

From creating order out of chaos, calling and caring for God's people in the wilderness, and directing the prophets, to calling disciples, sending the Holy Spirit upon the early church, healing, and equipping the church to tell of God's glory, God has been throughout history abundantly alive and active. Guess what? God is still abundantly alive and active. "God is not dead." God is still doing wondrous things. God is still creating, calling, caring, directing, sending, healing, and equipping. God is still making possible what many through the ages have thought to be impossible. God is still making able what many have thought to be unable. God is still saying can when so many want to settle for can't.

What we have done throughout this Summer together is recall God's wondrous deeds, and oh, how wonderful God is! This summary won't give each week the attention each topic delivers so I would encourage you to go back and review them but perhaps we can jog some memories.

- **Breath, Fire, and the Aftermath- Pentecost...** God chose to send breath and fire upon the Church at that time so that the Church would know of God's intentions and will. Pentecost illustrates the desires of God for all of God's people to talk to one another and be in relationship with one another. God sent the Spirit as a bridge to bring people together. (Acts 2:1-21)
- **Victory...** Why is God the one we are to praise? Victory! With God, in God, through God, by God, we have victory. And because we have victory with God, the psalmist says, "Sing to the Lord!" (Psalm 98)
- **Abundance...** God is a God of abundance. God knows what we need and will provide only the best for us. And we, because of God, not only have enough, but are enough. When we bring God into our situations (allow God to be an active participant in our life) all the humdrum, commonplace activities are touched with a new power that makes them fragrant, flavorful, enjoyable, and delightful, giving joy and gladness to the heart. (John 2:1-12)
- **God who works wonders...** Lament and loneliness are real, but the good news is that through Elisha we have seen the power of the Holy Spirit bring the power of divinity into ordinary lives. We have seen God's answer to Elisha's prayer as miracles have happened and wondrous deeds have been performed. Most importantly we have seen and celebrated the birth, life, teachings, healings, and miracles of Jesus. (2 Kings 2- Nancy)
- **Glory...** The glory of God is beauty, splendor, majesty, magnificence, excellence. Something we learn about God's glory throughout the scriptures is that God's glory is God's weightiness in wonderful qualities such as might, beauty, goodness, justice, and honor. When it comes to these characteristics and so many others, God has them in

superabundance. Something else we learn about God's glory throughout the scriptures is that God's glory is solid and substantial. It isn't mere reputation. It isn't dependent on anyone or anything else. God's glory reflects God's essential nature. And because of who God is in full glory, we are to glorify God through our actions and deeds: confessing, forgiving, trusting, produce fruit, give thanks, pray. (Isaiah 6:3)

- **Presence... regardless of circumstances...** Jesus could have chosen any number of methods at His disposal to reach the Disciples in the middle of the lake. He chose to do the impossible—to walk on water to them in the midst of the wind and waves, probably knowing it would terrify them. Throughout Scripture, the Spirit of God often hovers in places that are chaotic and turbulent—God's presence and ability to do the miraculous isn't limited to places that are calm, safe, have gotten better, or are "ok" from our human perspective. God is fine existing in the messy...in the "not yet." Jesus is already standing in the turbulence of our lives, and often times willingly calls us out to Him to walk with Him there. (Matthew 14:22-33- Alex)
- **Life Giving...** Jesus, and what Jesus is about, is LIFE GIVING. God wants us all to know that what Jairus and the woman were longing for, which in my understanding was "life", is available for us all. God doesn't pick and choose. God is a God of life for all who come to God in faith and love. (Mark 5:21-43)
- **Sainthood...** Sainthood is a gift from God instilled in us, God's masterpieces. Sainthood is an honor and responsibility given by no one other than God and it is a privilege and gift etched into us from the beginning of our creation. Sainthood is a result of "who" God has created us to be and our willingness to partner with God throughout the life God gives us. Our life then, as a gift from God, is our opportunity to live into our call and purpose to fulfill God's handiwork by embodying the sainthood God instills in us. (Psalm 139:14)
- **Trust (your Keeper)...** God's got this! We are to have the confidence and trust that God's our protector. God promises to keep and guard us on our journey of life as we go out and as we come in. God is the guardian and keeper of all life. (Psalm 121- Erik)
- **Bearing Witness...** Jesus proclaimed loving justice and embodied loving justice and now Jesus stands before the disciples, those wondering "How could this be? Is this commission for real?", that includes you and me in the here and now, and says, "You bet it is, so GO! and do likewise." (Luke 24:36-49)
- **Transformation...** God has the power, and can and will use that power, to turn (transform) things from one reality to another. God is the creator and maker of the heavens and of the earth. But what about humanity? Does God have the power to turn (transform) humanity? Yes, but God doesn't simply zap us into a new life. Transformation can take time and can have many layers of process. Transformation is often a battle of wills. Can transformation happen? Yes. Sin is not what defines us. As God's children, thankfully we are defined in God's love. Thus, when sin is so prevalent,

we must turn and seek God's help in transforming. To be who God has created and intended us to be, we must humble ourselves and surrender to God. (Acts 9:1-19)

- **An Incomparable God...** God, the God in whom we worship and praise, the God in whom we declare sovereign and worthy of our loyalty and allegiance, is the ONE and ONLY True God. "Our God is greater, our God is stronger." (Chris Tomlin) God is healer, awesome in power. Bigger, stronger, most powerful of all gods. "And if Our God is for us, then who could ever stop us? And if Our God is with us, then what can stand against?" (*Our God (is greater)*, Chris Tomlin) (Psalm 89:5, Isaiah 40:12-31)

Our last stop for this journey this Summer is in 1 Peter 4:7-11. Within this text we learn of the importance to be good stewards. Good stewards of what we might ask? Let's see if we can clearly identify as we read it.

