

THIS IS US

Part 2: What On Earth Am I Here For?
Ephesians 1:10-11

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Words of Encouragement Days 147-154



At different times in our lives, it is good to pause, stop what we are doing, and ask the question 'why'. Why am I doing this? What am I doing? Why am I doing it? The answer to the question 'why' always determines 'how' and 'how long'.

THIS IS US, the first series of the brand-new year, will help us pause and ask what is 'church' and why do we do it?

Join us as we investigate 'church' and remind ourselves what church is really all about.

This Week's Memory Verse:

**“For by Him all things were created:
things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible,
whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities;
all things were created by Him and for Him.”
Colossians 1:16**

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 147

The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is His faithfulness; His mercies begin afresh each morning. I say to myself, "The Lord is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in Him!" Lamentations 3:22-24

DAY-TIGHT COMPARTMENTS

IN 1913, Sir William Osler, the Father of Modern Medicine, delivered a speech at Yale University with a simple message: "Live in day-tight compartments." Osler had just traveled the Atlantic Ocean via ocean liner, and the captain of the ship had demonstrated to him how, by pressing a single button, he could turn parts of the ship into watertight compartments. Leveraging that machinery as a metaphor, Osler likened each of us to an ocean liner on a long voyage. "Touch a button and hear, at every level of your life, the iron doors shutting out the Past—the dead yesterdays. Touch another and shut off, with a metal curtain, the Future—the unborn to-morrows."

We find in this metaphor a key to living boldly each day empowered by the Holy Spirit. Our days are all about pressing that button and unleashing the power of God in our lives twenty-four hours a day. Burying dead yesterdays can be difficult and imagining unborn tomorrows involves labor, but if you want to walk in God's power, there is no other way. Long ago, Moses wrote in Psalm 90:12 "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." If you want every day to count, if you want to "win the day", you have to count the days. How? We do so by living as though each day is the first day and last day of our lives, which is both an art and a science.

In these next few devotionals, we will discuss seven habits designed to help us *win the day*. As with all new habits, this process won't be easy, and it won't happen overnight, but if you put these seven habits into practice, you will win on a lot more days than you lose. You will also learn ways to stress less and accomplish more. So before we begin, let me ask a question: *Would you try it for a day?*

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, I know that no matter what habit I'm trying to build, what problem I'm trying to solve, or what goal I'm going after, You always take me through it one day at a time. As I strive to break old habits and learn new habits, help me not to think in terms of weeks or months or years, which can be overwhelming and demotivating. Instead, grant me what I need to change my habits and do so by focusing on one day at a time. Thank you that You give me strength to change. As I awake each morning, I thank you that Your faithful love never ends! Your mercies never cease. Great is Your faithfulness; Your mercies begin afresh each morning. You are my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in You! (Lam. 3:22-24) In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 148

“Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” 2 Corinthians 5:17

HABIT 1: FLIP THE SCRIPT

IF your life isn't what you want it to be, it may be because you're telling yourself the wrong story. You are not the mistakes you've made. You are not the labels put on you by other people. You are who God says you are, and anything less is false humility. So if you want to change your life, start by changing your story!

If you want to win the day, you've got to flip the script. How? The Bible is a good starting point. Scripture is more than our script; it's our script-cure, and that is more than a play on words. Scripture confronts the false identities and false narratives perpetrated by the Father of Lies. It reveals the heavenly Father's narrative and the unique role each one of us plays in it. Just consider these examples found in scripture: Abraham thought he was *too old*. Jeremiah thought he was *too young*. Moses thought he was *unqualified*. Joseph thought he was *overqualified*. Gideon had an *inferiority complex*. Jonah had a *superiority complex*. Peter made *too many mistakes*. Nathanael was *too cool for school*. Paul had a *thorn in the flesh*. And King David was *the runt of the litter*.

In reality, none of that mattered! You see, *who you are* is not the issue. What really matters is *whose you are*.

“Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17). The truth is that *you are the apple of God's eye*. You are God's *workmanship*. You

are *more than a conqueror*, and nothing can change that. It is what it is; it is *who you are*.

There never has been and never will be anyone like you. That isn't a testament to you, it's a testament to the God who created you. Here's what is significant about that truth: *no one can take your place*. No one can worship God like you or for you. No one can serve others like you or for you. Jesus doesn't just live *in us*; Christ lives *as us*! Start living your life in a way that is worth telling stories about. It's time to flip the script!

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, I thank You for a new day like today. I thank You because Your Word says your mercy is always new every day. (Lamentations 3:23) It's sometimes hard to forget the past, so I need your power today to forget all that is behind me so I can move forward in faith. (Philippians 3:13) Lord, I ask that You grant me the power to forget all of my past mistakes that are creating guilt to weigh me down, thereby causing stagnation for me, and help me instead to be totally free from them. Thank you for coming so that I might experience freedom in You. (John 8:36) In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 149

“You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you! Trust in the Lord always, for the Lord God is the eternal Rock.” Isaiah 26:3-4

HABIT 2: KISS THE WAVE

CHARLES Spurgeon, the great preacher who also struggled with depression and anxiety, once said, “I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages.” No doubt, that is easier said than done, but that is how spiritual growth happens. During my battle with cancer, I came across this question in a piece of poetry: What have you come to teach me? It’s a difficult question to ask, but the answer might revolutionize your life!

One time when Jesus was with the disciples in a boat, a storm grew increasingly stronger by the minute. They rowed and rowed against the storm, while Jesus slept below. Finally, in desperation they woke Jesus up and accused him of not caring whether they made it through the storm. Jesus’ response was to rebuke the wind and waves with these words: “Peace, be still!” The Bible tells us that immediately the wind and waves became calm. God can do the same in our lives, but in order for His words to be fully effective, you have to believe that He can, indeed, calm the storm. You also have to recognize that you are in a storm. You can’t move past the storm’s pain if you ignore it or hide it or deny it. You have to confront the brutal facts with unwavering faith.

Our ability to remember the past is a gift from God, but it comes with a caveat. We don’t always remember it accurately. Instead, our minds are both selective and subjective, and because they are, our ability to remember can be a blessing and a curse. When we remember yesterday the wrong way, we live a lie, and living a lie

undermines our ability to “win the day.” Sometimes, we may also mis-remember—or try to forget—because the past can be incredibly painful. That’s where the second habit—kiss the wave—comes into play. The bottom line is that “you’ve got to own the past, or the past will own you.”

So how do you “own the past?” You begin by taking an accurate inventory of your past. Do not hide anything. Then you have to own all of it—the good, the bad, and the ugly. It is what it is. Or maybe I should say, it is what it was. You may not be responsible for what happened, but you are response-able. Two people can encounter the same obstacle—a difficult diagnosis, a bitter divorce, or even the death of a loved one—yet both come out on the other side very different people. One person owns his or her pain, while the other person is owned by it. One person becomes better, while the other person becomes bitter. What makes the difference? Their response. You’ve got to kiss the wave that throws you against the Rock of Ages. You’ve got to come to terms with the pain that has made you who you are. It’s time to kiss the wave!

TODAY’S PRAYER

Lord, Storms will come up in my life. Some creep up, giving me time to take cover. Others come suddenly with little or no time to prepare. I know that I cannot save myself from any one particular situation in my life, as You are the only One who can do so. Therefore, I thank You, Lord, for what You have done for me. Thank You for accepting me just as I am. Today, I choose to make a willful decision to let go of any and all deep inner wounds and any and all pain from the past – counting it worth less than nothing in order to fully live in the freedom You have already obtained for me. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 150

"Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philipians 3:13-14

HABIT 3: EAT THE FROG

ACCORDING to Mark Twain, if you ever have to eat a live frog, it's best done first thing in the morning. I know this scenario is awfully unlikely, but it's good advice nonetheless. Why eat the live frog first thing in the morning, you ask? Because you can go through the rest of your day knowing the hardest task is behind you!

