

Week Six — Target week April 7, 2003

Student devotionals written by students

Day 1

Excess Baggage!

Key Verse: Matthew 19:24b

“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

When Jesus said this, he wasn't talking about knitting. He was making a remark that was essential to the entire human race. There are three different interpretations of this verse. The one I wish to focus on states that the camel was literal and that the needle's eye was the name of a small gate in the Jerusalem wall. What is so crucial about this gate is that it was so low that the person riding the camel had to dismount, unload any baggage, and push/pull the camel through. Why was it so hard for the rich man to enter? Maybe it wasn't really a monetarily rich man.

I have met people with extreme pride. Not to say that we all don't struggle with pride at times, but some just exert a pride aura. Let's approach the man as being rich with pride. The reason I shall do this is because sometimes it's hard for us to get off our camels, get on our knees, and crawl through the gate.

I have a friend named Mike who has one of those pride auras. I very much desire for him to know Christ. I pray for him daily and have even wept on his shoulder for this to happen. (Don't laugh: Jesus wept.) Sometimes the biggest step in faith is getting off our camel. The greatest thing happens though: we get to see the beautiful city!

If you haven't already gotten off your camel, dropped your pride, and accepted Jesus Christ as your savior, I encourage you to consider doing so! I pray that many who read this will have already made this commitment and be looking to enhance their relationship. I encourage you to take the baggage off of your camel. Sometimes it's difficult, but God takes care of it! All you have to do is dismount. Do you really want to be stuck on that hump forever?

—Mike Snyder

Day 2 Study

God, Others, and *Then Me*

Key Verse: Philippians 2:3

Don't be selfish; don't live to make a good impression on others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself.

I've struggled many years with this passage, and I'm still struggling with it now. A few months ago I wrote a prayer in my journal asking God to help me follow his will through this verse: “Oh God, I need you. Life is so hard. Even though I know you are what I need

to be fulfilled, I continue to turn towards worldly fulfillment, and I constantly look for human acceptance. My desperation needs to be for you, not others. Lord, I'm also searching for joy in my life, but again, my joy's basis is in worldly things. Therefore, it comes and goes. Please help me regain reverence and awe of whom you are and confidence in who you have created me to be. Lord, please help!"

God's opinion is more important than any human opinion, and when we "live to make a good impression on others," our self-worth will fluctuate because we allow worldly standards to judge us. This is not God's will for our lives. He wants us to rest easy in his arms of love concerning ourselves only with his opinion of us.

The second key is: "Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself." This command presents a challenge. Our human nature tends to reserve the first and best for ourselves, but when we choose to think of others as "better," we will give unselfishly and, in return, receive God's gifts. Watch your actions and attitudes throughout the day. Do you give the best to others or take it for yourself? In your life, whose opinions are you valuing more—God's or the world's?

Actively pursue a lifestyle according to God's will. Check your focus daily because it is easy to slip into old habits. If your heart is torn from insensitive words or is crying out for acceptance, give up this struggle; God's unconditional acceptance and love are waiting to give you indescribable peace.

—Michelle Deal

Day 3 Study

Be Still

Key Verse: Psalms 46:10

"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

One of the things that annoys me most in others is when they're fidgety. The person who, for the life of them, cannot simply sit still always needs something going or they start to tap their foot or twiddle their thumbs. This characteristic becomes especially annoying when you are trying to talk to them, and you can't tell if they even care what you say because of that continual need to be doing something. And I think God often looks down on me and sees me as this fidgety child.

As he tries to get my attention and talk to me, I'm down here trying to keep up with church, youth, Bible study, praise band, school, family, etc. (none of which is a bad thing). I spend so much time doing these things that I don't often find the time to be still—to get away from distraction (and time limits), to really spend time getting to know and form a relationship with God. Time spent exalting and simply standing in awe of the creator of the universe.

God doesn't want us to balance the whole world; he has that totally under control. Earlier the psalmist says, "He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth ..." (Psalm 46:9). There is nothing in this world that God cannot do, but from the very beginning the one thing he has desired is our companionship, that we would seek a loving relationship with him. And when we have this kind of relationship with him, all the other "stuff" will simply fall into place, because it will be God doing it and not us.

