

FRIDAY DEVOTION - GATEKEEPERS WORKCAMP 2016

Matthew 14:13-21: Jesus withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand.

It's Friday, and your work is almost done! There were probably times this week when you thought you would never get here, times you wondered if your crew would be able to make a real difference for the homeowner with whom you have worked, times you questioned if you have what it takes to do this work.

In our devotions this week, we have been inspired by Nehemiah's call to return to his hometown to help rebuild, not only the structures, but especially the hope of his people. And we've learned that when we work to rebuild in our own community, we will need a strong foundation of faith, God's presence and guidance in every circumstance, the various gifts and talents within the Body of Christ, and God's strength when we grow weary. Today, we learn that we also need a willingness to give and to serve.

Have you felt like a servant this week? Have you been a willing servant? Have you felt you were a blessing to the others around you? And also important, did you receive any blessings? The wonderful, nearly incomprehensible, thing about service and blessings given and received in the name of Jesus is that they seem to multiply. The city of Jerusalem was rebuilt because Nehemiah remembered how gracious God had been to him and then led and inspired others to work to restore their hometown. The seven loaves of bread and the few fish fed a large crowd. The church grew because of twelve rather ordinary people who lived out their belief in Jesus as they told others of the good news of God's grace. God's Kingdom continues to grow because of service and blessing that keep multiplying. Giving and receiving, serving and being served, blessing and being blessed are part of living in Christian community. That is how the body of Christ continues to grow, and you are a part of it!

It is incredible and humbling that God trusts us with the work of the Kingdom of God. Even with all our doubts and limitations God gives us the privilege and responsibility of meeting the needs of others and showing them the love of Christ. So, it is no accident that you were here this week. It was not by chance that you were placed in one another's lives or in the life of the homeowner with whom you worked. God called you here to help to change the lives of others, and, even though you may not fully realize how, you were changed, too.

*Reflect on what you and your crew have experienced and accomplished this week. What were your successes? Your challenges? What surprised you? How have you seen God at work? As you go into the weeks ahead, think and pray about your Gatekeepers experience. How might you use what you have learned this week to continue to demonstrate Christ's love through your words and your actions?

Pray that God will bless our efforts so that our community might be changed. Pray for our homeowners, that God will bless their homes, their families and their lives. Pray that God will give you the courage and the willingness to seek God's Kingdom for our own life and so that others can learn of God's love for them and for the world.

THURSDAY DEVOTION - GATEKEEPERS WORKCAMP 2016

Isaiah 40:28-31: Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

These beautiful words of scripture were written to bring hope to a people who were weary. They were in exile, far from home and uncertain about the future. God promised to lift them up and carry them. God promised them strength for their journey, so they could run with energy and walk with perseverance.

Are you tired yet? When you woke up this morning, did you feel refreshed and ready for the day, or were you tired and sore from the week of working hard? When we are physically tired, we can renew our energy and strength by getting rest, eating a nutritious meal, or maybe having a cup of coffee. But when we are weary emotionally and spiritually, God calls us not only to take care of ourselves and to seek companionship and encouragement from others, but also to rely on his strength and to trust in God's promise that he will renew and strengthen us.

In what ways has this week been exhausting, both physically and spiritually? In what ways has your strength been renewed through your work and relationships at Gatekeepers? As you continue to push to finish your work, remember that God is with you today, lifting you up, encouraging you, renewing your strength. Walk on. Be strong. Soar like an eagle.

Prayer:

Gracious God, we offer all that we are to you in praise. Where we are strong, equip us. Where we are wounded, heal us. Where we are weary, renew us. Where we have experienced death, restore us to life. We offer every part of ourselves and trust in your accepting grace. Receive this the work we are doing this week as an expression of our love for our neighbors and an expression of gratitude for your blessings to us. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

WEDNESDAY DEVOTION - GATEKEEPERS WORKCAMP 2016

Romans 12:1-8: I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Well, here we are, halfway through the week! You have already accomplished much, but there is a lot of work left to be done. As you have gotten to know one another over the last few days, you've probably noticed that not everyone is good at the same things. Some of you pay attention to detail and like to paint, while others are really good a demolition. Some of you are talkative and some more shy. Some on your crew are natural leaders while others prefer to work behind the scenes.

Like Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, a body is made up of many parts. You are the body of Christ—many parts working together. There are planners, dry wallers, painters, spacklers, roofers, nailers, go-fetchers, cooks, drivers, sun screen applicators, encouragers, refreshing-drink getters, peanut-butter-and-jelly-sandwich makers, and lots of other important parts of Christ's body who are contributing to our week at Gatekeepers. You have worked together to serve Christ. You have each used your different gifts, in your active faith to serve. Your actual body parts may be sore, sunburned, and tired, but the body of Christ was strengthened today by your work.

