

# 40 DAYS OF PRAYER



JOURNEY  
TO THE  
CROSS



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## *Journey to the Cross*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We are about to embark on another prayer journey as a family of believers. Our desire is to come to the LORD's throne as one unified body, composed of many voices. Over the next 40 days, our prayer is that this book of devotions will encourage you, convict you, and cause you to bend your knees and bow your head in holy reverence. May the Lord speak to you through His Word and the hearts of some of the saints at Perry Hall Baptist Church.

***Let your mercy come to me, that I may live; for your law is my delight. (Psalm 119:77)***

We pray that over the next 40 days you will set aside intentional time to dwell in the Word of the Father, allowing His Truth to wash over you. We pray that the purposeful discipline of spending intimate time with your heavenly Father becomes the daily longing of your heart. May His teachings become your delight.

***Lord, teach us to pray! (Luke 11:1)***

A common thread among these individual devotions is the call to daily Scripture reading and prayer. Prayer can be difficult for many. Yet, it is one of the means of grace the Lord has given us to grow in our faith, trust in Christ, and receive the benefits of redemption. This devotional is filled with prayers and encouraging words from a small sampling of our congregation, imperfect people to whom God has called to abide in Him. Each one has been, and continues to be, changed by a holy, just, sovereign, forgiving, faithful Father. Each one, just like you, has been given different life experiences, perspectives, and gifts. We are a body of believers who love God supremely, love one another

passionately, and love others intentionally. Our hope is that this devotional can be a tool to help us learn from one another. Our prayers are a powerful weapon and an incredible gift.

*“To speak to God on behalf of man is probably the highest service any of us can render. The next is to speak to men in the name of Jesus. Either is possible through His grace.” - Corrie ten Boom*

***Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.  
(Psalm 116:15)***

A long-time member of Perry Hall Baptist Church and sister in Christ, JoAnn Simmons, recently passed away. Her family generously shared some of her prayer journals with us. She was a prayer warrior and faithfully penned her daily talks with the Lord of her heart. This precious daughter is now home in the everlasting arms of her Savior, enjoying the fellowship for which she longed. May we all glean something from the legacy she left behind.

*“Thank You, Father God, for the privilege of praying to You. You are my almighty God, and I want to follow Your Ways each and every day You allow me to be here. I can pray to You anytime and anywhere and for anything. When I pray, I always pray for Your Will to be done. My heart is full of love for You, and I will follow You for the rest of my life. I love You, JoAnnie.”*

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## **PRAYER**

Father, we lift our voices to You. Please guide our church family these next 40 days and beyond. We ask that You will reveal Your glory to us, drawing each one of Your children closer to You. Help us to run to Your Word for wisdom. Make us bold when we tell others of Your wonders. Help us to honor You with our time, prayers, actions, and words. Align our hearts with Yours. May we love what You love and hate what You hate. Use us to reach the lost. Teach us to seek You and find You all the days of our lives. Make us fishers of men, and help us to raise up an army for You. May all that we do glorify You. Amen.

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**PSALM 86:8-13**

*There is none like you among the gods, O Lord,  
nor are there any works like yours.*

*All the nations you have made shall come  
and worship before you, O Lord,  
and shall glorify your name.*

*For you are great and do wondrous things;  
You alone are God.*

*Teach me your way, O LORD,  
That I may walk in your truth;*

*Unite my heart to fear your name.*

*I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart,  
And I will glorify your name forever.*

*For great is your steadfast love toward me;  
You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.*



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# DAY 1: THE POWER OF A DAILY COMMITMENT TO SCRIPTURE AND PRAYER

*Psalm 19:7-14 | Joshua 1:8 | 1 Timothy 4:7*

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If you've been a Christian for any length of time, you understand that two of the greatest gifts we have received are access and freedom to read and study God's Word, and the privilege of enjoying communion and conversation with our Heavenly Father through prayer. If we are honest, we also understand the challenge we face to be consistent in both wonderful disciplines. Regular study and meditation of the Word and consistent time alone with God in prayer are habits - and they require grace.

What may not be as apparent is the powerful impact made in our lives when we have a dual commitment to time in God's Word and time in prayer, and when we realize these habits are intimately and critically related. The Word informs and directs our praying, and praying clarifies, protects, and empowers our reading.