This letter calls forth the Church to:

Be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. This doesn't mean we can't laugh or have a good time, but we are to dig in our heels with focus to God and follow what God commands.

Maintain constant love for one another. Maintenance takes effort and work and for something to be constant means it isn't something we just do when we feel like it or when it comes up. Love is to be at the forefront of our efforts to one another.

Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Hospitality is welcome and greeting. Hospitality is hosting and serving, tending to others so they have all they need. The nature of hospitality is different than work, because being hospitable doesn't always come with compensation. You are hospitable because it is right, not because you are being paid to be.

Be good stewards of God's grace, serve one another with the gifts God's has given you. God gives us grace and love and mercy and forgiveness, and God gives us gifts and talents to participate fully in the body of Christ. God gives us blessings and resources to help amplify and share God's love and light. Are we good stewards of what God gives us? Do we give thanks to God for what God gives? Do we share what God gives or do we hoard it for ourselves? A good steward cares for what they have and purposefully uses what they have for the glory of the owner or master.

Speak truth as God speaks truth. Truth comes from God, and it is the sweetest of information we can know. As we speak, we are to know the power of our tongue and do all we can to speak the truth of God, and the truth of circumstances, in love.

Serve in the strength and courage of God. Is it possible to be good stewards? Can we speak truth? Are we able to maintain constant love and be hospitable? Yes, with God's help. Just as God gives us grace and love and forgiveness, and gifts and talents, so does God remain with us to help us use them faithfully.

There is an illustration I have grown to really appreciate and I think it provides a good example of what it might look like for the church to embody 1 Peter 4:7-11 and be good stewards of God's grace:

Once upon a time, two brothers who lived on adjoining farms fell into conflict. It was the first serious rift in 40 years of farming side-by-side, sharing machinery and trading labor and goods as needed without a hitch. Then the long collaboration fell apart. It began with a small misunderstanding and it grew into a major difference and finally, it exploded into an exchange of bitter words followed by weeks of silence.

One morning there was a knock on John's door. He opened it to find a man with a carpenter's toolbox. "I'm looking for a few days' work," he said. "Perhaps you would have a few small jobs here and there I could help with? Could I help you?"

"Yes," said the older brother. "I do have a job for you. Look across the creek at that farm. That's my neighbor. In fact, it's my younger brother! Last week there was a meadow between us. He recently took his bulldozer to the river levee and now there is a creek between us. Well, he may have done this to spite me, but I'll do him one better. See that pile of lumber by the barn? I want you to build me a fence an 8-foot fence -- so I won't need to see his place or his face anymore." The carpenter said, "I think I understand the situation. Show me the nails and the post-hole digger and I'll be able to do a job that pleases you."

The older brother had to go to town, so he helped the carpenter get the materials ready and then he was off for the day. The carpenter worked hard all that day -- measuring, sawing and nailing. About sunset when the farmer returned, the carpenter had just finished his job. The farmer's eyes opened wide, his jaw dropped. There was no fence there at all. It was a bridge... A bridge that stretched from one side of the creek to the other! A fine piece of work, handrails and all! And the neighbor, his younger brother, was coming toward them, his hand outstretched. "You are quite a fellow to build this bridge after all I've said and done."

The two brothers stood at each end of the bridge, and then they met in middle, taking each other's hand. They turned to see the carpenter hoist his toolbox onto his shoulder. "No, wait! Stay a few days. I've a lot of other projects for you," said the older brother. "I'd love to stay on," the carpenter said, "but I have many more bridges to build."

What does it mean to be good stewards of God's grace? Is it possible? Are we able? Can we really? Yes, with God's help, for God is the One and Only True God who does wondrous deeds.

Prayers of the People- "Impossible Possibilities" adapted from the lyrics of *No Impossible with You* by I Am They

Wondrous God, you indeed are the one and only true God. You are The God of victory and glory. You are The God of breath and wind and fire. You are The God of abundance. In you we have life, hope, and peace. In you we have a chance against all the struggles and challenges of the world. In you we can and are able to be transformed and renewed. In you we can and are able to bear witness and be saints. You are The God of strength and presence, regardless of circumstances. You are The God in whom we can trust, knowing You will keep us and guard us.

Many of us right now are staring down a giant. Many of us right now can't see past our pain. For some our songs have turned to silence and You've never seemed so far away. May we all remember and have faith in the truths you promise, that there's no heart You can't rescue, no war You can't win, no story so over it can't start again, no pain You won't use, and no wall You won't break through. It might very well be too much for us, God, but there is no impossible with You.

Thank you for being willing to fight with us in our battles. Thank you for being the source of breath and life again. Thank you for being mighty in our weakness. Your name is greater, Your love is stronger, Your ways are higher, there's nothing that You can't do, because there's no impossible with You.

May all glory and honor and praise be Yours God, in the name of Jesus, your Son, our Lord and Savior, who taught his disciples of every time and place to pray together... Our Father...