

Champs & Misfits

Daily Devotionals

Believers
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Introduction and Purpose

The book of Hebrews is an encouragement and an exhortation to a group of Christians who were enduring intense persecution. After establishing the superiority of Jesus over the old systems of religion that existed, the author turns to point out the importance of faith in Jesus.

Hebrews 11:1 tells us, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” The importance of faith is demonstrated through a biblical hall-of-fame of the faithful. Following this list of well-known biblical names, the letter takes a stark turn in verse 13: “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on earth.”

The life these strangers and exiles lived were radically different from the world around them, because of the faith they had in things to come. In this way, each of them were something of a misfit. However, we know that the hope in things to come is where we have our security. It’s when we persevere in this hope that we can be called “champions” as well as “misfits.”

Our congregation is blessed with countless champions and misfits, and in the next few weeks we’ll be reading through devotionals inspired by the video interviews shared on Sunday mornings. Each of our lives have the potential to beautifully strange, wild, and countercultural examples of a life lived in faith.

My hope for you in this series is that you can see how your life can be an encouragement and an exhortation to those around you. You are both a misfit and a champion.

Jeremiah Hinton
Pastoral Resident

Don Olson's Story

10/30/2017 (Monday)

Creation bears witness

The moment that the created order first burst into being, moving from the bleak emptiness of non-existence into the fully orbed, multifaceted condition of existence, it was greeted with shouts of joy. We read in Job 38 that they saw what God had made, the morning stars sang and the sons of God shouted for joy. Creation is a masterwork of design, an unsurpassable performance of motion, and a testament to its creator.

R.C. Sproul wrote, "Creation is another theater of divine revelation" In the created order we see the poetic revelation of God made physical, unavoidable tangible. Consider for a moment the sort of things that make you shout for joy.

Whether it's your favorite sports team, a beautifully arranged composition, the view from the top of a mountain, or even the accomplishments of a loved one. Things that are enlivening, astonishing, deeply meaningful, or masterfully crafted cause us to react, to respond, and even to sing and shout. Creation's efficiency, complexity, and beauty all bear the fingerprints of their creator.

Reflect today on the song-worthy, beauty of the world around you. Where have you seen God's artistry on display?

Job 38

10/31/2017 (Tuesday)

Seeking after God

From the moment we draw our first breath, our senses are flooded with the witness of God's creation. With wonder-filled eyes we look to what the next day brings, constantly asking questions, constantly learning and growing.

While the wonder we feel as children might taper off as we get older, the existence of the wonderful never ceases to be. And as our capacity to ask deeply meaningful questions about the created order grows more and more exact, so too does our understanding of God's handiwork grow.

Wherever we press into the mystery of the world around us, we find further witness to the unparalleled artistry of God's design. God is not afraid of our curiosity, rather he invites our questions. Matthew 7:7 instructs us to "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."

The Greek word used here for "seek" is *zeteo*, and has connotations of not only looking for, but also of a relational request. Scripture invites us to seek righteousness, seek the kingdom of God, and seek the things that are above.

The sovereignty of God is not diminished by our asking questions of him, or by our seeking after him, and like a Father who delights in the interests of his children, God invites us to seek after him.

Where are you asking questions about God? Where do you have an opportunity to seek him in a new way today?

Matthew 7:7

11/1/2017 (Wednesday) *Becoming New Creations*

There comes a point in the life of a Christian where we start to understand the gap between who we are, and who we were made to be.

It might come from prolonged study, intense introspection, the gentle insights of a friend, or from the conviction of the Holy Spirit. However we arrive there, at some point we finally recognize this disparity, and enter into a terrible moment of “Ok, now what?”

The old religions of the world told us that we had to white-knuckle our way across that disparity, to perform or obey our way into righteousness. To try and perform enough that we can become. When we're honest, we know that we can't become what we were made to be on our own strength. As much as we want to be new creations, we can't force that change. The grace of God in our lives is the only power that can move us out of the condition of sin.

