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**Sunday 4 June 2023 to Sunday 11 June 2023**

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Sunday 4 June 2023

**Calling the doubting**

by Annie Duarte

***When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted (Matthew 28:17).***

Read [Matthew 28:16–20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+28%3A16%E2%80%9320&version=NRSVUE)

After everything they had been through, three years of shared life and ministry with Jesus, some of the 11 disciples still doubted. After years of miracles, healing, teaching, and hours spent in prayer together, they still succumbed to doubting Jesus. But despite these doubts, the Scripture says that they worshipped Jesus upon seeing him. They worshipped even though they doubted. What’s more, they were still commissioned to jump-start the greatest task in human history! These were the men tasked with building the church. They were charged with taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. And still, they doubted.

The beautiful thing about Jesus is that he knew they doubted, yet he still commissioned them. Nothing comes as a surprise to Jesus. He knows the masks we wear and the doubts and fears we hide in our hearts. But as believers and members of the body of Christ, he still calls and commissions us to make disciples of all nations, just as he called and commissioned the disciples so long ago. God has an amazing history of calling unlikely heroes from humble beginnings – from the beginning of the Bible and even into our present time.

Do you ever feel overwhelmed by Jesus’ commission to go and make disciples? You may even disqualify yourself when you consider your inadequacies. Praise God that he sees everything. He knows everything about you and still calls you to great things for the sake of his name. So bring your doubts and worship him anyway. He promises that his grace is sufficient. Bring your doubts and receive his calling and commission – his purpose for your life. He isn’t bothered by your brokenness. He is honoured by your obedience and perseverance despite your doubts.

***Jesus, thank you for equipping me to do what you have called me to do. I trust you and your intimate knowledge of my gifts, skills and capacities. Amen.***

*Annie Duarte is a wife, mom, worship leader and preschool Bible teacher. She and her husband serve in ministry together in the United States. Annie loves seeing God’s word come alive to people of all ages.*

Monday 5 June 2023

**Godly beliefs**

by Annie Duarte

***Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly (1 Timothy 4:7).***

Read [1 Timothy 4:1–16](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Timothy+4%3A1%E2%80%9316&version=NRSVUE)

You have probably heard some version of the saying, ‘Watch your thoughts; they become your words. Watch your words; they become your actions. Watch your actions; they shape your life’. Today’s verse is a reminder to really dissect the casual phrases that make their way into our speech and, therefore, reflect our attitude and heart-setting. It is often helpful to ask, ‘Does this belief align with God’s word and with the hope of the gospel?’

There was a time when my husband and I had completely shut down the possibility of moving back to my hometown. We believed stereotypes about people who lived there and the political climate and quite honestly looked down on the place, thinking it could never be for us as a family. But the Lord had other plans. One Sunday, we sat and listened to a sermon about replacing ungodly beliefs with godly ones. We looked at one another with tear-filled eyes, feeling so convicted that we needed to make the heart-wrenching choice to move from our current life, which we loved. When we believed that there was no opportunity, hope or place for us, God entered in with what he wanted to tell us about the place: his plan awaited us there, and it was full of opportunity and community. It had nothing to do with the cultural perception or what people had to say.

Our ungodly belief had made its way into our speech … and thus dictated our actions and made us reluctant to what God had planned for us. We hadn’t put those stereotypes and beliefs through the filter of the gospel. We put stock into myths and sayings, not into what God’s word said. We had to commit ourselves to godliness and submit our thoughts and attitudes to his authority.

***Loving God, as the heavens are high above the earth, your ways are higher than my ways, and your thoughts are higher than my thoughts or the thoughts of this current age. Give me discipline and spiritual acuity so that I may become more godly. Amen.***

Tuesday 6 June 2023

**Capacity to serve**

by Annie Duarte

***If any woman who is a believer has widows in her care, she should continue to help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need (1 Timothy 5:16).***

Read [1 Timothy 5:1–16](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Timothy+5%3A1%E2%80%9316&version=NRSVUE)

When I read today’s passage as a whole, there are lots of specifics for the church at Ephesus under Timothy’s care. But here is also a good reminder for the church today and even for me as a believer: you only have so much capacity. Therefore, God-honouring boundaries are important.

The early church revolutionised what it meant to care for the poor in the ancient Roman Empire. Early Christians showed generosity in unprecedented measures. Roman Emperor Julian even tried to get pagan priests to show compassion and care for the poor in a similar fashion, but the program was ultimately a failure because they were not inspired from the heart in the way that Christians were. The early church loved people well. But as we read here, their service was not boundless. Paul instructed them to ‘prioritise the widows who were really in need’. Paul knew that the church would provide the best quality and more effective care when it acknowledged its capacity, honoured its limits and used its resources most efficiently.