If you want to win the day, you need to stop and ask yourself these questions. What to-do list items are you most tempted to procrastinate on? What goals have you had forever but not taken the first step toward? What difficult decision have you been delaying? That, my friend, is your frog! How do you move forward from where you are today? You start by giving yourself a deadline; then get started. That is the third habit, and it's a hard one to swallow. Sorry—I couldn't resist! The bottom line is that you can't just pray like it depends on God. You also have to work like it depends on you. If you want God to do the super, you've got to do the natural, and you have to start first thing in the morning because how you start your day sets the tone for the rest of it. Many of us never give the morning a second thought beyond getting out of the door on time, and as a result, our morning rituals may be as unplanned as an earthquake. That is sounding the retreat before the day even begins.

Jesus made the most of the early part of the day. Mark 1 gives one example: "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a

solitary place, where he prayed." On another occasion, before appointing his disciples in the morning, he prayed all night. Now, you may not be a "get up before dawn" type of person. That, however, is not the point. Regardless of the time your day does begin, you can begin to move forward today by asking yourself what is the one thing you least like to do, but you feel best about after you've completed it? That's your frog. Determining to make progress on that one thing can often be one of the hardest habits to establish, but it pays the biggest dividends. Whatever your best routine might be, you need to purposefully figure out a morning routine that works for you, and, I might add, one that works for your spouse and your kids and your dog and your boss.

If you want to win the day, you've got to attack the day. It's time to eat the frog!

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, I know that at every point in time, I can experience victory to overcome my past which includes whatever is holding me back from making progress on the good things I need to do. Strengthen me as I work to overcome the bad habits of the past. I know that as I attempt to do so, Satan will not give up without a fight, and the more I fight, the more counter attacks I will experience, so, Lord, in case I fall to some of the counter attacks, help me not to get discouraged and think the battle is lost. Help me to continue from where I stopped and move on. Thank you for the victory that is found in You! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 151

"Then another message came to me from the Lord: 'Zerubbabel is the one who laid the foundation of this Temple, and he will complete it. Then you will know that the Lord of Heaven's Armies has sent me. Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin, to see the plumb line in Zerubbabel's hand.'"
Zechariah 4:8-10

HABIT 4: FLY THE KITE

WHEN engineers were planning to build a suspension bridge across Niagara Gorge in 1848, the dilemma they faced was how do you stretch the first wire across an 800-foot gorge with 225-foot cliffs on either side and rapids that rush toward a waterfall? The solution? You host a kite-flying contest! Fifteen-year-old American, Homan Walsh, won the contest and the day after that successful flight, a stronger line was attached to the kite string and pulled across it. Then an even stronger line was added. Then a rope. Then a cable consisting of thirty-six strands of ten-gauge wire.

It all started with one kite string! It always does, doesn't it? As God said to the prophet Zechariah, "Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin, to see the plumb line in Zerubbabel's hand." (Zechariah 4:10, NLT) Plumb line, kite string—no difference. Making it personal, does God delight in our accomplishments? Yes, He does much like a proud parent would of his or her child. But God does not delight in just the big accomplishments! According to Zechariah 4:10, it is the little things that produce disproportionate celebration. If you read this entire portion of Zechariah 4, you will find that the Israelites had not even broken ground

on the temple yet. All they had done was measure, and God was already giving them a standing ovation!

Our heavenly Father celebrates our little steps of faith and the small acts of kindness. In fact, you can't give someone a drink of water without God taking notice! God is great not just because nothing is too big to escape His notice. God is great because nothing is too small. We want to do amazing things for God, but it is not our job to determine the size of what we do. Our job is to dedicate ourselves to God, and then God does amazing things for us. It starts with the fourth habit—fly the kite. In other words, do little things as if they are big things.

Go ahead and dream big, but start small. What is the good news as you do them? If you do little things as if they are big things, God will do big things as if they are little things. That's how kite strings turn into suspension bridges. You've got to take the first step before God reveals the second step. It's time to fly the kite!