Ephesians 2:9-10 tells us, “For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Although we are called to seek diligently, to pursue wholeheartedly, and follow after God with our whole heart, the new life of Christ in us is ultimately a gift of God. We are made new creations not by our own work, but ultimately by the free gift of God, given to us.

Remember today that your status as a new creation is not now, and has never been contingent on your works, but is a free gift from God.

Ephesians 2:9-10

11/2/2017 (Thursday)

Saved from what and for what

One half of the gospel message is, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” It’s a reality that we have failed both in the things we’ve done and the things we’ve left undone, but it’s a problem if that’s as far as we get when we share the gospel.

The other half of the gospel message is that even though all have sinned, God has made a way for us become new creations, to be made new. This isn’t just a far-off hope of disembodied perpetual bliss, this is a real boots-on-ground reality of new life that we are invited to live into, today.

2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” Too often we think of the salvific work of Christ as relating only to life after death, but for anyone who is in Christ, you are now a new creation.

God has placed before you a new path, a new identity, and new way of interacting with the world around you. You have not only been saved from sin, you were saved for new life. Sin that once clouded your existence is no longer your default, you are a new creation. The old patterns that defined you no longer are who you are, you have a new identity. Sin that once had power over you no longer binds you.

Today consider whether you are living into the reality that you are a new creation. Who are you? What have you been saved from, and what were you saved for?

2 Corinthians 5:17

11/3/2017 (Friday)

Delighting in Creation

Psalm 111:2 tells us, “Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them.” The Psalmist recognized that God’s works are not only great, but they were the sort of thing that were worth spending time with.

The Hebrew word for “studied” is darash, which could also be translated “to resort, seek, seek with care, or to frequent.” It’s a “stay-awhile” kind of word, not an executive summary.

It’s in this spending time, in the searching out, in resting in, and in frequenting God’s works that we begin to know more about Him. So stop and smell the roses, but also consider that each petal is unfurling at just the right position to best receive sunlight. Not only is a rose a delight to behold, it’s petals unfurl in accordance with the Fibonacci number sequence, found throughout creation.

When we spend time with God’s creation, we see that it is not only beautiful, it is unceasingly bearing witness to the glory of God. Majesty and testimony sit side by side.

Today take time to see the delightful complexity of the world around you. Where can you study the great works of the Lord?

Psalm 111:2

11/4/2017 (Saturday)

Holy Spirit's Witness

The Holy Spirit in us is both an affirmation of God's presence and an introduction to deep mystery. The Holy Spirit isn't bound by our conventions of repeatable, testable, or falsifiable, but instead flowing freely between unmistakably apparent, and frustratingly difficult to prove.

God's activity in our lives seems to be less about demonstrating his work on paper, and more about working in us. The presence of the God in us is often seen in its effect more than observable in its origin.

Like a bar of iron heated white-hot, we become heated with the Holy Spirit's presence. Like an energized circuit, we become charged with the Holy Spirit's power. And while we do not become fire, or electricity, we can be so animated by God's presence that when we interact with the world they will feel the heat and the power of God at work in us.

1 John 4:13 tells us, "By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit." It's through the animating, enlivening, and unrelenting presence of the Holy Spirit that we have confirmation of God's love for us.

God is actively at work in your life, translating your prayers, helping us in our weakness, guides us in truth, comforts us in affliction, and empowers us to speak. Instead of meeting our requirements of truth from the outside, the Holy Spirit is made known by his undeniable affects on our lives.

Where have you seen the presence of God at work in your life?
Where have you felt the animating presence of the Holy Spirit?

1 John 4:13

Cheryl Peirson's Story

11/6/2017 (Monday)

Unrelenting faithfulness

In J.R. Tolkien's "The Fellowship of the Ring" a question is raised by the character Frodo, as to whether he can trust his friends. His friend Merry responds, "You can trust us to stick to you through thick and thin – to the bitter end. And you can trust us to keep any secret of yours – closer than you keep it yourself. But you cannot trust us to let you face trouble alone, and go off without a word. We are your friends, Frodo. Anyway, there it is We are horribly afraid—but we are coming with you; or following you like hounds."

