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## Daily Meditations

### February 1-6, 2021

The Biblical readings are taken from the Daily Office in the Book of Common Prayer for Year 1 and written by the St. Stephen's Meditation Writing Team: Dave Boyd, Jon Campbell, Becky Denton, Pat Gillory, Jay Nickel, Bob Reed, and Carroll Wilson.

Click on the scripture reading for each day to go directly to link. Current and past copies of the "Daily Meditations" may be found at: [ststeve.org/daily-meditations](http://ststeve.org/daily-meditations)

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## COLLECT: Epiphany 4

*Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things both in heaven and on earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.*

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## Never Look Back

### Monday, February 1, 2021

#### Galatians 4:1-11

*Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods.*

The fairy tale, *Cinderella*, follows the life story of a young woman's transition from loathed stepdaughter to princess. Despised by her wretched stepmother and berated by her aesthetically challenged stepsisters, Cinderella's lot in life was servitude to a wicked family that took no care or concern for her well-being, needs, emotional or physical health, or prosperity. Her trajectory was a downward spiral into further oppression within her own household. One fortuitous day, she met the Prince and her path hit an inflection point; her life roles completely inverted from lowly servant to an eventual child of the King.

Then, in a most confounding reversal, Cinderella forfeited all her good fortune to regress from the liberty of royal privilege back to the bondage of her family of origin. Can you believe she did that? Neither can I because we all know she didn't!

But the churches in Galatia did.

Their spiritual father, the Apostle Paul, is dumbfounded. Why would his children revert from life to death? Why exchange free, living grace for feckless legalism and death?

It could have been ingrained habits, conditioning, addiction, comfort, tradition, human nature, or innumerable other reasons why I do the same thing. Whatever the cause, the effect is a reversal from the path of salvation, wholeness, healing, and freedom offered by Christ.

Paul encourages and, frankly, entices us with the truth that we are sons and daughters of God, known and loved by Him.

What freedoms does He have for our futures if we don't look back to our pasts?

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## **Father Knows Best**

*Tuesday, February 2, 2021*

### **Galatians 4:12-20**

*Have I now become your enemy by telling the truth?*

If you are a fan of *Leave it to Beaver* or *The Brady Bunch*, you will likely recognize the collective "the talk with dad" voices of Ward Cleaver and Mike Brady in this passage. Ward setting straight Wally and the Beav for questionable associations with Eddie Haskell. Mike Brady rambling through parental precepts with Bobby and Cindy about proper care of the Astroturf backyard. My dad reminding me that we share the same last name, and he would prefer to be proud of it. Have you been on either end of these conversations?

- What's gotten into you?
- If only you could see what this is doing to your mother!
- After all I've done for you!
- If everyone else were jumping off a cliff...
- What were you thinking? (The only acceptable response: "I wasn't.")
- Don't make me come up there!
- Integrity is doing the right thing when no one is watching.
- We've tried to raise you right, but now I have my doubts about you.

In some form, each of these reliable reprimands is incorporated into this text. The setting is not a 1950s or 1970s comedy show, however. The time is roughly AD 40-60 in the early church the "father who knows best" is Paul, and he is flummoxed.

The Galatians have cratered to peer pressure from a legalistic clique. Their weakness is a personal affront to Paul who so intimately disciplined and mentored their spiritual formation. The deeper wound is their abandonment of the sacrifice of Christ in exchange for the approval of men. Any offer that wants our spiritual freedom in exchange is a bad trade.

How is the world luring me to surrender my spiritual inheritance?

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## **Beyond the Mountain**

*Wednesday, February 3, 2021*

### **Galatians 4:21-31**

*Tell me, you who desire to be subject to the law, will you not listen to the law?*

One of my favorite childhood homes was Mt. Shasta, California: a bucolic mountain town at the base of the eponymous 14,162 foot volcano in the Cascade Mountain Range. The city park encompassed the headwaters of the Sacramento River, which carved the valley between the Cascades and Siskiyou. As a family of native Texans, we felt like the snow, wildlife, fresh air, crystal clear lakes, and evergreen scenery were a slice of heaven.

We were not the only ones who felt a divine connection there. Every stripe of cult, sect, religion, mysticism, philosophy, conspiracy, and lifestyle had a spiritual revelation or practice centered around Mt. Shasta. This made for an interesting cast of characters and a colorful spiritual milieu for a nine-year-old Christian kid from the Bible Belt. Much of the mountain's mystery derived from the ethereal lenticular clouds that occasionally descended, not infrequently occluding the tops of the two peaks. One popular belief was that God or gods were transported in these clouds to bestow blessings or abduct life forms before lifting and disappearing.

