



Staff Devotions

Devotion 1

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." 1 Samuel 16:7

Take a look at the people around you. What do you notice first about them? Skin shade? Ability level? Physical characteristics? How they speak? Where they're from? How much money they make? Do you look for similarities to yourself or do you examine the differences?

Or . . . do you look at every individual human being as a precious image-bearer of our Creator first and foremost, and as your relative in the family of Adam and Eve?

We are in the middle of heated, sometimes violent, discussions on how people are treated based on their skin shade or ability levels. Tensions are high. Social media blazes with tweets and posts and photos of opinions from all sides.

Where are you in the middle of this? Do your words and actions and posts and tweets reflect the biblical idea that we are all part of the same family made by the same Creator and in need of salvation by the same Savior? Do you value listening to your fellow image bearers, seeking to understand their point of view, more than you value sharing your own opinion or memes that support your current view? Do you value the Creator's fearfully and wonderfully made creations more than you value the mic drop on the latest point you made? Do you wait to hear the whole story before rushing to judgment and hitting that "post" button? Are you willing to dialogue face-to-face over lunch with a fellow descendant of Adam and Eve who may have a different skin shade and unique experiences, or are you intent on having him for lunch with your latest tweet?

Would your reaction to news and events change if your first thought was, "Wow, what an amazing image bearer he is!" instead of, "Wow, what a(n) ____?"

The sin cycle that began with our—all of our—first parents continues today. We see it in the violence, the anger, the hatred in so many . . . and in ourselves. Are we continuing the cycle with our attitudes and actions toward those who bear the

image of God? Or are we standing against the antagonism and the us-versus-them mentality that grieves our—all of our—Creator? Are we making much of the reconciliation found only in Christ and through his love? Do we demean or resent our fellow image bearers in our thoughts and actions or do we treat them and think about them with dignity and respect?

This week, as we teach our kids about the incredibly amazing human race filled with so many beautiful shades of brown, let's take an honest look at our attitudes—both in public and in our secret heart-of-hearts. As we learn the true history of the wide variety of people groups and God's love for them, let's allow the Holy Spirit to produce his fruit in us and to conform us more to the image of the Son.

May we pray as the Puritans did:

Thy will is supreme in heaven and earth,
and all beings are creatures of thy power.
Thou art the Father of our spirits;
thy inspiration gives us understanding,
thy providence governs our lives.

But, O God, we are sinners in thy sight;
thou hast judged us so,
and if we deny it we make thee a liar.

Yet in Christ thou art reconciled to thy rebellious subjects;
give us the ear of faith to hear him,
the eye of faith to see him,
the hand of faith to receive him,
the appetite of faith to feed upon him;
that we might find in him light,
riches, honour, eternal life.

—Arthur Bennet, *The Valley of Vision*
(The Banner of Truth Trust: 2005), "Seventh Day Morning:
God's Good Pleasure."



Devotion 2

By awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness, O God of our salvation, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas. Psalm 65:5

Our God is a God of infinite characteristics. Of the many things he is, hope springs eternal from him. He is our hope, and he provides hope in the middle of his judgments. Even in the account of Babel, we find the seed of hope.

With Noah, God unleashed the measure of his judgment against the sin of mankind with a devastating global flood. The ark provided hope that Noah and his family would survive the flood.

One hundred years later at Babel, God provided hope in his judgment of the rebellion of mankind. He did not let man's rebellion run its full course, as he had before Noah's flood. He nipped the rebellion in its early stages so that humans would not hurt themselves too much.

And the hope does not end there. The next verse opens a new chapter in the history of mankind: "These are the generations of Shem" (Genesis 11:10). The history of this family becomes the focus of the rest of the Old Testament.

Through Abraham, a descendant of Shem, all the nations on earth would be blessed. God had promised Abraham that he would make of him a great nation and make his name great (Genesis 12:2). God planned that the nations would one day learn about a Savior, Jesus Christ, who would descend from Abraham. All along, God had planned eventually to build a city, united under the rule of Christ. Unlike impatient man, however, God would patiently build this city on his own timetable.

With the eyes of faith, Abraham looked for this city, "whose designer and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:10). In contrast to the tiny and sin-filled cities built by human hands, God's city will be everlasting and holy, built on a grand scale, with streets of gold and walls of precious jewels (Revelation 21:18–21).

God's plans included an incredible way for repentant sinners to join him in this city—by faith in Jesus Christ. With his dramatic miracle at Pentecost when people from

nations all over the earth first heard the gospel in their own tongue, God let the world know that he had begun overcoming the effects of Babel. Since then, he has been patiently fulfilling his plan to call people to his eternal city "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9).

Today, as we talk about the effects of rebellion seen at Babel, let's be sure to also offer the hope that comes after Babel: the hope of a Savior who offers salvation to all who believe, no matter where they live or what they look like.