Let's consider three particularly important relationships between Scripture reading and prayer.

**Knowing God** ~ God has revealed Himself in a special way through His Word: His character, His attributes, His will, and His purposes. As we learn more and more about who He is and what He is like, our desire to know Him grows, we respond in praise and adoration, and we understand how He is to be approached. In other words, Scripture guides our conversations with our heavenly Father. A deeper intimacy with the Scriptures leads us into deeper intimacy with God (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

**Knowing God's Will** ~ As we engage with the Scriptures, we become acquainted with the heart of God and His desires, what pleases Him, and how He is most glorified (Psalm 115:1). As our knowledge of God grows, our hearts and minds become more aligned with His will, and we can pray, as John writes, to pray

“according to His will” (1 John 5:14). Our desires begin to transform, and we start to desire what He desires (Psalm 34:7). The Apostle Paul commands us to be “transformed by the renewing of our minds” (Romans 12:2) and that renewing of the mind comes through faithful meditation upon God’s Word.

**Nearness with God** ~ Simply put, regular and focused time in God’s Word leads to deeper, more intimate prayer with God. It has been said the soul learns to pray by praying, and the Word of God is our teacher. As we draw near to Him through His Word, we are simultaneously drawn to converse with Him. Jesus, the Living Word, lived in such intimacy with and nearness to the Father, that He constantly sought to be alone in prayer with God. Of course, no one knew the Word more than Christ. Most, if not all, heroes of the faith combined their love of God’s Word with a longing to spend time in communion with the Lord.

As A.W. Tozer famously stated, *“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us”* and those thoughts are foundational to a faithful and healthy prayer life!

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## **PRAYER**

Lord, give me a growing desire for Your Word, a desire that leads me to deeper communion with You in prayer. Father, as I meditate upon Your Word, may I draw nearer to You and may my prayers be fervent and effective. Amen.

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## **REFLECTION**

- I. Do your thoughts of God, learned through faithful and consistent meditation upon His Word, often considered the bridge between scripture and prayer, lead you to your knees in awe, adoration, obedience, and worship?
- II. As you read His love letter to us, do you find burning within you a desire to commune with the Living God?

*Submitted by: Pastor Dave*

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## DAY 2: KEYSTONE SPIRITUAL HABITS

*"Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the LORD." Psalm 4:4b-5*

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If you are a follower of Jesus, you know that prayer and Bible study are essential practices of our faith. During this season of Lent, as we are preparing our hearts to remember the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, I would like to challenge us to dig a little deeper and lean more closely into the heart of the Savior through intentionally meditating on His Word, spending time in silent prayer, and also learning the practice of fasting.

Psalm 1:2 says that the man is blessed whose *"delight is in the law of the LORD, and on His law he meditates day and night."* In the busyness of our lives, it is easy to read God's Word without really thinking about it. Meditating on Scripture takes deliberate thought and a little more of our time than we may typically give to just a cursory reading of it. For example, have you ever read a familiar account in the Bible and, instead of glossing over it, really tried to imagine yourself right there in the middle of it? Imagine being Peter, James, or John at the transfiguration of Jesus. Why did those three disciples get to participate in this amazing event? Surely it was primarily to prepare and strengthen them for the suffering Jesus was about to endure and to increase their trust in God. But also, had they become a little too familiar with Jesus because they had lived and walked with Him every day for over 3 years and maybe needed a reminder of His transcendence? Was Jesus giving Peter an opportunity to recognize that sometimes he needed to stop and think before he spoke, knowing how he would impulsively and emphatically betray Jesus not too far into the future? And what might the Holy Spirit be speaking to me as I consider these questions? Hebrews 4:12 tell us that **"the word of God is living and active"**; it is as relevant to us today as it was to the original audience. Approach God's Word with excitement and anticipation, remembering always to ask the Holy Spirit to open

your heart and your mind to truly hear what God is saying to you through it.

Being able to hear from God in this way also requires a good dose of silence. Maybe you are like me and find that your prayers often consist of “laundry lists” of requests for yourself and others. Now it is good and necessary to *“let your requests be made known to God”* as Paul tells us in Philippians 4, in addition to offering prayers of praise, thanksgiving, and repentance. But do you ever slow down and just sit in silence before Jesus and let Him do the talking? God came to Elijah not in a strong wind, an earthquake, or in fire, but in *“a still small voice”* (1 Kings 19:11-12). We can’t hear the still small voice if we aren’t quiet! Psalm 46:10 says, *“Be still and know that I am God”*, but sometimes being still is the hardest part for us.