In all fairness, there is ample recorded biblical history of God's people encountering Him on mountains, too: Sinai, Olivet, and Calvary for a start. Hence the phrase "mountaintop experience." Paul acknowledges this and credits the mountain with its historical value. On Sinai, He delivered the law to Moses. On Calvary, He delivered us all from the guilt and bondage of the law by fulfilling it. Christ is more than a meteorological epiphany. He is our savior and emancipator, and He is now gone to prepare a place for us beyond the mountain top.

Where is Christ doing new things in my life today?

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## **The Gift of Faith**

*Thursday, February 4, 2021*

### **Galatians 5:1-15**

*For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

If this week's theme has wearied you with incessant polemics against legalism, festivals, traditions, circumcision, cliques, and heresy, do I have good news for you! The wide-ranging diatribes will quickly converge with a heart-piercing narrowness of focus...

"...none of that matters, only faith expressing itself through love."

Am I the only one tired of hearing this, though? It is the central tenet of the Christian faith, originating in Judaism. In various forms, this thread is woven through the Pentateuch, Prophets, Gospels, and John's and Paul's Epistles. It's EVERYWHERE! If this is the secret of the Christian life, it is the worst-kept secret in Christendom.

Speaking for myself, it is also the worst-kept exhortation in my life. Sometimes ubiquity yields monotony; especially if that broken record only plays, "Sacrifice."

Christ expects my faith to benefit everyone around me. My invisible faith is only as valid as its tangible expression to other people. My faith is not my faith alone. My faith is your faith, our faith. It is shared and meant to be given away.

I think what Paul is saying here is that any petty difference we allow to break faith with one another does bodily damage to Christ and His church. A faith in legalism is not a faith that loves.

## The Spiritual Walk

Friday, February 5, 2021

### Galatians 5:16-24

*Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh.*

Three years ago, my wife-to-be and I caught a romantic whim to hike the Camino de Santiago in Spain. The history of the Camino, also known as *The Way*, predates the Middle Ages but has for many centuries been a popular pilgrimage, dotted with churches in each small town along the path. There are multiple routes originating from France, Portugal, or Spain, but the authentic starting point is your own front door. The idea being that once a pilgrim decided to leave the comfort and familiarity of home, the spiritual journey had already begun. The geographic destination is the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Santiago, Spain, purported to be the final resting place of St. James. The spiritual destination for each person.

Though the most popular route is roughly 500 miles, for only a 72 mile commitment, we could get the t-shirt and the official certificate of completion. Since we only had five days, we averaged just over 14 miles per day on this journey of spiritual discovery.

To call it a spiritual walk would be an accurate but incomplete description. After mile 10, every step was painful: blisters, joint pain, aching arches, swollen feet, and unthinkable toenail tragedies. The adventure was both a spiritual walk and a physical sacrifice. For the record, it was well worth the discomfort, and we hope to return for another 400 miles some day.

Paul uses vice and virtue lists to contrast the work of the flesh with the fruit of the spirit. The two war against each other but our own souls are the casualty risk. Like the Camino, a victorious spiritual journey will exact a proverbial pound of our flesh.

Is the walk worth the cost?

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## Sow to the Spirit

Saturday, February 6, 2021

### Galatians 5:25-6:10

*My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted.*

This week's concluding passage lays a practical grounding for our walk in the Spirit. Paul gives us a pragmatic checklist. If the fruit of spirit concept feels too squishy for the doers amongst us, here is a picture of the outworking of those traits.

- Keep my brother and sister (love, kindness).
- Bear my own burdens (joy, peace, patience).
- Humbly correct my faith family members (love, gentleness, self-control).
- Share with my teachers (joy, goodness).
- Keep my pride in check (self-control, gentleness).
- Persevere (joy, faithfulness).

- Do good for others at every opportunity (love, faithfulness, goodness).

The spiritual life just became a whole lot like personal responsibility both for myself and my family of believers.

Nested in this text is the law of sowing and reaping, coupled with a choice of seed: flesh or spirit. I often use this principle as a diagnostic tool for life. When life is coming up weeds and thorns, my country boy upbringing looks first to the seed I have sown. If I am growing my own problems, the remedy is found in the same text: proactively sow to the Spirit and reap life.

How can I plant the seeds of life today?

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