Maybe this instruction speaks to you today. Take a minute to check in with yourself emotionally, physically, time/energy-wise, financially or relationally ... Where do you have margin? Where are you tapped out and at capacity? In what areas do you feel you have more capacity to serve and love others well? In what areas might you need to step back and let Jesus fill up your cup? An unfortunate reality of being human is that we have limits. I often wish I could serve, fix, donate, love and share far more than I am realistically able to. When I take a step back to assess my capacity, I am more inclined to ask the Lord where he wants me to focus my energy and attention. Then I find that I more easily walk in his will for me.

***Lord, I know you have prepared in advance good works for me to do. Let your grace wash over me as I accept my limitations and lean into what you are calling me to. Amen.***

Wednesday 7 June 2023

**Share in salvation**

by Annie Duarte

***Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure (1 Timothy 5:22).***

Read [1 Timothy 5:17–25](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Timothy+5%3A17%E2%80%9325&version=NRSVUE)

The phrase ‘share in the sins of others’ really jumped out to me. How could I share in others' sins? Is it not sin that separates us from God and from one another?

Unfortunately, sin has a compounding effect. Sin multiplies and has a domino effect. Hurt people hurt people. The sin of one person or group of people ripples out to hurt others, who, in turn, fall into more sin because of their wounds. Satan and his henchmen have a hay day when they can trap even one person into sin because they know that more sin and destruction will follow. We share in the sin of others when we gossip, bear false witness, conspire, enable unhealthy behaviours, and perpetuate unhealthy generational cycles.

How can we break the cycles of sin? What can stop the multiplication of sin in its tracks? For people living without the hope of Christ, this reality can feel crushing. But you have the hope of Jesus and the comfort of the Holy Spirit to be your constant companions. What’s more, just as sin and its destruction can multiply exponentially, so can hope. When you carry the gospel into the sin-marred relationships and places of the world, you give hope a chance to thrive and spread. Just as you have the ability to share in the sin of others, you also have the opportunity to share in the salvation of others. You get to determine how and where you will participate. This may look like resisting gossip in the workplace or setting healthy boundaries so you don’t enable sinful behaviour. This may look like bringing God’s peace into tense conversations or inviting a friend to church. Make a point to take part in the salvation and joy of others, and not their sin. You are mightily enabled by God’s Spirit to do so!

***Father, give me the grace to resist the temptation to share in the sins of others. Let me share in their life and salvation in you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.***

Thursday 8 June 2023

**Embracing our neediness**

by Annie Duarte

***For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains (1 Timothy 6:10).***

Read [1 Timothy 6:1–10](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Timothy+6%3A1%E2%80%9310&version=NRSVUE)

As I have grown and dealt more with money and people (and drawn closer to the Lord), I have been able to process this verse a bit more. Truly, the emphasis must be placed on ‘the love of’ money, not the money itself. Money is a tool – and I have many times been blessed by the outrageous generosity and wise stewardship of others. But the love of money is dangerous. Eagerness to be rich – not with the intention of blessing others, but for personal gain – communicates a desire for power and control. Often, the power and control that comes with lots of money are beyond what we can faithfully manage. Instead of the beautiful, vulnerable neediness for God and community, we begin to take matters into our own hands. We no longer need heaven because, in our minds, we have made our own heaven here on earth. We don’t need God to provide because we perceive we have provided for ourselves. The lines of communication between us and the Lord break down as we subconsciously ‘outgrow’ our need for him.

The interesting thing about Jesus is that he never outgrew his need for his Father. Jesus could have had all the money in the Roman Empire if he had wanted to command it. All the power and control that we strive for through financial means is rightfully Christ’s. Still, he kept a close prayerful relationship with his Heavenly Father, only doing what his Father did and saying what he heard his Father say. Again, Jesus models a perfect life for us. He resisted the temptation to love the money, power, control and possessions that could have easily been his – and he opted for the better thing, a close and vulnerable relationship with God the Father. If Jesus very intentionally chose a life free from the love of money, then we know that this is what God wants for us. If the Son of God embraced his need for the Father, it should be our joy and our delight to serve him, not money.

***Heavenly Father, you have blessed me with so much. Whether I have plenty or am in need, let me never exchange my love for you for the pursuit of riches and love of money. Grant me wisdom in stewarding what you have given me in this life – that all my wealth would be used for your glory. Amen.***

Friday 9 June 2023

**Fight the good fight**

by Annie Duarte

***Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses (1 Timothy 6:12).***

Read [1 Timothy 6:11–21](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Timothy+6%3A11%E2%80%9321&version=NRSVUE)

Clinging to your faith will be a kind of fight. At times, it can feel like everything in life is aiming to destroy faith. Our culture certainly does not foster faith in God. You likely even have some relationships or personal circumstances that test your faith. We have all had moments when it is tempting to ask, ‘What are you doing with this God?’ It can be difficult to be assured of his nearness in those times. Even a great servant of the Lord like Mother Teresa said there were periods of her life when she felt as though God’s loving presence had left her.