May we pray with the Puritans:

We hope in thy Word.

There we see thee, not on a fearful throne of judgment,
But on a throne of grace

waiting to be gracious and exalted in mercy.

There we hear thee saying,

not 'Depart ye cursed';

but 'Look unto me and be ye saved,

for I am God and there is none else.'

They that know thy name put their trust in thee.

How many now glorified in heaven,

and what numbers living on earth,

are thy witnesses, O God,

exemplifying in their recovery from the ruins of the
Fall

the freeness, riches and efficacy of thy grace!

All that were ever saved were saved by thee,

and will through eternity exclaim,

'Not unto us, but unto thy name give glory

for thy mercy and truth's sake.'

—Arthur Bennet, *The Valley of Vision*
(The Banner of Truth Trust: 2005),
"O God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."



Devotion 3

These are the clans of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations, and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood. Genesis 10:32

Since the events recorded in Genesis 10 and 11 surrounding the tower of Babel were real historical events, we would expect to find evidence of the dispersal around us. In fact, the names given in the Table of Nations (Genesis 10) are reflected throughout nations in Asia, Europe, and Africa.

For example, Aram was a descendant of Noah. His name gave rise to the Aramaic language that came out of Babel and still survives, with changes down through the ages. Some parts of the Bible are written in Aramaic. Jesus spoke it on the cross when he said: “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” (Mark 15:34).

Cush seemed to have settled in the area we call Ethiopia today. In fact, people there call themselves Cushites to this day. Mizraim is still the Hebrew name for Egypt. Madai became the father of the Medes (often associated with the Persians). Ashkenaz is the Hebrew word for Germany.

Javan is still the Hebrew name for Greece. His sons, Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim (Chittim), and Dodanim have given their names to places in Greece. For example, Paul was from the region of Tarshish (Acts 21:39) and a city called Tarsus. Jeremiah mentions Kittim (Jeremiah 2:10) and is modern-day Cyprus. The Greeks worshipped Jupiter Dodanaeus from Japheth/Dodanim. The Elysians were ancient Greek people.

Mechech is the old name for Moscow, Russia, and a region called the Mechech Lowland still holds the original name today. A people group and language (Hebrew) was named for Eber. Abraham was a Hebrew, and the bulk of the Old Testament is written in Hebrew.

Most of the European genealogies have a variant of Sceaf (from Japheth) with the exception of Irish genealogies, which still used the name Japheth.

How does knowing the connections between the descendants of Noah who were dispersed at Babel and present-day nations change the way you’ll talk about this account with the children today? The past matters as we deal with the events and traumas of the present. We know, from the Bible, that we are all part of the same family—we are one human race. We need to ask the Lord to cement that knowledge in our hearts and enable us to act on it with kindness and grace, sharing the love of Christ with everyone.

THOU ETERNAL SOURCE,

Author of all created being and happiness,

I adore thee for making man capable of religion,
that he may be taught to say:

‘Where is God, my Maker, who giveth songs in the
night?’

But degeneracy has spread over our human race,
turning glory into shame,
rendering us forgetful of thee.

We know it is thy power alone that can recall
wandering children,
can impress on them a sense of divine things,
and can render that sense lasting and effectual;
From thee proceed all good purposes and desires,
and the diffusing of piety and happiness.

Thou hast knowledge of my soul’s secret principles,
and art aware of my desire to spread the gospel.

—Arthur Bennet, *The Valley of Vision*
(The Banner of Truth Trust: 2005),
“Things Needful.”



Devotion 4

For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. Romans 5:19

This week, we've been exploring God's love for the nations. Do you really believe that? That God is calling for himself people from every nation, tribe, and tongue? Or is our concept of God's salvation extended only to those who look the most like we do?

There is an amazing and beautiful variety of people, all made in God's image. In years gone by, there was a movement to group people according to one or more physical features they share in common. These groups were called "races," and the features that define them, "racial characteristics."

Even today, we struggle in a culture where people treat others differently, depending on these supposed racial characteristics. They believe those differences are more than just skin deep and have implications for their value as human beings, and even their place on the "evolutionary ladder."

Yet God's Word is clear. There is only one race. Acts 17:26 reads, "And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place."

Because there is only one race of people, we can more accurately talk about "people groups" (not "races"), with the understanding that these groups represent what the Bible refers to as "tribes" or "nations." We can honor and celebrate the wide variety of ethnic and cultural heritages found among those groups, and we can rejoice in all the beautiful skin shades found around the world.

But we are all one blood. Even in the midst of our differences (which are actually very minor), we are all the same: descendants of the first two people, made in God's image.

The idea of races calls us to ask a serious question: if there are different races of people and we are not all part of the same family, then which race did Christ die for? The answer has eternal consequences.