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, I want to make a difference and do great things for You. In order to do great things for You, I realize I must dedicate myself to You with all that I am. Help me to remove the obstacles in my life so I can serve You with everything that I am. Thank You for accepting all the little things I do as an offering to You. Help me, today, to take the first step in what you are calling me to do. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 152

“And who made God angry for forty years? Wasn’t it the people who sinned, whose corpses lay in the wilderness? And to whom was God speaking when he took an oath that they would never enter his rest? Wasn’t it the people who disobeyed him? So we see that because of their unbelief they were not able to enter his rest.”
Hebrews 3:17-19

HABIT 5: CUT THE ROPE

DURING the 1853 World's Fair in New York City, a man named Elisha Otis pulled off a remarkable stunt. Otis had invented the safety elevator, but he had a hard time selling his idea to skeptics. So on September 20, 1853, Otis staged a public demonstration. He climbed on top of his elevator in New York's Crystal Palace exhibition, and while suspended by a single rope, ordered the axman to cut the rope! The elevator fell—a few feet. The crowd let out a collective gasp. And Elisha Otis pronounced, “All safe, ladies and gentlemen. All safe.”

I know, cutting whatever “rope” is holding you up does not seem safe. However, can I tell you what really is not safe? Playing it safe! In fact, the greatest risk is taking no risks. If you want to imagine unborn tomorrows, you have to cut the rope. That is scary, especially if you are afraid of heights, but anything less means we will maintain the status quo. While cutting the rope, you will experience a few falls, a few fails. That is certain. But cutting the rope is the way we cut the ribbon on the dreams God has given us. Here is a lesson I have learned the hard way: whatever you don’t do today, you are less likely to do tomorrow! You don’t feel like dieting today? You’ll feel less like dieting tomorrow.

Don’t put off until tomorrow what you can do today! The writer of Hebrews advocated same-day delivery when he wrote in Hebrews 3:15, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” If you don't do it today, your heart becomes a little harder. So does your hearing, and before you know it, it will become difficult to discern the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

According to Parkinson’s Law, the amount of time it takes to accomplish a task depends upon the time allotted. The time it takes will expand or contract based upon deadlines. If you have two days, what you are working to accomplish will take two days. If you have two weeks, it will take two weeks. If you have two months, it will take two months. So think about it. Do you have something you need to take action on? Today is the day! If you wait until you are ready, you will be waiting for the rest of your life! It's time to cut the rope!

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank You for grace. Thank You for Your creative ways that give me new ideas to begin, new dreams to dream, new ways to organize and improve my life and to help those around me, and new paths to walk. Please help me to take a step forward today. When hurdles arise to trip me up, give me the strength and wisdom needed to look up to see the hope in You as I run toward Christ. and help me, through Your power, to move beyond those hurdles. Thank You for new beginnings, Lord, and for the promise that You will give me Your strength to accomplish what You have set before me today. In Jesus Name, Amen.

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MEETING WITH GOD – Day 153

*"See then that you walk circumspectly (be careful how you walk), not as fools (unwise), but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is."
Ephesians 5:15-17*

HABIT 6: WIND THE CLOCK

GOD is in the business of strategically positioning us in the right place at the right time. He is preparing good works in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). He is ordering your footsteps (Proverbs 16:9). And He who began a good work will carry it to completion (Philippians 1:6). Simply put, God is setting you up! The unborn tomorrows you imagine were sovereignly prepared by God Himself before the creation of the world.