Finally, prayer is often offered in conjunction with fasting in Scripture. During Lent, many Christians choose to give something up as a means of humbling themselves before God and preparing for the passion of Jesus by participating in some small way in His suffering. But let’s be honest... fasting from things we like (food, social media, an extra few minutes of sleep) or even from sinful habits is often inconvenient or uncomfortable or just plain difficult, and yet it is clearly a practice that is pleasing to God. Fasting in the Bible is usually associated with repentance (Neh 9:1-2 and Jonah 3:5-10) or with seeking the Lord for help (2 Chron 20:1-4 and Esther 4:16). Of course, Jesus fasted for 40 days as a means of being strengthened before His temptation by the devil and of preparing for His ministry, which is the whole basis for recognizing the 40-day season of Lent. When done with prayer in a spirit of humility and trust in God, it can be an effective means of receiving healing, forgiveness, and/or help from His hand. When the Jews were set to return from captivity in Babylon, Ezra *“proclaimed a fast...that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a straight way for ourselves, our children, and all our goods...So we fasted and besought our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty”* (Ezra 8:21, 23).



All of these habits take time, effort, and resolve on our part. As we participate in this season of repentance and remembrance of Jesus' suffering and death on our behalf, let us be willing to give more of ourselves to Him who gave everything for us.

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## **PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, thank You for this time of preparation to focus on the tremendous sacrifice that Jesus made on my behalf. Please help me to be willing to meditate on Your Word more fully and to have times of quiet before You in prayer, trusting the Holy Spirit's help and guidance. Please give me the discipline and grace to follow the example of Jesus in fasting according to Your Will. And please help me to surrender my will to Yours so that in all things I can become more like Jesus and bring glory to Your name. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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## **REFLECTION**

- I. Is it hard for you to spend time really studying Scripture? Will you commit this week to asking the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to what God might be saying to you through His Word?
- II. Do you find yourself doing all of the talking when you pray? See if you can spend even just 5 minutes in silence, imagining yourself in the presence of Jesus.
- III. Is there something God might be calling you to fast from during these 40 days as a means of preparing your heart for Easter? It might be something good that you enjoy (such as chocolate, coffee, sleeping in on a Saturday, etc.) or a habit that you need to control (such as excessive worrying, too much time on your phone, complaining at work, etc.) or a habitual sin from which you need to be free. Can you also take it a step further and offer that sacrifice up to God without unnecessarily drawing attention to it? (See Matthew 6:16-18)

*Submitted by: Amy Honbarrier*

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# DAY 3: HONORING AND VALUING GOD'S WORD HIGHLY

*Isaiah 55:10-11 | Psalm 1:2-3 | Hebrews 4:12*

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**V**aluing God's Word ~ In 1953, at Queen Elizabeth's coronation, the Bible was presented to her with the words: "We present you with this Book, the most valuable thing that this world affords. Here is Wisdom; This is the royal Law; These are the lively Oracles of God." As professing Christians, it's important to ask ourselves; do we believe that this book is the most valuable thing that the world affords? If so, how do we honor or practically live this out in our daily lives?

For me, daily quiet time with the Lord has been a vital need. My days are ALWAYS better when started in this type of worship. In 2023, I wanted to reinforce this daily habit and, most importantly, grow closer to my Lord and Savior, praying, "Lord, I want to know You more." In mid-January, I started reading a daily devotional that follows the biblical text from Genesis to Revelation. It includes at least one devotional for each book of the Bible. Those initial devotionals were close together, skipping a chapter or verse here and there. This would have made it very easy to skip those chapters and verses not referenced. However, it didn't take long for me to decide that I not only would read, but LONGED to read each chapter and verse between those referenced. I desired to not only read God's Word, but meditate on it and soak it in.

Recently, my wife Tracy and I, along with our daughter, Maggie, took a short hike to the Gunpowder River. Once we reached the Gunpowder, barely a word was spoken for the first few minutes. We each sat taking in God's creation. As I heard the sound of the water flowing, I was immediately reminded of the words from the psalmist, "*As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*" (Psalm 42:1-2). I had an emotional reaction then, as I do right now, recalling this encounter with His creation. What a joy to have His words return to me at that very moment.