This steadfast, dogged, and unrelenting willingness to remain true is demonstrated not by its initial impact, but in its sustained effect. It's the slow layering of shellac over sand that makes a pearl, the moment to moment reaching of a tree for the sun, or the love of a parent for a child (especially through the teenage years). Its the often costly call to daily commit.

Hebrews 11:13 reads, "These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth."

The heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 exemplify the willingness to stay true. By outside standards they had every reason to break faith with God. In this life they did not receive their reward they were promised. Despite this, they lived out their faith even to the very end, through thick and thin, even when horribly afraid, following like hounds.

Where have you seen faithfulness demonstrated? What are you being called to be specifically faithful to?

Hebrews 11:13

11/7/2017 (Tuesday)

God's Timing

Lamentations 3:25-26 tells us, “The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord”

Whether we're 9 or 99, waiting is not something we're effortlessly great at. Particularly in our culture of ever-increasing immediacy, anything that doesn't happen on a fast-food schedule can seem painfully slow. We often gravitate towards what is fastest, most user-friendly, and produces the most results.

The capacity to wait, and maybe even harder to wait quietly, is an increasingly lost art. As far back as 1670, Blaise Pascal remarked, “All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone.”

What scripture tells us is that it is good for us, not acceptable or endurable, but good for us to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. There is something valuable and even potentially formative in this posture of waiting on the Lord. When we shift impatiently in our seats, frustrated that God has not acted on our timeline, we miss out on the time we have been given to wait quietly.

God has promised goodness to those who hope in him, and God does not waver or fail to fulfill what he has promised, even if it isn't on the timeline, or in the way that we might prescribe.

Where has God invited you to sit quietly and wait? How has that gone so far?

Lamentations 3:25-26

11/8/2017 (Wednesday) *His unstoppable plan*

A difficult thing about God's plan is that when we can't see it, or we don't understand it, we have a hard time trusting it.

Proverbs 16:1 says, "The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord." Another way to say this would be "Humans make plans, but God has the final word."

What's supremely comforting about this is that God has the final word. End of story. When circumstance, adversary, or any other constraint imposes on us, we have the assurance that God's plan will ultimately be accomplished. God has the final word.

The challenging part about this is that God has the final word. End of story. Our plans for how we think things ought to go, where we should to live, what job we should have, or any other variable we can consider is ultimately and finally subject to the will of God.

If the question of whether you've missed out on the will of God in your life comes up, know that God has the final word.

When you wonder whether or not God can use you because of past mistakes or missed opportunities, know that God has the final word.

And if you find yourself asking whether or not God is in control in the midst of a situation that seems so broken you can't comprehend its redemption, know that God has the final word.

Where are you being challenged or encouraged by the idea that God has the final word in your life?

Proverbs 16:1

11/9/2017 (Thursday)

You are not forgotten

An often overlooked character in the Bible is a woman named Hagar. In Genesis 16:1 she is described as an Egyptian servant of Sarai, who is used to get children for Sarai and Abraham apart from God's plan.

Culturally she is disenfranchised three times over, being a woman, an Egyptian, and a slave. She is used as a means to an end, but having given birth to a child, enmity develops between her and Sarai. To escape the harsh treatment that followed, she runs away with her son into the desert called Shur. This was the same wilderness that the Israelites wandered, a desolate place where water was scarce, conditions were harsh, and few people traveled.

It's in this lonely place that an Egyptian slave woman running from her masters, is found by the God of Israel. Culturally, Hagar is the least likely person, in the least likely place for this interaction, but that's where God meets her. Following this meeting in Shur, Genesis 16:13 tells us, "So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing, " for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me."

Have you been to a wilderness place where you wondered if God would ever find you? Have you wondered whether or not God even sees you? Have you wondered whether God is for looking after some other kind of people altogether? Consider today the name of God that Hagar uses here, and know that wherever you are, you are not forgotten.

Genesis 16:13

11/10/2017 (Friday)

You are God's delight

The love of God is grand enough that at times it can seem distant, so universal that it can feel abstract. It can be easier to believe that God loves you than it is to believe that God actually likes you.

