15

By Tom Lipsey
Director of Ministry Partner Development



Matthew 9:2-6b reads: "Some men brought to Him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the man, 'Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven... Get up, take up your mat and go home.'"

This is one of my favorite stories in the Scriptures. It's a picture of life. Everyone in life experiences paralysis of some type: Some physical, some social, some emotional, some relational, and all of us spiritual. It's so nice that this man had friends who cared for him enough to get him into the presence of Jesus, the great Healer. Mark's version of this story (Mark 2:1-12) says that the man's friends had to push through the vast crowd and tear a hole in the roof to lower the man into the room with Jesus. So, here's this man, unable to help himself. He has friends, however, who care and who want to help. Helping him isn't easy. The man's friends had to figure out a way to get him to the roof. Then they had to tear open a hole in the roof and lower him into the presence of Jesus. This is a great picture of passion and persistence leading to God's redeeming love.

Life is not easy. We need to surround ourselves with friends who know Jesus, the "difference maker." We are not made to do the journey of life alone. Sometimes, life is so difficult, it's hard for us to have faith that things will get better. I think it's remarkable that the text says that when Jesus saw *their* faith, and then he forgave the man of his sins and healed him. Life can get us so down we can't get up. At times like this, we need friends of faith like the paralytic had.

Will you be that kind of friend and help someone in need? Will you do all within your power to get them to a place where they can have an encounter with Jesus' redeeming love and transformative power?

Day 16

By Tom Lipsey
Director of Ministry Partner Development



In Celebrate Recovery (Christian-based recovery) we have a saying that we are as healthy as our deepest secrets. Think about that. We are as healthy as we are honest with ourselves, God and others. We are as free as we are able to turn to God and bring things into the Light. It's there, in the Light, that God will defuse our sins of their negative power, so we can tap into God's abundance for us; as He meant it to be.

So, our spiritual (and sometimes physical) health and personal well-being come when we stop hiding. God isn't looking to hold things against us, but to release us from the negative destructive powers of our sins and admonitions. He longs to release us into our inherent blessings in Christ Jesus. It's in the Light that God removes our sins and their negative effect. Then, we are released to begin experiencing the blessings we are destined for in Christ.

This coming out from secrets and bringing our lives into the Light before the Spirit is what the New Testament calls repentance. Simply stated, repentance means a change of mind that brings forth a change of heart. This brings forth a change of life direction, that brings forth life as God meant it to be experienced. When we finally get to the place of repentance, the flood gates of God's blessings are released.

Acts 3:19-20 says: "Repent then and turn to God (best definition of repentance ever) so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that He may send the Christ who has been appointed for you - even Jesus."

Who doesn't want their sins removed and refreshment breathed upon them? Who doesn't want Christ to show up in and through their lives? Best thing I ever did was to turn to God and stop hiding. Life in the Light is life as it was meant to be!

Day 17

By Melissa Reinert
Communications Coordinator



Today, we're going to read the passage Matthew 6:24-33. Tomorrow we will discuss its meaning for our lives.

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Therefore, I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

Therefore, do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

CONTINUES TOMORROW

Day 18

By Melissa Reinert
Communications Coordinator

CONTINUED FROM YESTERDAY

Matthew 6:24 reads: “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

I love the Lord. I also love His blessings. There’s nothing wrong with that of course, we should appreciate all that He gives to us. However, we cannot allow the love of His blessings to overpower our love for Him.

This is something that I’ve found myself struggling with of late. I think this is something, if we’re honest, we all struggle with from time to time.

God has blessed me with wonderful people and experiences throughout my life. I’m so grateful. But sometimes, I get more focused on the getting than I do on the Giver. It’s almost, as my pastor (also my husband) said one Sunday: “Sometimes we treat the Lord like a vending machine.”

Basically, I go to the Lord asking Him to meet a need or want. I expect him to immediately dispense my “selection.” When He doesn’t, I may get irritated or impatient and even bang on the glass to speed the vending process. That’s not how God’s kingdom works. And that’s not how I should treat my Lord and Savior.

Instead of expecting more or even staying focused on keeping all the blessings I have now, I need to be more focused on loving my Lord.

Matthew 6:24, tells us that we cannot serve two masters. God must come first. Loving God must be No. 1 on our agenda.

