

## HELPFUL THOUGHTS

Sadly, many Christians can look back on times when spiritual leaders dealt abuse rather than sound counsel, like the rams that trample and shove the other sheep in Ezekiel 34. God desires for his church, his flock, to be a place of refuge, restoration and renewal and the only way a church can be that kind of place is to have Jesus Christ as the lead Shepherd, with each church leader following hard after Christ as others follow them. May this kind of healthy church multiply and crowd out those false ones with leaders more interested in their own power and influence than in having the Lord God influence them.

To this end, pray for your leaders, that they would be protected from the seductive nature of authority. Pray that they would seek the Lord and be held accountable by strong brothers. Encourage your leaders. Affirm their leadership as you see them following Christ first before leading you.

And if you have been hurt in the church, know that your pain came from men, not from Christ. And know that your Great Shepherd desires to see you cared for in a healthy church. Do not give up on the church, for to do so would be to reject God's plan for your care in this life.

## ABOUT THE COVER IMAGE

**'Woe to the Dirty Dish' by Michael Winters, a sojourner**

In Ezekiel 24, Ezekiel prophesies Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem. The prophecy metaphorically talks about a dirty pot, encrusted with filth, which will go through the fire to be cleaned, but does not become clean. It's thrown in the fire. God's people were rebellious and they received judgment. It's a warning to us too, especially considering Jesus' similar words to the religious people of his generation, "You hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence." So if we can think of ourselves as dirty dishes, we should welcome God's Spirit to scrub our insides clean, but Lord have mercy. We know we're dirty, but God please don't through us in the fire!

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## DAILY BIBLE READING AND DEVOTIONAL



# BC



FROM CREATION TO THE CROSS

November 16-22, 2009

## SCRIPTURAL PRAYER

I love you, Lord, for you heard my cry for mercy. In my sin, the cords of death and the anguish of the grave loomed. But I called on your Name. You are righteous, merciful and full of compassion. You replaced my simple, stony heart and saved me. Thank you, Jesus. Amen. from Psalm 116 Ezekiel 36

## DAILY SCRIPTURE READING AND PRAYER

## Monday

**Ezekiel 24-26; Psalm 110; Proverbs 27:21-22**  
**Ezekiel 25:3-7**

How convicting is it to read about God stretching his hand against Ammon for rejoicing as Israel fell? Whether it's thinking, 'Better them than me,' or 'Finally they get what they deserve,' we tend to feel good when others feel bad – and the bigger they are, the harder we want to see them fall. Sin feeds the poison root of this rejoicing: the sin of pride (thinking we're better than the fallen) and the sin of lacking compassion. Today, pray that God would change your heart from stony pride and coldness to one of humble warmth that genuinely desires to see the broken restored and healed in Christ.

## Tuesday

**Ezekiel 27-28; Psalm 111; Proverbs 27:23-27**  
**Ezekiel 28:1-10**

Tyre had it all: wealth, skill, cleverness; figuratively Tyre had the throne of a god. This temporary glory fostered great, festering pride in its people and leaders, so much so that they assumed they were gods, not men, and never realized that they needed the true God. Their story calls to mind Matthew 16:26, 'What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?' Great wealth and success can truly deceive us into thinking we've got everything we'll ever need, but remember that wealth and success can do nothing to save your soul. Today, pray that God would increase your reliance upon his Son and Spirit, even if it costs you some of the temporary things in life, because ultimately only God can give you everlasting life.

## Wednesday

**Ezekiel 29-30; Psalm 112; Proverbs 28:1**  
**Ezekiel 29:3, 9-10**

Everything on the earth was made by God (including the Nile river) and he gives some of those things to us as gifts. Because Jesus died and rose to restore us to God, we can truly understand these gifts as coming from God and respond in thankfulness. But it's so easy, for Christians and non-Christians alike, to feel we deserve every good thing we have, and even that it's our unalienable right to have them. This can lead us down a very dark path of taking and taking what we claim is rightfully ours – a path that leads to ruined relationships, blackened hearts and broken societies; a path that has led nations to war and divorced humanity from their Creator. Today, pray for a soft heart regarding things, a heart that overflows with thankfulness for the many blessings you do enjoy and that is not consumed by the arrogant and unquenchable demand for more.

## Thursday

**Ezekiel 31-32; Psalm 113 & 114; Proverbs 28:2**  
**Ezekiel 31:10-14**

The allegory of Assyria rising proudly and falling quickly like a great tree illustrates the Proverb, 'Pride comes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.' There's nothing wrong with growing strong (in our day becoming wealthy or successful or having great influence), but Assyria's

pride cut it off from the Sovereign Lord, the source of life, and so it fell and died. If Assyria had humbly sought the Lord, obeyed his commands and turned from its sins, undoubtedly God would have preserved that nation, but such a path was considered below unnecessary. God may bless you in this life, and your call is to remain humble and remember that your blessings come from the God who can build up and make low. Today, hold the things you enjoy in an open hand, thanking God for giving you that joy, and staying ever-ready to give them up or give them away while always praising the Father.

## Friday

**Ezekiel 33-34; Psalm 115; Proverbs 28:3-5**  
**Ezekiel 33:10-11**

While there were truly evil people in Israel, the whole nation may not have been so obviously horrible. It's easy to read of Israel's sin and assume that all Israelites wore black capes and top-hats and ran around twirling their moustaches and tying damsels to train tracks, but it's a cartoonish vision of their sin. Many of the people may have simply done what they thought was best, which seemed completely reasonable but was actually an affront to God so horrible that he called it open, not-for-profit prostitution. In verse 11, God doesn't call Israel (or by extension us) to simply *improve* our ways and live, but he calls them (and us) to *turn from* their ways and live. Today, acknowledge to God that doing what you think is best has led you astray, but that doing what he says is best, replacing your will with his own through faith in Jesus and the renewing work of the Holy Spirit, will lead you to life.

## Saturday

**Ezekiel 35-36; Psalm 116; Proverbs 28:6-7**  
**Ezekiel 36:24-28, 32, 22-23**

The promises in end of Ezekiel 36 resonate with beauty – chief among them the promise of a new, living heart and the presence of God's Spirit to move us to obey God fully. They are the promises of a new reality and a new motivation to replace our old reality of death and selfish inclination. But verse 32 (and 22-23) is key – these truly amazing gifts are not simply for our sake, for our own happiness, but for the sake of God's holy name. We can receive our new heart and our new motivation and not get consumed with ourselves but be consumed with thankfulness to God that results in our worship of him simply because of who he is. Today, simply thank God for being merciful and loving.

## Sunday

**Ezekiel 37-38; Psalm 117; Proverbs 28:8-10**  
**Ezekiel 37:1-14**

Ezekiel and the valley of dry bones is one of the coolest stories in the whole Bible. Imagine telling bones to rise up and seeing them assemble themselves into whole skeletons and seeing muscle and flesh regenerate upon the bones until they were living bodies again. As fascinating as this is to imagine, know that this story is also yours. Your body may have breath, but apart from the Lord, you have no spiritual life – your heart is full of dry bones. Yet God, through the power of Jesus Christ, reaches into our graves and raises us up to new life. Rejoice in this today, knowing that you are truly, fully alive.

## BENEDICTION

Be sure to know the condition of your heart, for riches do not endure forever.