Take a look at your relationship with God. When you spend your time reading the Bible and praying, take a look at your motives and ask yourself why you are doing it. Is it to get that good feeling that you've finished reading your three chapters for the night—or to get your dose of "God" for the day? Or are you doing it with a real longing to know God better?

So now what are you gonna' do about it? Think about why you are praying, and when you do pray, spend some time being still. Find a place with no distractions and a time when you will not have to cut God short to go somewhere. Reveal things to God that you've never told him before, and ask him to show you something new about him, and then listen for it. Focus on what is truly real instead of getting wrapped up in so called "real life."

—Cheryl Baughman

Day 4 Study

When God Says Go...

Key Verse: Genesis 22:8

Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering my son." And the two of them went on together."

Can you imagine what it would be like if God asked you to sacrifice your little brother or sister? Maybe your best friend? As much as you love them, Abraham loved his son Isaac more. God knew this, but he asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac anyway. And Abraham obeyed—well as much as God let him. Abraham had the knife poised and ready when God sent an angel to stop him.

Abraham had obedient faith. God said go and he did—on more than one occasion. When God tells us to go, or to do something, we should. No matter how much we don't want to or how impossible it might seem. Many of the teenagers who came to IYC and went on their missions trip faced the same dilemma. God said go, but where would the money come from? For some this might have been a pretty pricey trip. But by doing their part God provided, either through opportunities to raise money or just by someone helping out a little. It happened to me two years ago.

But God doesn't want this kind of obedience from us only during summer or on special trips, he wants our obedience all the time. And if we are obedient God will bless us. Because Abraham was obedient to God, God allowed his descendents to be "as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the shore."

If you read the stories of Abraham and Moses, you see the results of being obedient to God. But ask yourself, “Am I as obedient to God as I could be? When God tells me to go, do I go in obedient faith or do I hold back?”

Take a look at your obedience to God. If you find that you’re being obedient, ask God to help you to continue that way. If you find that you’re missing that, ask God to help you see the areas you need to be more obedient in and to teach you how. God did say obey your parents—isn’t he your Father?

—Melissa Cunningham

Day 5 Study

Can you make it?

Think of something you LOOOVE—ya’ know? Sometimes you think, “Man, I just couldn’t live without THAT for a day”: A favorite TV show, TV in general, AOL (IM), computer games, the radio, reading magazines, shopping, conversations, electronics (curling iron), etc. —something you do/use on a regular basis and sometimes you feel like your day is not complete without it. Ya’ got it in mind?! All right.

Now, you say you are putting God above your “earthly things.” Let’s find out. Let’s take away all those things you love to do—*all* of them! No computers, no TVs, no radios, no singing, no dancing, no school (yay!), no reading, no church services, no Bibles—nothin’. You’ve got squat. Even take away those people around you—family and friends (yes, even boyfriends and girlfriends). Nothing’s left but you. You’re stranded, alone. **Could you live or would you go insane?** Here’s an important question: Is there anything left in your life? I’m guessing most of you are saying, “NO!” right away (human nature); but you’re wrong (sorry). There’s still one thing left. The most IMPORTANT thing left ever. More important than your friends/family, more important than any TV shows or computer games, even more important than the Bible and Sunday church services... So what is it?

You’re personal **relationship** with Jesus Christ.

Ouch, huh? Yeah, it got me, too. So imagine with me everything taken away. Ok, so that’s a little hard. Go a WEEK without your FAVORITE thing to do or use! Whether it be watching TV, getting online, or using your hair dryer—go w/o it! Hard, huh? All right, then do this: Go a week (or a couple days) without and instead of doing whatever it is or using whatever it is, spend that time with GOD, taking your personal relationship with your Father a step higher! Get to know him! Share your doubts, feelings, burdens, love, etc. with him—he wants to hear it **ALL** from his child!

Can’t do it!? Then step back and examine your life. Are you truly living out your life for the One who really cares and really matters? Take the challenge and find out for yourself...

—Erin Hostetler

P.S. There will **not** be any computers, TVs, electronics, magazines, malls, etc. in heaven.