As the passage goes on to say, life is so much more than our needs and wants – food and clothing. We don’t need to worry about these things. Instead, as verse 33 says, we need to first seek God!

Life with the Lord is so much more than His blessing. It’s about being loved by Him and loving Him. It’s about building and walking in relationship with Jesus. Therein, you’ll find the truest blessing one can have on this earth; simply the presence of Jesus.

Day 19

By Melissa Reinert
Communications Coordinator



My youngest and I were on a ride at Kings Island this summer and a conversation we shared reminded me of my own circumstances in life and my relationship with the Lord.

My youngest is 4 and this was a “big” ride for him, an amusement park classic, a log flume with a tall hill, about 40-feet high, as the grand finale.

He enjoyed all the splashing throughout the ride, but as our "log" climbed the depths of the hill, I could feel him stiffening up. I held him tightly. He said to me: "Ma, I'm scared. I don't want to do this."

I felt so bad for him, because, unfortunately it was too late to change his mind. He had decided to ride and now was faced with the consequences of rolling down that big "scary" hill.

I immediately reassured him, however, that he was OK. "We can't stop the ride," I said. "We have to go over the hill. But that's OK, we can do this and we'll do it together. I'm with you. Jesus is with us and it's going to be OK."

We took a deep breath and over we went. SPLASH!

With a cautious smile, I could tell he was relieved to be back on the ground. We made it. Although, it was scary and difficult, together we lived through the challenge. He happily went on to the next adventure, maybe a little more careful about what he chose to ride (avoiding those big drops.)

My son's reluctance reminds me of my own regret of some decisions I've made. Sometimes we choose to do the wrong thing. We sin. We mess up. And often, even after we repent, we still have to face the consequences. It's rarely easy to do that. Just as I assured my son, the Lord reassures me, He reassures us, that He is with us. Together, we will get through the difficult circumstances and as we walk with the Lord, we will grow wiser and learn from our mistakes.

Day 20

By Melissa Reinert
Communications Coordinator



Joshua 1:9 reads: "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Earlier this spring, the Lord's Gym Ministry team partook in a team-building exercise: Kayaking six miles on the Little Miami River. This was only my second time kayaking and it was my first-time riding solo in the kayak. Riding by myself was my decision and it was a big one for me, a non-swimming, inexperienced kayaker. The journey was amazing.

I chose riding solo because I wanted to put myself in a situation where I was completely reliant on God. I also wanted the opportunity to steer in my own strength, or rather, what I later would learn to be His strength.

It was smooth sailing. A lovely day, comfortable weather, calm waters... until things got a little rocky. About 40 minutes into floating, almost effortlessly, I found myself stuck. I was wedged between a few rocks that were hiding under those smooth waters.

At first, I was surprised, as often we are by hardships that come our way. How did I get here? After a moment's pause, it made sense that there would be rocks under the water, after all this was a natural river. Why wouldn't there be rocks below the surface? It's like coming to the realization that we live in a fallen world where sin and hardships surround all of us at every turn.

CONTINUES TOMORROW

Day 21

By Melissa Reinert
Communications Coordinator



CONTINUED FROM YESTERDAY

Back to the rocks. I had to get loose. I kept thrusting my paddle into the water on my left, hoping to hoist myself up enough off the rocks for the quiet current to pull me back into motion. Despite the use of all my strength, my plan was not working.

I was starting to panic. I was frustrated. How will I get off these rocks? I must look like a weakling. I kept thrashing the paddle down on that left side. The kayak was not budging. I was beginning to regret that cookie time I had shared with my son the night before. A little less weight and maybe my efforts would be fruitful. I kept pushing the paddle into the rocks and sand on the left side. The kayak stayed put.

Suddenly it became clear. I needed to pray. I rested my arms and asked God to get me off these rocks. "The other side," I heard deep within my conscience. One of my teammates nearby yelled to me to try the other side too. Confirmation. I needed to try the other side.

So, with all my might, I again shoved my paddle down into the rocks and sand, this time on the right side. Within a few seconds I was free.

I got stuck two more times. I prayed. Remained calm and tried different methods and always became free. A few of my teammates had their fair share of rock time along the way too. Two even tumbled out of their kayak. Thank the Lord they were safe and did what we all have to do in life, climb back aboard and keep going.