**How Can We Honor God's Word** ~ I encourage you to open your Bible daily, read your Bible daily, study your Bible daily, and to meditate on the Bible daily. As Paul writes, *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work”* (2 Tim. 3:16 – 17). We must make every effort to seek Him and His Word daily. NO EXCUSES. We live in a day and age and place where The Word is so accessible. We have the faithfully preserved and translated, very Word of God. John Piper says, *“We hold in our hands a book where God, the ruler of the universe, tells us what He wants us to know. The Bible puts us in touch with God’s thoughts about everything He wants us to think about.”* Do you own a Bible? If the answer is no, ask the church for one. Do you own a smartphone? If you do, download the Bible.

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## **PRAYER**

Father, we want to know You more. We want to know who Your Son is, why You created us, and what our purpose is. Lord, would You open our eyes, clear our minds, and soften our hearts as we make You and Your Son, Jesus Christ, the center of our lives? May You be honored and glorified. In Your Son’s name we pray. Amen.

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## **REFLECTION**

- I. Do I honor and value God? What does this look like? Am I opening His Word? Am I praying to Him?
- II. Am I willing to sacrifice something earthly, perhaps the headlines of the day, or a scroll through social media, to have a deeper relationship with the Creator and have the hope of eternal life?
- III. Are you ready to share the Good News?

*Submitted by: Shawn Dietrich*

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## DAY 4: ANSWERING GOD'S CALL

*Thessalonians 4:1-8 | 1 Thessalonians 5: 12-22 | 1 Peter 2*

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Often time throughout my life I have wished that God worked a little bit more like He did in the Old and New Testaments, especially when it relates to God letting me know what His will is for my life. Moses was called by God to return to Egypt by God speaking to him from a burning bush. Samuel heard an audible voice while he was trying to go to sleep. Both the Old Testament and New Testament Joseph received dreams from God. Paul was blinded when God appeared to him in person on the road to Damascus. Deciphering God's will for their lives sounds a little easier for them than it is for us. I would love to answer God's call, if I could only determine what it is!

God did work in amazing ways throughout the Scripture, but it is easy for us to downplay the incredible way that God communicates His will to us today. We have two things combined that none of the people mentioned above had: the indwelling of the Holy Spirit combined with the completed revelation of Scripture. Revelation 3:20 describes how Jesus stands at the door and knocks; God approaches us and initiates contact, He calls us to open ourselves to Him. The phrase that is used to describe what happens when we open the door of our lives literally says, *"I will come into him"*, a phrase that conjures thoughts of possession. If you have opened your life to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit then you have already answered the first call of God for your life. Ephesians 2:8-9 describes for us how this process of answering God's initial call for us is a faith-based event, it requires no work from us; however, verse ten tells us about the next step in God's call for us. *"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*

As Christians, God has called us to "do good works". This first includes a list of things to avoid. 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 tells us the will of God for us is sanctification, becoming more like God in our

lives, and “for God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.” We also get a list of good works that God has called us to do in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22. It includes things like, “*be at peace amongst yourselves,*” and “*give thanks in all circumstances.*” These are helpful lists, but they don’t give us any information on what God specifically wants *me* to be doing in my life. Where do we get a burning bush moment? Where do we hear an audible voice tell us where to go, or who to witness to, or what job to pursue?

1 Corinthians 12 speaks to our desire to get special directions from God as it talks about the body of Christ. Verse 4 says, “*There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.*” God has given each of us different gifts and abilities, the passage seems to indicate that each member of the body already knows where they fit into the whole. God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be. And they already know where they are! Are you a teacher? Are you an encourager? Are you a scientist? Are you good at working with your hands? Are you fast? In the film “Chariots of Fire” Eric Liddell knew how God made him when he said, “God made me fast, and when I run, I feel his pleasure.” All these gifts come from the same Spirit. God’s calling on our lives is that we use those gifts for Him. Scripture presents a picture of answering God’s calling as something that largely happens within us, we are called to sanctification, we are called to become more like Christ in everything we do, no matter what that is.