In light of this, a right relationship with time means recognizing, first and foremost, that time is measured in minutes, but life is measured in moments! Not all time is created equal. As Albert Einstein so ably demonstrated, time is relative. The sixth habit—wind the clock—stewards time in two ways. It makes the most of every minute, but it also makes the most of every moment. It is being acutely aware of everything that is happening right here and right now while also keeping a constant eye on eternity. Most importantly, it does not lose faith in the end of the story. The ancient Greeks had two words for time—chronos and kairos. They are two sides of the same coin, but they are as different as heads and tails. Chronos is clock time. Chronos is sequential—past, present, future and it is quantitative—it counts seconds, minutes, and hours. Managing chronos time is incredibly important because if you do not control your calendar, your calendar

will control you, but it is not as important as “redeeming the time” (Ephesians 5:16, NKJV), which is where kairos enters the equation. Kairos makes the most of every opportunity. It is the sixth sense that perceives the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Kairos does not keep time as much as it makes time, and when it discerns a holy moment, it takes off its shoes.

The greatest moments in life aren't often measured by chronos time. Instead they are kairos moments, off the clock, off the grid. Chronos is all about making good time. Kairos is about enjoying the journey. It is about smelling the roses. It is less about getting to a particular destination in record time and more about who you become along the way. Let us wind both the chronos and the kairos clocks with the sixth habit. It's time to wind the clock!

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank you for the gift of a new day. Help me to enjoy the good moments of today, understanding that those moments come “off the clock”. I want to enjoy this journey that You have me on by taking the time to stop and enjoy the “little things” You have placed around me. Help me to make good use of my time but not to be so focused on the minute that I miss the moment - the roses, the ultimate destination and the character that You are building within me along the way. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 154

“So Ahab went to eat and drink. But Elijah climbed to the top of Mount Carmel and bowed low to the ground and prayed with his face between his knees.” 1 Kings 18:42

HABIT 7: SEED THE CLOUDS

ON November 13, 1946, a plane took off from the Schenectady County Airport with a rather unique payload—six pounds of dry ice. Its mission? To seed the clouds with solidified carbon dioxide in hopes of creating enough condensation to cause precipitation. Upon takeoff, Vincent Schaefer flew his single-propeller plane into a cumulus cloud and dumped the dry ice. Eyewitnesses on the ground said that the cloud seemed to explode. The subsequent snowfall was visible for forty miles. The GE Monogram had a little fun with Schaefer’s breakthrough: “Schaefer made it snow this afternoon over Pittsfield! Next week he walks on water.”

The science of seeding clouds may be a modern-day marvel, but the idea is as old as the prophet Elijah. After a famine that lasted three and a half years, Elijah seeded the clouds with a brave prayer. Elijah climbed to the top of Mount Carmel, bowed low to the ground, and prayed with his face between his knees. There are many ways to seed the clouds. Humility catalyzes God’s favor. Generosity activates exchange. And old-fashioned obedience sets the table for unborn tomorrows. You can seed the clouds in many different ways, but none are more powerful than prayer!

When was the last time you found yourself doubled over in prayer? The posture that Elijah assumed indicates profound humility and extreme intensity. He was not just praying; he was believing God for a miracle. I have no issue with short blessings before meals. Why? I believe in eating food while it’s hot. That said, there are moments when you need to

press in and pray through. You need to seed the clouds with contending prayer.

In our quest to win the day, we have buried dead yesterdays and imagined unborn tomorrows. We have explored six habits—flip the script, kiss the wave, eat the frog, fly the kite, cut the rope, and wind the clock. There is one more habit we must put into practice if we want to stress less and accomplish more. You have to seed the clouds. How? By taking proactive measures today that will produce desired outcomes tomorrow. Simply put, sow today what you want to see tomorrow! Identify the daily rituals that have the highest return on investment and the daily habits that are high leverage points, then prioritize them. Right at the top of the list, you ask? Don’t underestimate the power of a single brave prayer! It’s time to seed the clouds!

TODAY’S PRAYER

In Colossians, we find a prayer Paul prayed for the church at Colossae which, when personalized, contains powerful words to help us seed the clouds. Father, I need your help to change. "I continually ask You to fill me with the knowledge of Your will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that I may live a life worthy of You and please You in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of You, being strengthened with all power according to Your glorious might so that I may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to You, who have qualified me to share in the inheritance of Your holy people in the kingdom of light." (Col. 1:9-12) In Jesus name, Amen.

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