My experience taught me that I can't rely on my own strength. I need God. I need to take time, even in the midst of busyness and trouble, to go to Him. He has the right answers. Always.

Day 22

By Emily Moreno
Covington Women's Chaplain

"'Other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great.' As He said these things, He would call out, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear.'" Luke 8:8

I was sitting in a morning meeting when God gave me a vision. The vision was of a garden. As I was sitting in the garden, I was grabbing handfuls of extremely rich soil. The soil was running through my fingers and it was soft and dark. I looked to the left of me at the rest of the garden. The ground was dry and hard. That side of the garden seemed desolate. God showed me the process of making the soil rich. We have to till it, water it over and over again. Sometimes we have to add other resources like compost. Then we till it and water it and continue the process as much as we need. It's the only way to make the soil rich enough to even plant the seed. We have all been dry and desolate in our hardened hearts. God did not give up on us. He continued to send people to help get the soil rich and fertile.

There have been many come though the ministry with hardened hearts. Dry and desolate, they keep coming and because of that seeds are falling on rich soil. We speak love and kindness over them; the water and the tilling. We come alongside and do life with them; the resources we can plug into them as we are tilling. Nothing is wasted, it all gets used. We don't get angry and walk away. If we do, then nothing gets planted and no one gets fed. Not even us. We learn how to labor with love so God can have the greatest harvest.

There are several women I have worked with that I have wanted to wash my hands of and be done with; just like Pilate did with Jesus. But, God showed me this vision in a crucial time in my life. He reminded me that I'm a laborer and that I may never see the harvest. It's not my harvest. I'm supposed to make the soil rich and plant the seed. I need to sing joyous praise and I do so. Washing my hands of anyone is never going to glorify God.

Abba, I ask to be a strong laborer for you. Make every aspect of me strong; my head to my feet; my mind, soul and body. Search me Lord, and help me rid myself of offense and burden. Help me love like You love and work like You work. I want more than anything for You to have a bountiful harvest.

Day 23

By Melissa Reinert
Communications Coordinator

For the last two years, my family has been blessed with an extra four-legged member, a beautiful Beagle mix. We named her Bo Peep, paying homage to my young son's love for the *Toy Story* movies. Alas, he once called her Bobo and it was just such a sweet sound to the ears, it stuck. So, she is our Bobo.

Bobo is first and foremost a gentle soul. She's playful and loving, however, she often gets herself into mischief. During one of the last days of this summer season we were out playing in the yard. Bobo eerily disappeared for a bit, and I knew... she was getting herself into trouble. I yelled the Bobo call and she bounced from the back of our yard to me. OH, THE SMELL!

We have a spacious yard that bumps back into a wooded area. Unfortunately, some small animal had met its finality back behind our little storage shed near the woods. Especially unfortunate for me, Bobo had discovered the carcass and had enthusiastically rolled herself into it borrowing the very nasty stench.

"Oh, Bobo," I said in disgust. I had no choice. I turned up my nose and rolled up my sleeves to bathe her. It was not fun. As my suffering commenced, it occurred to me I was being given a glimpse of what my sin is like to the Lord.

The Lord detests sin. He is a holy and perfect God. Sin is deeply offensive to Him, to His heart, His core. As much as I hated the smell Bobo was oozing, it didn't even compare to the stench I exude to the Lord in my sin. Fortunately, the Lord is also a loving and merciful God. Romans 5:8 reads: "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Just as I cleaned Bobo up from her misadventures, so Jesus cleanses us from all our sins. Even as Christians, we struggle with sin and continually need to humble ourselves before the Lord in repentance for His cleansing.

In Leviticus 20:26 the Lord tells the Israelites: "And you shall be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine." We too, as Christians, are separated from the world; set apart for the Lord. This is an ongoing process, just as keeping my stinky Bobo clean is an ongoing process. When we fall short, we must go to the Lord, repent, and He will forgive and wash us up.

Day 24

By James Davies
Covington Volunteer



No matter the circumstances or situations going on in life, we follow and serve a God who desires to be called on to help us. More importantly, He loves us even when we stumble. Jesus is there to forgive us in the moments we're failing, to comfort us when we're suffering, and heal us when we're hurting.