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## **PRAYER**

God, I am grateful for the way that You have chosen to communicate with me. Thank you for giving me access to Your word, thank you for sending the Holy Spirit to help me understand how Your word applies to my life. I pray that You would help turn my thankfulness into action, that I would search Your word and hide it in my heart, that I would learn to better apply it to my life. Please help me to be the person that You have called me to be, a

person that avoids the things that You tell us to avoid and practices the things that You desire us to do. Help me to live in a way so that no matter what I do I call attention to Your glory and greatness. Teach me to use the gifts that You have given me to be more like Jesus. May I be more like Jesus when He said, *“for I seek not to please myself but rather Him who sent me.”* (Jn. 5:30) Amen.

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## REFLECTION:

- I. As God’s primary call, have you answered the knock of Jesus on the door of your life?
- II. God’s secondary calling is sanctification. How can you better live out the lifestyle of 1 Thessalonians 5, and therefore show Christ to others?
- III. Have you become consumed with outward gifts and abilities to the neglect of the “same Spirit” that has given each of our gifts like the Church in Corinth? Are you more concerned with comparing your abilities with other people, or using your abilities to honor the God that gave them to you?

*~Submitted by: Zach Royce*



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# DAY 5: MISPLACED WORSHIP

## *Psalm 5*

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7o me, the account of Exodus 32 is one of the most fascinating stories in the whole Bible! When Moses is away spending precious moments with God, the people of Israel lose patience, band together, create an idol, and begin to worship it as their new god. Depending on your translation, this process happens in about two paragraphs (just six verses)! Sheesh, shame on them for their prideful lack of fear of God! How silly the people of God must have looked bowed before an idol made of their own gold trinkets. That's certainly what I'm tempted to think at times when reading this story. However, you don't have to look deeply to realize that we're not far from this reality a few thousand years later.

We're good at making idols. We strive, strain, and scheme to acquire the things that we want, sometimes limiting our ability to invest in the Kingdom of heaven. We prioritize the preferences and agendas of our children, sometimes to the detriment of our ability to steer our families to follow closely behind Jesus. We build a pedestal for our work or educational accomplishments, looking to them as sources of contentment and security, sometimes keeping us from looking to the One who promised to guard us with peace, often using these things together to bolster the little tyrant that is our selves. Often, we subconsciously believe the modern-day thought process that all things should work together to serve our joy and comfort. Our stuff should produce it, our kids should display it, and our accomplishments should proclaim it. Don't believe me? The internet is making billions through our primary tool of self-celebration (the one that lives in our hands...the tool through which I type this devotional). Sometimes, we're eerily good at doing what Paul warns about in Romans 1:18-25 (worshipping the creation rather than the creator), and the church is increasingly less immune to this struggle.

Yet, we were made to worship! God designed us to look in awe upon Him and His creation and to celebrate (Psalm 100). Worship is built into our DNA but think about the precious moments we miss when we lose sight of the only just object of our worship: God. Let's realize together that our children are precious gifts from a loving God! They allow us to laugh, smile, beam with pride, and they teach us patience (not to mention they are an inexhaustible source of sermon illustrations). God blesses us with precious treasures as a tool to honor Him and join Him in building His kingdom. Our accomplishments become platforms on which we lift His glory and grace so that others see Him in us and come to the precious realization that our "best life" is one that is surrendered to Him (Romans 12:1). To worship the God of the universe is precious!

Losing sight of Him can be all too easy. Let us challenge ourselves this year to do what David says in Psalm 5 and cry out to God in the morning and watch for His goodness throughout the day.

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## **PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, I confess that You are great, and awesome, and wonderful! I don't want to miss how precious You are, nor do I want to provoke Your wrath by misplacing my worship. Please help me to start my days by focusing my eyes on You and Your glory. Then, help me to see all of the blessings of my life through the lens of Your glory. I need the help and power of Your Holy Spirit to do this! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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## **REFLECTION**

- I. What things or people do you make an idol in your life? What reason do you give yourself for thinking that they/it are worthy of so much of your attention?
- II. What are you doing daily to ensure that your attention is fixed on the Creator every morning?
- III. Do you view the worship of God as precious?

