

SGL 2015 Devotions

Monday 8/17/15

Devotion: The 'Who'

I propose some thoughts to you. I say propose because I'm not here to teach you anything. That's like singing to the choir. But I very much want to engage the unity of this incredible group with the subject of 'devotion'. We have just a few minutes each morning this week to examine the who, what, when, why, and where of the devotion of our lives. The 'five W's' of most basic analysis efforts. My professional background is thirty-five years in heavy industrial engineering and construction, so I'm the kind of person you all know as 'wired to analyze'. That's usually a good thing, but not always, so sometimes I need to just listen to the Holy Spirit. Part of God's victory for all of you today is that I was led to *not* fill your mornings with recitations from all the creeds and rituals of the Order. You already know them and you're already aimed at living them. I say "aimed at living them" because, like in golf, the hole is always the goal, but it seems you can't always get there from where you're at, so some of us get to play the whole course, of life.

All of *YOU* are a big part of the '*Who*' of your devotion! God first, and your immediate family of course, but then, your Odd Fellows family. I would like to believe that most of us in this room are bound in eternity by common values and beliefs, so *we* are devoted to those in the world that either *share those values, or need to*. Now, wait a minute you say; that would include everyone on the planet! *Those that share God's values, or need to*. That's the commission I received. What about you?

Some people are disposed to not overly influence other people's religious beliefs, or ever. That's appropriate, but their values? Holding ourselves, *and others*, accountable to the values we believe in is the only thing keeping evil from ruling the earth. Being devoted to the 'who' is important!

The word 'devotion' has always sounded like a 'working' word to me, so, sinner that I am, I don't always lean into it like I could. You know what I mean. Diligence is another great word. God is so amazing. How many millions of details passed by His throne to lead all of us here, from all over the world, to this one place, at the same time? I am so proud to be a part of this group.

Tuesday 8/18/15
Devotion: The ‘What’

Good morning team! ‘What’ are we devoted to today? Isn’t it interesting how people respond to the question, “how was your day?” Depending on your level of relationship with them, and the personality and/or mood that they’re in, one will usually hear a barrage of the ‘five W’s’; the ‘who, what, when, why, and where’ of their day. Have you noticed how you can tell a lot about their ‘devotions’ of life by how they answer? The emphasis on certain elements of their life helps us narrow down who they associate with, to do what, when they do what, why they do what, and where they do what. I believe each of us have causes in our life, and I’ll tie more of the when, why, and where into this the next three days, but through the different cycles and stages of life, the causes we choose to devote ourselves to are forced into a ‘short list’ because God created this thing called ‘time’. The causes are all wrapped up with our chosen ‘whos’, and our limited time.

Yesterday I had the privilege of answering the ‘who’ question with a big global, “everyone on the planet”. How easy! We get an equally lazy, yet incredible answer to the “what can I be devoted to” question: “more than you can ask or think!” Almost exhausting just considering that answer, isn’t it?

I enjoy cultural anthropology, and all the different theologies I’ve studied put considerable weight on the value of our ‘dreams’ and the collective wisdom passed down through the generations. There’s so much we don’t understand about how to interpret ‘what’ we’re supposed to do, so we just pick things and run with them until we believe something else. I believe that everything passes by the throne of God, and He has the power to ‘nod’ and ‘shake’. For those of you that don’t know, this is a ‘nod’, and this is a ‘shake’. He also gave *us* the power to nod and shake. I want to encourage you to *be decisive!* As we all can say “Amen”, nobody gets *everything* right, or wrong, in life, so just get moving! You’re going to make a lot of mistakes, but that’s also the only way you’ll accomplish anything. I believe prayer moves the hand of God, but he won’t steer a parked car.

God is able to make *all* grace abound toward you; that you, *always* having *all* sufficiency in *all* things, may abound to *all* good works. I have a good friend who likes to say, “*All* always means *all*. That’s all ‘*all*’ means!”

Let’s close this devotion with what I consider to be one of the most powerful paragraphs ever written by man; James Allen, in his book *As A Man Thinketh*.

“In all human affairs there are efforts, and there are results, and the strength of the effort is the measure of the result. Chance is not. ‘Gifts’, powers, material, intellectual, and spiritual possessions are the fruits of effort; they are thoughts completed, objects accomplished, visions realized. The vision that you glorify in your mind, the ideal that you enthrone in your heart – this you will build your life by, this you will become.”

Wednesday 8/19/15
Devotion: The 'When'

Ah! The 'time' element. It's been a bit more difficult for me to narrow this one down. Benjamin Franklin stated that "time is the stuff life is made of". Have you noticed how people deal with the 'when' of the devotion in their life by usually referencing either a *point in time* or a 'chunk' of time? Our various personalities and habits can move us to race from 'point to point' in time, or seem more to dwell through periods of time. Another way of describing this could be like people that are 'destination' oriented versus 'enjoying the journey' or process.

John Maxwell says "we overestimate the event and underestimate the process". In his book *Failing Forward* he states "Most people will grudgingly concede that they must make it through some adversity in order to succeed. They'll acknowledge that they have to experience the occasional setback to make progress. But I believe that success comes only if you take that thought one step further. To achieve your dreams, you must *embrace* adversity and make failure a regular part of your life. If you're not failing, you're probably not really moving forward."