I know this to be true because after being homeless for 20 years, He gave me an apartment after turning to Him and trusting in His mercy. He blessed me by showing me His true faithfulness. A lot of my disobedience was due to my addiction and not laying my burdens at His feet. But now I've learned to fully surrender everything to Him. Sometimes we make things much harder on ourselves when we forget Who's really in control.

Life gets much better when we transition from, "I know God is real," to actually living a vibrant life with Jesus at the center of everything we do. Be in a constant state of prayer, things just work out better! Let's face it – He's right next to us, all around us, and wants to love, keep and guide us – how could we not surrender everything to Someone like that? It all belongs to Him anyway, right?

Ask and ye shall receive His grace, knock and the door to salvation shall be opened, seek and you shall find His redeeming blood!

Thank you, Jesus, for being Who was, Who is, and Who is to come. You are the Great I AM, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.

Taste and see that He is good!

Day 25

By Melissa Reinert
Communications Coordinator

Being thankful keeps us in good standing. It keeps us humble and reliant on the Lord as well as joyful in all circumstances. Jesus lived His life in thanks. Let's take a look at three things He was grateful for.

- Prayer: "So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, 'Father, I thank You that You have heard me. I know that You always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that You sent Me.'" John 11: 41-42. Wow. Have you ever stopped to think about how amazing it is to be able to pray to God. Through prayer we have a direct connection to build a relationship to the Almighty – the very Creator of the heavens and earth. What a beautiful thing.
- Daily Provision: "And He directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, He gave thanks and broke the loaves..." Matthew 14:19. "Then He took the seven loaves and the fish, and when He had given thanks, He broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people." Matthew 15:36. We need to follow Jesus' example and rely on the Lord for His daily provision for our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. We also need to give thanks and praise for all He has given. Remember, it's not about getting everything we want. It's about getting what we need, sustainment from the Lord God, our Father.
- The cross: "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples saying, 'Take and eat; this is My body.' Then He took a cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you.'" Matthew 26:26-27. Jesus knew what was about to come. He, however, accepted God's will and He focused on the big picture - His sacrifice would save the world. "For God so loved the world that He sent His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." John 3:16.

Day 26

By Melissa Reinert
Communications Coordinator



Psalm 37:23 says that the Lord: "directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives."

Many years ago, at a very lonely time in my life, I was at the grocery store shopping, and I came across some beautiful flowers.

The petals were gorgeously wrapped with one of my favorite colors – orange. These flowers were the perfect gift for me. And I wished I had someone in my life who would gift them to me. Then, I realized, I did... God.

He put those flowers in the right place at the right time for me to see and enjoy them. I smiled. I was reminded that I'm not alone.

Years before while at a Bible study, a good friend had shared this wonderful and very truthful idea: When we see something we really enjoy, like a deer in the woods, or a random wild bunny in our yard... it is a gift from God, just to us.

God delves out His blessings even in the little details of our day.

Day 27

By Melissa Reinert
Communications Coordinator



Job 5:15-16 reads: “But He saves the needy from the sword, from the mouth of the mighty, and from their hand. So, the poor have hope, and injustice shuts her mouth.”

What is the Lord doing?

The Lord is readily saving the needy and showering hope on the lives of the poor. With His almighty hand, He is sealing shut the mouth of injustice. He’s doing this every day, even right here in Cincinnati.

The Lord is bringing His righteousness upon the people – children and adults – who are living in poverty and surrounded by violence. The Lord is doing a good work and He wants us, as faithful believers to take part in this glorious undertaking. This is indeed the greatest things we can do for the Lord.

In Mark chapter 12, a teacher of the law asks Jesus: “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

Jesus doesn’t hesitate with His reply: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”

It’s important to note too that Jesus didn’t stop here. He goes on to say: “The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

It’s interesting to note that Jesus considers these two ideas as one commandment. The two are so intertwined. It’s simple. If you love God, then you love people. Our lives, as believers, should be about living for the Lord. That means, answering His greatest call—loving others.

Day 28

By Melissa Reinert
Communications Coordinator

Psalm 51

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving kindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.

Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight - that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge.

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You.

Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise. For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart - these, O God, You will not despise.

Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; build the walls of Jerusalem. Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering; then they shall offer bulls on Your altar."