*Submitted by: Kenny Matthews*



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# DAY 6: WORSHIP, PRAYER, AND FASTING

*Joel 2:12-13 | Isaiah 58: 3-7 | Matthew 9:14-15*

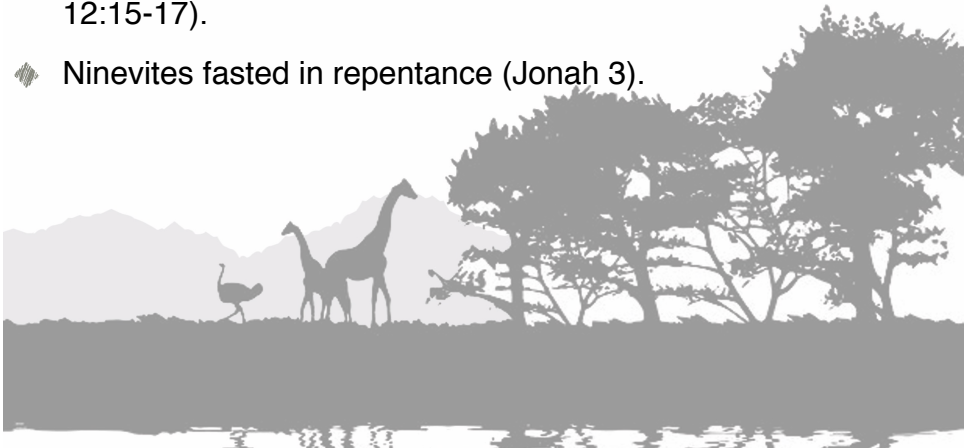
*Matthew 6:16-18 | Luke 2: 36-38 | Acts 13:1-4*

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**W**hat comes to your mind when someone mentions the word “fasting”? Does it make you think of improving one’s physical health, Ramadan or Lent seasons, or Old Testament Jewish people grieving in sackcloth over sins? Would it surprise you to know there are more than 40 passages in Scripture referring to the Biblical/spiritual discipline of fasting?

Old Testament passages have fasting in different situations.

- ◆ Moses fasted on Mount Sinai while conversing with God over the 10 commandments (Ex 34:28).
- ◆ Queen Esther asked for Mordecai, the Jews in Susa, as well as her maids, to fast for three days before she appeared unsummoned in the presence of the king to plead mercy for her people. An unsummoned appearance could have cost Esther her life (Esther 4:15-16).
- ◆ Nehemiah fasted when he was heart stricken for Israel especially over Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1-2:8).
- ◆ King David fasted while in agony over the sins he committed against God while his baby boy lay dying (2 Samuel 12:15-17).
- ◆ Ninevites fasted in repentance (Jonah 3).



Humbleness, repentance, grieving, mourning, strength, and mercy or just wanting a word from God seems to have been among the reasons for Old Testament fasting.

In the New Testament, the passages continue but with something different.

- ◆ Luke mentions the prophetess Anna in the temple worshipping, fasting, and praying waiting for the Christ (Luke 2:36-38).
- ◆ Even in Christ's ministry, fasting was wrapped with worship and prayer. His disciples were expected to fast (Matt. 9:14-15).
- ◆ Christ, himself, reiterated God's expected fasting behavior (Matt. 6:16-18, Joel 2:12-13 and Is. 58:3-7).
- ◆ Christ, the example, shows how important fasting is while He was in the wilderness for 40 days and nights being tempted by Satan (Luke 4: 1-11).

According to both John Piper and Focus on the Family, Christ's ascension into heaven left an ache, a deep longing of the heart, an intensity for Christ that is still felt even to this day. The New Testament church would fast to seek God's will and need for grace and strength to remain faithful to God and His work (Acts 13:1-4).

Are we not today asking for the same thing in our churches? The same guidance, the same grace, the same strength to be faithful to the Biblical God?

John Piper reflected in a sermon he gave called, "Prayer, Fasting, and the Course of History" from January 1, 1995:

"John Wesley tells us in his journal of a similar kind of deliverance in 1756. The king of Britain called for a day of solemn prayer and fasting because of a threatened invasion of the French. Wesley wrote,

'The fast day was a glorious day, such as London has scarce seen since the Restoration. Every church in the city was more than full,

and a solemn seriousness sat on every face. Surely God heareth prayer, and there will yet be a lengthening of our tranquility.'

Then, in a footnote he added later, "Humility was turned into national rejoicing for the threatened invasion by the French was averted." It would not be difficult to multiply story after story from the Bible and after the Bible to show that fasting and prayer have changed the course of history. We will see in the coming weeks that this is especially true in the way fasting figures into times of great revival."