The process, or journey, of getting to a destination takes time and effort. Sometimes lots of it! Learn, plan, work, train, correct; over and over again. My wife recently showed me a picture of a ballerina's feet, up on her toes as they do, but one foot had a shoe on, all pretty and pink, with the ribbon wrapped up her ankle; the other was bare, with what looked like a broken big toe, a swollen ankle and bruises everywhere, with band-aids on every toe. The caption read; "Most people want to accomplish great things; until they see what it takes."

God reminds us; we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulations brings about perseverance: and perseverance, proven character: and proven character, hope: and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

The 'when' of devotion? All the time! Be devoted *all* the time! Passion can pour out of us in every area of our lives if we just stop restraining God's Holy Spirit. Time is restricting us right now from a lengthy sermon about receiving first, before you can give, but I know you all understand this; dedicating regular times to be still is just as critical to the process. Keep your appointments with God and He will keep you full.

We all need constant encouragement and Odd Fellowship is a powerful tool to edify 'who'? Everyone. Doing 'what'? More than you can ask or think. 'When'? All the time!

Thursday 8/20/15
Devotion: The ‘Why’

We are all devoted, but why? God created us to be, *but with a twist!* He gave us free will. To choose. To love Him, each other, et cetera; the five ‘W’s. The great news, and the other news, is; **you** are in control. For some people that’s a relief; others, sheer terror. But God has a plan for your life.

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

The divine assurance of the hope that God gives each of us is that it is Him! He is the hope. He alone sustains that which His will decides. Remember the ‘nod’ and the ‘shake’? From Him all blessings flow, or not, and Oswald Chambers asks a critical question; “Have we come to the place where God can withdraw His blessings and it does not affect our trust in Him?” Ouch. Oswald always does that, doesn’t he? Simple questions like “Does my life honor God?”

There’s a lot of talk in the world about ‘sustainability’. President Calvin Coolidge believed that “no enterprise can exist for itself alone. It ministers to some great need, it performs some great service, not for itself, but for others: or failing therein it ceases to exist.” Our Order serves great needs. We *must* be sustainable!

I have numerous affirmations I review frequently to keep me on track with the five ‘W’s. Simple ones, like, ‘your vision disciplines your flesh’, and ‘belief with action creates passion’. We all keep pictures of our loved ones to keep us focused on the ‘why’ for the ‘who’, and we keep objects that remind us of the ‘why’ for the ‘what’ that we’re devoted to. From the moment we first hear the question as children, for the rest of our lives we never stop asking “why”. That’s a very good thing. If you’re not asking anymore, you need resuscitation.

How many of you have a personal mission statement? One line from mine is, “To consistently pursue a lifestyle of excellence that is focused on H.O.P.E.: helping others prosper enormously.” Hopefully you’re all asking, ‘why’? So here’s the next line of my mission statement: “Thereby setting an exceptional example to those who may look to me as someone who can be respected and modeled.” God gave me those words almost thirty years ago, long before I was lead to Odd Fellows, and they have sustained my ‘why’. Joining the Order was just an extension of all my previous devotions and I believe that through my obedience, millions will be blessed.

Friday 8/21/15
Devotion: The ‘Where’

The past is history and we only need to carry forward that which we will build with. For what we have learned in the past, let’s multiply the positives with what we are going to learn in the future. If you multiply by a negative, what do you get? Negative! I hope that your goals are being examined with several of the thoughts this week about the ‘who, what, when, and why’ of devotion in our lives. Now we’ve come to, you guessed it; the ‘where’ of devotion.

Where DO we devote our time and money, thoughts and emotions? Where *should* we? As outlined before, the ‘five W’s’ are edified by each other, so if your values are clear, the ‘why’ for the ‘who’ is getting pretty clear, then the options for ‘what’ get narrowed down a bit, and along comes the universal filter of ‘when’, time, seeming to further cut the options down almost to a feeling of, “I guess I don’t have much choice about where”. Even though frustrations pop up in all the five ‘W’s, you adjust, praise God, give thanks, and keep moving. Then you *literally* have to move! Maybe your job transfers you, someone you love needs you somewhere else, your health forces you to move. Oftentimes the ‘where’ of the devotion in your life is where you live; you know; near the ‘whos’ with their associated ‘whys’ and ‘whens’, doing the ‘whats’ that you worked so hard to develop, et cetera, et cetera. But if the usual ‘wheres’ get thrown to the wind, does everything fall apart?

My wife and I built our own home almost thirty years ago in Oregon and lived there twenty-four years before moving permanently to our second home on Tybee Island, in Georgia. Wow. *Everything* was *completely* disrupted, in *every* area of our lives. I wish I had time to share more about how God moved in our lives during that time, but just the other day, my wife was staring at a little sun dial in our back yard at the beach, and she looked at me and said out loud the words staring back at her; “Bloom where you’re planted”. She shared that God’s Spirit had just washed over her with a feeling of peace she hadn’t felt for a long time.

Devotion. Where? Everywhere! You knew that was coming, didn’t you? What a sharp group. That’s why you’re the leaders! You have known for a long time that we can serve everyone, do whatever God wills us to do, all the time, to glorify God, wherever we are! All great things are simple, aren’t they?

My personal hope for you regarding our time together while asking these questions about devotion is that God has been able to use me to touch your life in some positive way, and that you’ll actually remember the subject as a tool you can use in your daily walk, and share with others.