All human beings are related. We all trace our ancestry back to the first man, Adam. As descendants of Adam, we are all born sinners. As sinners, we are all in need of a Savior (Romans 5:12).

Jesus Christ, the last Adam, was born as a human, as a descendant of Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45). A quick look at the genealogy of Jesus given in Luke 3 confirms that Jesus Christ, as a man, can trace his ancestry to Adam, and is

therefore our relative. Because of this and because he is God, he was able to serve as our Redeemer. He did what the first Adam didn't do: lived a life in perfect obedience to the Father. He was crucified, died, and rose again to pay the penalty for sin on behalf of Adam's descendants. He overcame death, and those who put their faith and trust in him need not fear death, for they inherit eternal life. "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22).

Today, let's be sure our vision for the gospel extends to everyone and that we share this good news with each child in our care.

May we pray as the Puritans did:

O CHRIST,
All thy ways of mercy tend to and end in my delight.
Thou didst weep, sorrow, suffer that I might rejoice.
For my joy thou hast sent the Comforter,
multiplied thy promises,
shown me my future happiness,
given me a living fountain.
Thou art preparing joy for me and me for joy;
I pray for joy, wait for joy, long for joy;
give me more than I can hold, desire, or think of.
Measure out to me my times and degrees of joy,
at my work, business, duties.
If I weep at night, give me joy in the morning.
Let me rest in the thought of thy love,
pardon for sin, my title to heaven,
my future unspotted state.
I am an unworthy recipient of thy grace.
I often disesteem thy blood and slight thy love,
but can in repentance draw water
from the wells of thy joyous forgiveness.
Let my heart leap towards the eternal sabbath,
where the work of redemption, sanctification,
preservation, glorification is finished
and perfected for ever,
where thou wilt rejoice over me with joy.

—Arthur Bennet, *The Valley of Vision*
(The Banner of Truth Trust: 2005), "Joy."



Devotion 5

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Luke 10:29

Today at *The Incredible Race*, we are studying the account of the Good Samaritan. (Check it out in Luke 10:25–37.) Before we ask the question of our students, let’s ask ourselves: “Who is my neighbor?” Just think about that for a bit. Who is your neighbor?

We tend to surround ourselves with people who look and act like we do. “These are my people; these are my tribe,” we say. And we’re comfortable with that. Maybe we continually speak into the proverbial “echo chamber”—sharing our views and having them echoed and applauded by people who look, think, and act like we do. Maybe, in our discourse and social media posts, we pass by those who disagree with us or with whom we don’t have anything in common. Maybe we block them or refuse to have anything to do with them. Maybe we refuse to listen instead of engaging with grace and for the purpose of sharing the love of Christ.

Who is your neighbor on social media? Who is your neighbor at school or work? Who is your neighbor who has been oppressed or mistreated in other parts of the country? Who is your neighbor who needs to hear the gospel around the world? Let’s move beyond our tribe and ponder the biblical definition of “neighbor”: any descendant of Adam.

Jesus was clear in this account that we show our love for him by showing our love for those who are made in his image. Are we desiring to justify our prejudicial attitudes and actions by subtly (or not-so-subtly) saying, “Surely they aren’t my neighbor. Surely I don’t need to treat them with dignity and respect. Surely they don’t need me to respond with the gospel.”

Before we encourage our children to examine their hearts, take some time to truly examine yours. Ask the Lord to reveal areas of prejudice in your heart (and allow him to lovingly snip them out when he does). Repent of being quick to speak, slow to listen, and quick to become angry

(James 1:19). Examine the way you speak and share in light of this: “With [our tongue] we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so” (James 3:9–10). Ask God to give you a true love for all neighbors, for all nations, for all those who bear the image of God. And then prepare to humbly lead your children to examine their own hearts and point them to the Savior who alone can save us from the sin of prejudice.

SOVEREIGN GOD,

Thy cause, not my own, engages my heart,
and I appeal to thee with greatest freedom to set up
thy kingdom in every place where Satan reigns;
Glorify thyself and I shall rejoice,
for to bring honour to thy name is my sole desire.
I adore thee that thou art God,
and long that others should know it, feel it, and
rejoice in it.

O that all men might love and praise thee,
that thou mightest have all glory from the intelligent
world!

Let sinners be brought to thee for thy dear name!

To the eye of reason everything respecting
the conversion of others is as dark as midnight,

But thou canst accomplish great things;
the cause is thine,

and it is to thy glory that men should be saved.

Lord, use me as thou wilt,

do with me what thou wilt;

but, O, promote thy cause,

let thy kingdom come,

let thy blessed interest be advanced in this world!

—Arthur Bennet, *The Valley of Vision*

(The Banner of Truth Trust: 2005), “God’s Cause.”