We pray as individuals, and as a church, to be humble before Christ. To rely on Him for guidance, direction, grace, mercy, forgiveness, and strength to remain faithful for His honor and His glory. We ask for a deep faith through worship, prayer, and fasting so we may be like Christ.

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## **PRAYER**

Father, thank you for giving us Your Word filled with examples of people in the Old and New Testaments who were faithful to worship, pray, and fasting. We ask that You let the words of our mouths and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, our rock and redeemer (Ps. 19:14). In Your Son's precious name. Amen.

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## **REFLECTION**

- I. What, if anything, prevents you from seeing fasting as a spiritual discipline?
- II. When you are heavy with burdens or feel surrounded by the evil of this world have you ever considered fasting along with prayer and worship?
- III. For those who have experienced fasting, what have been the positive spiritual results? Have you considered sharing with those around you?

*Submitted by: Rebecca Fisher*

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# DAY 7: FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRISTIAN BROTHERS AND SISTERS

*Proverbs 27:17 | Hebrews 10:24-25*

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Fellowship is extremely important as we grow in our journey to be closer to and more like God. Having other Christians support you is a blessing to both you and them.

Several years ago, I was feeling like I needed more. I reached out to Pastor Dave for guidance. We started meeting regularly. As we met, he would ask personal questions to get to know me to see exactly where I was in my walk. As time went on some questions got tougher, and he would teach me what the Bible had to say about certain struggles or blessings in my life. He is always an encouragement. As time went on, we grew into a group of seven men of varying ages. We have been meeting for years and have grown closer to one another and the Lord during this time.

As Proverbs 27:17 states, *“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”* We must be willing to be honest and vulnerable with each other. It is equally important for men and women to gather in separate groups and in groups together as couples. My wife and I have been part of a few couples groups. Something great about these groups is that all couples are in very different stages of life with their walk with the Lord, marriage, children, work, etc. As we go through our studies, we can apply them to our life and help one another. In both style groups you will learn that *your* struggles are *not only your* struggles. Others have gone through or may be going through the same struggle now. Opening up and sharing helps free yourself of the burden and gives others the opportunity to offer biblical advice and encouragement as you offer the same.

James 5:16 says, *“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”* You must be

willing to accept loving corrections from your brothers and sisters as they share the truth (at times the hard truth) with you. You cannot be offended by their love as they help you stay on or get back on track for the Lord. You benefit from mutual instruction, encouragement, and correction. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “*And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.*”

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## **PRAYER**

Lord, I pray that the men and women of Perry Hall Baptist seek You and fellowship with others. May they see the importance of fellowship with other believers and the blessings You provide through following Your Word. Lord, lay it on the hearts of those that are not part of a group to step out of their comfort zone and seek a group to grow with and learn from as they all seek You together. Thank you for all the men and women at Perry Hall Baptist that lead groups. May their hearts continue to have the desire to share Your Word and love on others. Amen.

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## **REFLECTION**

- I. Am I in an intimate group of believers? If not, why?
- II. If you are, are you being open with your group, seeking and offering guidance, encouragement, and loving correction?

*Submitted by: Chuck Kelly*



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# DAY 8: CONFESSION, REPENTANCE, AND FORGIVENESS

*Psalm 51 | 2 Samuel 12*

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**W**e all want and need forgiveness. In our relationships with people, we want those that we have said something to that we shouldn't have or mistreated for whatever reason to forgive us and for the relationship to be healed. Even though we are quick to want forgiveness, we are, at times, slow to forgive. If we are honest, sometimes we might even say that it is impossible to forgive the other person for what they said or did to us because of how it impacted and continues to impact us. At other times, we may feel that what we did or said is so big and heinous that we could never hope to be forgiven. When we fail to forgive others or ourselves it often comes from our misunderstanding of God's love, grace, and mercy.