We know on a theological level that God's love is the means by which we have right relationship with God, but it's also incredibly valuable to know that God also really enjoys us.

Zephaniah is an Old Testament book that finds God calling out his people who have been unfaithful. In the midst of his warnings and invitations to restoration we find verse 3:17 describing a reconciled people. It reads, "The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."

That the God of creation loves us is a miracle we won't begin to understand in this life, but that he likes us enough to sing over us, and to sing loudly, almost seems like a misprint.

Think of the last song you sang loudly. Not even necessarily a worship song, but just a song that you sang with your whole heart. God sings over you with gladness, without any obligation to do so. God sings over you, and loudly, He rejoices over you, and he's legitimately glad you're around.

Reflect today on the reality that the Alpha and Omega likes you so much that he sings about it.

Zephaniah 3:17

11/11/2017 (Saturday) *Deeper Relationship*

If you've never wandered off, it can be easy to wonder how the wayward ever leave home. If, by God's grace, you've been blessed with a lifetime of righteous obedience, it can be hard to have empathy for those who fall away. Every temptation resisted seems to make the mindset of those who succumb more foreign.

One of the deep truth's we learn from the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32 is that it doesn't actually do any good to stay at home if we don't spend time with the Father while we're there.

That's not to say that we all ought to run away from home, or that faithful service to God is somehow no good. It means that in our faithfulness we still need to be actively searching after God. We still need to be cultivating a heart that returns to God. A heart that acknowledges a need for God. A heart that knows dependence.

A cheerless, religious obedience is not what you or I were made for. The heart that runs to the Father, whether from the far off country, or from the fields where work has been faithfully done is what we were made for.

How has God invited you into deeper relationship in your faithfulness and in your wanderings?

Luke 15:11-32

Larry Olsen's Story

11/13/2017 (Monday)

Running after

There is an old that saying goes, “You can’t run with the rabbits and hunt with the hounds.”

Even though it’s fairly common sense, we tend to operate as though we can do both. Outwardly, running with the rabbits and hunting with the hounds often looks the same. There's some running involved, some searching around, and some times of rest in either case. At some point however, we’re all forced to pick a team. You can get away with riding the fence for a long time, but you can’t do it forever.

Matthew 6:24 applies this thinking to the question of serving God, or serving money. It reads, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

Whether its the love of money, power, comfort, or security, there will be a time when each of us have to decide what we run after. Even if the service to another master outwardly appears very similar to our service of God, there will be a day when we will be forced to hate the one and love the other.

Take a minute to consider how your service of God is different from your service to the worship of money, or power, or comfort, or security. Ask yourself today whether or not it would it be easy for an outsider to see what you're running after.

Matthew 6:24

11/14/2017 (Tuesday) *A deeper love*

1 John 2:15 says, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

While this is a clearly worded warning against loving the things of the world, the message isn't just about avoiding the world, but about experiencing something much better.

John isn't saying that the tantalizing offers of the world are too rich for us, but that they're far less than what we were made to experience. We have a scandalously generous Father, who is creative beyond our comprehension, and compassionate beyond our wildest hopes. The brightest and most attractive things that the world can offer us are only a shadow of what God has for us.

The most thorough defenses we can erect will never keep us safer than the embrace of the Father. The most sweeping and romantic love we could ever pursue is a pale, and temporary imitation of the love of God. The greatest heights of power that we can climb will never equal the prestige of servanthood in the Kingdom of God.

The warning against the love of the world is not a puritanical prohibition against experiencing life, it's a reminder that we were made for richer and greater things than the world has to offer.

Where is God inviting you into a deeper and richer love than the world offers?

1 John 2:15

11/15/2017 (Wednesday) *Disordered passions*

One of the most dangerous things we can do is to allow good things to become “god things.” Though we’d probably not always aware of it, there’s a constant battle for the role of what we worship in our hearts.

All too often, the very good gifts that God has given us, can become the idol that distracts us from him. This is what Screwtape describes in C.S. Lewis’ book “The Screwtape Letters,” as enjoying good things “in times, or in ways, or in degrees, in which He has forbidden.”