Day 29

By Lynn Woods II
STreet OutReach Ministry (STORM) Chaplain

Chaplain Lynn partakes in spoken word, which refers to an oral poetic performance art that is based mainly on the poem as well as the performer's aesthetic qualities. It is a late 20th century continuation of an ancient oral artistic tradition that focuses on the aesthetics of recitation and word play, such as the performer's live intonation and voice inflection. Here is one of his pieces...

Maybe you never had questions and you've always believed. Maybe you've never doubted He was born to die so that we could live.

And if you never wrestled with grasping the substance to justify your faith, then blessed are you who have believed without seeing.

To walk by faith and not by sight is not an easy skill to comprehend. Thomas couldn't believe unless he felt the holes in Christ's hands, which I understand.

It's a challenging thing to believe a manger born boy was King of Kings thrust into earth to eradicate death's sting while calling common men to be leaders.

I remember Peter one day declaring Christ was the son of the living God, but after being sifted by Satan denied he even knew this Son of the living God. I wonder if the rooster crowing thrice was louder than the voice of Christ asking Peter if He loved Him more? Did Christ's voice shatter the shame of Peter's shortcomings, which compelled Him to do more?

Did Mary Magdalene love Him more because she was forgiven much? When she saw the tomb was empty, did her soul rejoice and erupt in a praise that could not be contained because the Savior of all men died to live again? And because of this encounter Mary could now face her tomorrows with Him.

See something happens when you encounter the cross that you know "changes everything." One may call it a defining moment, a turning point that points you to the One. The One Who makes all things new and old things pass away - the failures in your yesterday will not hold you prisoner in your future.



Your future is so bright you shine in the midst of darkness. In the midst of darkness you overcome. Christ rose in the midst of darkness defeating death and grave in one.

Undeclared, unconquered, unbeaten, unfinished Christ's work on the cross was finished; Satan's futile plan diminished.

Ultimate victory through the Gospel's mystery sings heaven's symphony a beautiful song. I join with the angels in worship because Christ saw I was worth it. Even still far from perfect, He died for my wrongs.

I was dead in my trespasses but resurrected like Lazarus. Called to speak to the masses let my life-song sing. Let my life-song sing of the freedom He brings. His death, burial and resurrection changes everything.

Day 30


By Lynn Woods II

STreet OutReach Ministry (STORM) Chaplain

Leaving the comfort of Northwest Florida to embrace the call of Southwest Ohio may seem to be the wrong move for many. Saying bye to the beautiful beaches and sunsets in a tourist area known as Santa Rosa Beach to be thrust into the battlefield of Cincinnati known as Price Hill, would boggle some of the most brilliant minds. It's a battlefield of homelessness, unemployment, poverty, prostitution and drug addiction. However, where most people see obstacles, I see opportunities for the Light of the Gospel to overcome darkness. I'm foolish enough to believe that homelessness, unemployment, poverty, prostitution and drug addiction can be reduced or even eliminated when the right people show up and believe God for the impossible! (Matthew 19:26).

I've come to realize that obedience is better than sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22) and I would even say obedience is more rewarding than anything you must sacrifice to obey. Disobedience will always tempt you to choose comfort over calling but how many people do we put in jeopardy when we run from something God is calling us to? (Jonah 1:10-12). Imagine how many Israelites would have stayed trapped in captivity under the rule of a ruthless pharaoh had Moses chosen comfort over the call of God on his life (Hebrews 11:25). How many people in our everyday life are suffering from day to day because there are no "good Samaritans" being moved with compassion to lovingly care for our neighbors in need? (Luke 10:25-37).

Father God, as we choose Your calling over our comfort, let Your Holy Spirit anoint us to preach the Gospel to the poor. Remind us how it felt to be broken-hearted and use us to heal those who are broken-hearted! Give us the boldness to proclaim liberty to those who are captive and hope to those who feel hopeless. Let those who are spiritually blind receive sight from the truth of Your Word. Let Your Holy Spirit move on us and through us to bring liberty to those who are bound and let Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven that Your name would be glorified forever and ever! Amen

 **YouTube** *Jesus in the Hood:* <https://bit.ly/LWSpokenWord>



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Info@LordsGymMinistries.org
Ph: 513-621-5300
P.O. Box 5099
Cincinnati, OH 45205