Christians must play a long-term strategy. An eternal one. Yes, there are moments when it is easy to question God’s goodness or presence. But we have to get outside of our moments and start living with an eternal mindset, or as Paul put it, ‘take hold of the eternal life’ to which we are called. If a situation does not reflect the goodness and glory of God, God is not finished working on it yet.

I have two toddlers. My son sometimes gets so frustrated waiting for me to prepare his bottle before bedtime that he throws himself onto the floor and then refuses to take the bottle once it is ready. The moment of ‘despair’ is just too much for him! So, he misses out on the good thing I prepared for him. It is silly, but it is a tiny picture of how giving up the good fight of faith can cause us to lose sight of the eternal life of glory that awaits us.

What circumstances are tempting you to give up the good fight? How can you be reminded of your eternal destiny in these moments? A small shift in perspective may just give you the will to press on in faith.

***Holy Spirit, come and remind me that I have an eternal home where there will be no more testing of my faith. Strengthen me with your loving presence while I wait here in this life. Amen.***

Saturday 10 June 2023

**A call to praise**

by Annie Duarte

***Sing to him a new song; play skilfully on the strings, with loud shouts (Psalm 33:3).***

Read [Psalm 33:1–12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+33%3A1%E2%80%9312&version=NRSVUE)

There are three main exhortations from our Scripture today, though I encourage you to read and reread and let the psalm energise your soul.

*Sing to him a new song.* Maybe you are a singer or songwriter, but maybe not! To me, this verse says, ‘Respond in a fresh way to his never-ending, never-ceasing blessing!’ God’s people had been worshipping him for a long time when the Psalms were written – they had many songs in their repertoire … yet the psalmist calls for a new song in response to God’s goodness. Because God is alive, active and present in our lives, his goodness and blessings show up in new ways constantly! We should respond with fresh gratitude and expression to his presence with us. This means we have to turn our attention to what God is up to presently … where he is moving, what he is blessing, and how he is providing for us and respond with due praise.

*Play skilfully on the strings*. I don’t play a stringed instrument … But I can offer the gifts I do have as skilfully as possible. If you teach, teach to God's glory. Offer your best and finest gifting to the Lord. If you coach football, coach unto the Lord! Work for excellence in whatever you do – this is an act of worship. When we play, teach, nurse, and work skilfully, we celebrate the competency and talent the Lord has blessed us with. Can you imagine the joy in the Father’s eyes as you fulfil your God-given destiny and use the gifts he gave you? He is so proud of you.

*With loud shouts –* don’t be shy about it! The Psalms also say that the heavens declare or proclaim the glory of God. Should we who have lips not praise him even more? All of nature bears witness to God’s glory and goodness. It is the right and natural thing to join with all creation in giving him praise. When was the last time you were excited about worshipping and praising God?

***God of Glory, you are worthy of all my praise. I could sing new songs to you every day, and there would still be more to sing. I want to offer you my best. I want the world to know you and your salvation. Guide me by your grace. Amen.***

Sunday 11 June 2023

**Care of the new believer**

by Tom Brennen

***I have baptised you with water; but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8).***

[Read Mark 1:4–11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+1%3A4%E2%80%9311&version=NRSV)

I came to faith as an adult. The first Christian community I encountered was welcoming, understanding, encouraging and supportive. However, not all of them were like that. I have a clear memory of a time before I was baptised. I was part of a travelling music group that was visiting a congregation when one church member told me: ‘Wrong, wrong, you have it wrong! You can't be a Christian and be part of a church until you repent properly and are baptised.’ Even many years later, I feel the cut of those words.

Baptism is an integral part of being a Christian. In baptism, we receive the gift of faith. We join the community of believers that reaches back into the generations. We join our church mothers and fathers in declaring the glory of God.

Let us never forget: ultimately, baptism isn't our doing – God is at work. As John 15:16 reminds us, we do not choose God; he chooses us.

As God's people, may we act and speak carefully and lovingly as we mentor those new to the faith. May we be that welcoming community where people can safely explore faith as guided by the Spirit. Let us never cease praying for the gospel to bring forth great fruit.

***Lord, we give thanks for your Spirit, who works in all people to bring about faith. May we see the world through your eyes and support those new to the faith. Amen.***