James 4:1 asks us, “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?”

When we try to enjoy these good gifts of God in times, ways, or degrees that God has forbidden, when our passions are out of line with what they should be, we substitute worship for the Creator with things that he has created. Our disordered passions are the source of all kinds of troubles.

So what do you love, and does it have the position it ought to have in your life? Where do you spend your time? Where and for who do you exercise your abilities? Where do you spend you treasure?

Where there’s smoke there’s fire, and where there’s quarrels we will find passions at war within us.

James 4:1

11/16/2017 (Thursday) *The love of the world*

In 2 Timothy 4:10 Paul writes, “For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.”

What's encouraging about the story of Demas, is that his story is left so open-ended. We don't know the trajectory of his life after he left. We don't know what he was looking for, whether he found it in Thessalonica, or if he ever returned to the ministry he shared with Paul.

What we do know is that we serve a God who is relentless in his love for us. Who goes anywhere we go, and is as close as turning around no matter how far from him we might run. Our God is a great father who sets aside decorum, overlooks our abandonment, and runs to embrace his prodigal. God's track record throughout scripture demonstrates his willingness to restore, even when we're seduced by the love of the world.

Have you experienced a season of running from God? A time of “backsliding”, or of rejecting God? Know that your way back is clear. Know that no matter how far you go, or how thoroughly you abandon God's call on your life, you have a Father graciously waiting to receive you.

You are loved more than we could ever deserve, more thoroughly than you could possibly understand, and more securely than you ever thought possible.

2 Timothy 4:10

11/17/2017 (Friday)

Restoration to mission

The apostle Paul's ministry found him working with a number of partners, across several continents. From early missionary work with Barnabus, Paul is joined by Luke, Timothy, Demas, Aristarchus, and Mark.

At some point along the way, some of Paul's most trusted friends break off from his ministry. We know Demas was pulled away by the love of the world, other for missional needs, and as is the case with Mark, some leave for unknown reasons. Regardless of why he left, when Mark and Paul parted ways, it left a deep hurt. Have you been a part of this sort of break? Trusting deeply, and then parting ways? it can be intimidating or even terrifying to try to begin again. Restoring a relationship can feel even harder than starting brand new.

This makes what we see in 2 Timothy 4:11 all the more encouraging. In the midst of Paul's description of those who have abandoned him, we see a personal request for Mark. Despite the feelings of abandonment, despite the fractured relationship, despite the earlier recommendation against Mark's inclusion in ministry, something miraculous has happened. Mark is again a trusted, valued member of Paul's ministry team. He's not just restored to "acceptable," he's personally requested by Paul.

When we've broken relationship with our community, it can be difficult to believe that the break will ever heal. But the same God who is making all things new is actively at work repairing our relationships, healing old wounds, and repairing what is broken.

Have you felt estranged from the community of God? Where is there room for God to restore you to where you once were?

2 Timothy 4:11

11/182017 (Saturday) *Bearers of Joy*

Christians have a strange relationship with happiness. The very good gifts we experience in this life can bring us temporary happiness, but happiness is by definition a fleeting experience. Christians definitely experience happiness as it comes, but we aren't reliant on it in the same way as the world around us.

Psalm 4:7 says, "You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound." The Psalmist compares the abundance of grain and wine, of things that should bring happiness, to the joy that comes from the nonstop presence of God.

Christ in us means that we have constant access to something that does not fade. Joy isn't the same as happiness, because it finds its source in the eternal. Joy doesn't always mean the absence of suffering, but it does always mean the presence of God. We have a deeper stream that we drink from. One of the great things about being a Christian is that we get to be the bearer of this joy to the world around us.

John 15:11 tells us, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." It's out of this fullness of joy that we are sent out into the world. The constant and uninterrupted access that we have to God means that we have something greater than passing happiness to bring with us wherever we go.

So where has God called you to bring joy to the world around you? Where have you been invited to share the joy that does not fade?

Psalm 4:7

Believers Fellowship
4112 Hunt St NW
Gig Harbor, WA 98335

www.believersfellowship.net