Take a minute to think about the various gifts of the people on your crew and how they have used them this week. Have the adults take turns naming some of those gifts for each youth and for each other (Be sure not to leave anyone out!) Help the youth to learn to identify and name their various gifts and how God can use them, as part of the Body of Christ, in service to one another and to our community.

Say a prayer of thanksgiving for the opportunities we have this week to work hard and serve and for the energy and skills your crew has been given to do the work. Ask God for strength to be effective in your ministry but also wisdom to be mindful of the changes and growth that are happening within you. Pray that you might find ways to give of yourself and your talents in order to make this week even more meaningful for your homeowners and other crew members.

TUESDAY DEVOTION - GATEKEEPERS WORKCAMP 2016

Exodus 13:21; 40:38-39: The Lord went in front of his people in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night. No matter where the people traveled, the cloud of the Lord was over them by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel at each stage of their journey.

After the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt, they were wandering in the desert for a long time before they reached the Promised Land. During this entire time, the presence of God was visibly with them. God appeared in the daytime as a cloud that would guide them on their way and protect them from the scorching sun. At night God appeared as a flame or fire, lighting their path, protecting them from wild animals or other dangers in the wilderness, and continuing to lead them. They were always led by God, they were never alone, and God's presence was always visible to them.

During our journey of life, we also have the promise of God's presence with us. Though we can become distracted by other things, if we pay attention and look for God, we can often find evidence of God's presence protecting and guiding us. Look for that presence to guide you through this day, to help you in your work of rebuilding homes, to encourage you in the enormity of the tasks ahead, to help you understand what you are to learn and how you are to grow through this week.

How have you felt or seen God's presence so far this week? Do you think God might be using you to be his presence for someone else this week? How so?

Pray for our city. Pray for those who are hurting because of financial hardship, physical disabilities, community divisions and tensions, family disputes, grief, loneliness, hopelessness. Pray for Gatekeepers volunteers, the congregations we represent, other agencies and ministries, and all those who are working to improve life in our city. Pray that God will give us the strength, courage and creativity to make a positive difference in the lives of others and to go wherever we are called to share Christ's love with our entire community and beyond. Pray that we might see God's presence at work among us today, and that the work we do might be the presence of God in someone else's life.

MONDAY DEVOTION - GATEKEEPERS WORKCAMP 2016

Ezra 3:10-12: When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments were stationed to praise the Lord with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, according to the directions of King David of Israel; and they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, “God is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever toward Israel.” And all the people responded with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and heads of families, old people who had seen the first house on its foundations, wept with a loud voice when they saw this house, though many shouted aloud for joy.

Welcome to Gatekeepers Workcamp 2016! You are now a part of an 25-year tradition of churches coming together to assist homeowners in the Rocky Mount community. This week you will help to build, not only homes, but also relationships, love, and hope. In the end, you will know that you have shared God’s love and given much of yourself for the sake of a neighbor—and for the building of God’s Kingdom. Inspired by the story of Nehemiah, this week’s devotions will explore some of the things we will need in order to respond to God’s call to serve, right here in our hometown or wherever God calls us.

Ezra was a contemporary of Nehemiah and was one of the priests who was serving while the city of Jerusalem was being rebuilt. He is said to have been responsible for reintroducing the Torah (God’s Law) to the Israelites after they returned home from the Exile.

Building a house or any kind of structure must start with a good foundation. In today’s reading from Ezra, we hear that when the foundation was complete, the priests and Levites praised God by putting on special garments and clashing cymbals. The older people cried in joy to see the temple being built again, and joyful shouts came from the people. Even though they had a long way to go to complete the Temple, seeing the foundation rebuilt was an important first step in restoring the house of God.

Imagine the joy that will come from the building and repairing you will be doing this week. You already have a strong foundation of faith that has led you to this place. The foundations and other types of building, repairing, painting, and cleaning that you do will give witness of that faith to those you help and to our community. As in the scripture, people will experience joy as they see their homes and neighborhoods restored, and you will feel joy because of the work you accomplish.

One can never know what kind of foundation each of you, by your work this week, will lay for others. God has a way of working in and through us so that weeks or months or even years down the road, we might continue to see change and growth in our community and in ourselves because of the work we will do today. So work hard to lay a strong foundation, and celebrate all the marvelous things God is doing for you and through you this week!

What are some of the things that make up the foundation of your faith? How do you see your faith playing a role in the work you and your crew are doing this week? What are some of the things that bring you joy? Is joy different from happiness or contentment? How might Gatekeepers bring joy to others and to you, both now and in the future?

Pray for the week ahead. Pray that your crew will be safe and accomplish its work. Pray that God will help you to develop new friendships and to gain new insights. Pray that you will be open to allowing God to work in and through your life and that you will be able to demonstrate God's love to your homeowner, to your other crew members, to our community. Pray for your homeowner, that God will bless them and help them to see God's love at work in their lives this week and in the future.