David knew what it was like to carry the great weight of sin. After failing to go out to war with his men, he engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Bathsheba. This relationship led David to try and cover up his sin and culminated with having Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, killed. Even after this, David did not face his sin and God sent the Prophet Nathan to confront him. After being confronted by Nathan, David penned these words in Psalm 51:4, *"Against You, You only; have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You may be justified in Your words and blameless in Your judgement"*. Despite the impact of David's choices on Bathsheba, Uriah, and his men, David understood that his sin was first and foremost against God. The Psalm continues with David for the Lord to *"deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed" and for God to "hide Your face from my sins."*

The Psalm continues with David expressing that nothing he can do, no animal sacrifice or burnt offering, would fix the problem. However, David did know that God did desire a sacrifice as he writes, *“my sacrifice, O God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart You, God, will not despise”* (Ps 51:17). David understood that confession and repentance was the way to receiving God’s forgiveness.

Perhaps you look at your life and feel like your sin is just too big to be forgiven. Perhaps, you feel that you are so dirty that God could never accept you. These are both lies. God knows we have a sin problem and that the problem is too big for us to fix. This is why He sent His Son to die on the cross, to be buried, to rise from the dead, and to ascend to the right hand of the Father. Jesus paid the debt that you and I could never hope to pay for us to be forgiven and God takes our sin and casts them *“as far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us”* (Ps 103:12). No matter what you have done, in Christ God forgives you completely. However, God does more than forgive us, He puts His Spirit in us, gives us a new heart, and through His Spirit causes us to walk in obedience (Ezek. 36). Complete forgiveness does not give us license to go on sinning. Even though we have complete forgiveness of sin in Christ, God calls us to walk in obedience and to pursue holiness.



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## PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank you for the forgiveness that I have in Jesus Christ and that no matter how big I feel my sin is, it was paid for at the cross. Thank you that my sin has been cast as far as the east is from the west. Help me to understand that when I do sin, it is first and foremost against You. Help me to see my sin, to confess my sin, and to turn away from my sin. Amen.

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## REFLECTION

- I. When you sin, do you tend to focus on the impact on others, yourself, or on God?
- II. How can understanding that your sin is first and foremost against God help to bring you to a point of confession and repentance?
- III. Knowing that in Christ you are forgiven, do you still pursue to walk in obedience or just ask forgiveness every time you sin?

*Submitted by Ed Barnett*





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## DAY 9: PRAYING HIS WORDS

*Luke 11:1 | Ephesians 5:25-27 | Psalm 1:2-3*

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**I**magine – your dreams come true, and Jesus is sitting across the breakfast table from you. Could you picture how animated your conversation would be? What would you discuss? On your mind are family and friends’ challenging circumstances, the future, financial struggles, or maybe ministry questions. You may even have a crisis on your hands, and you feel desperate for His help. Satisfyingly, you feel heard, and incredibly, you discover tomorrow you have the same opportunity.

Tomorrow comes, and you are eager to meet with Jesus. You tell Him how wonderful He is and thank Him for hearing about your burdens yesterday. Then, there is an awkwardly long pause because you just don’t know what else to say. It’s like the quiet meal across from your family member – since you both are already familiar with the day’s events, you typically talk about schedules, or worse there is distance. What do you discuss with Jesus, who already knows everything anyway?

Can you relate to the disciples? They spent the most in-person time with Jesus. Yet, in mid-ministry they reached a point where they were stumped about how to pray: *“Lord, teach us to pray”*, (Luke 11:1). How much more might we need His direction now since prayer requires quiet and focus that compete with the pace of modern life?

As a teen, I listened to Donald Whitney introduce the concept of “praying through the Scriptures”. Over the years, it has served my relationship with the LORD well to pray God’s Word back to Him and add my heart. It shows I’m listening, the message is understood, and I desire to imitate the Initiator.

I’m convinced that you will find praying through Scripture is helpful for several reasons and it is easy to do.

First, praying through Scripture is helpful because it is God-centered and practical. It focuses prayer by giving a springboard to start the conversation. It widens prayer by broadening it beyond the usual subjects of prayer. Next, this type of prayer is God-centered by beginning with God's initiation through His Word and drawing attention to His priorities. Praying through Scripture brings into alignment our will with His purposes. Additionally, the mind is prepared by washing it with the Word and cultivating its renewal (Eph. 5:27, Rom. 12:2). Lastly, it adds fuel to the conversation that is inexhaustible.

Second, it is easy to pray through Scripture. Young and seasoned Christians alike, can do this with little effort to exercise this new muscle. Donald Whitney suggests starting with the Psalms, but it can be applied to even heavy theological portions of Scripture.

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## **PRAYER**

Simply start by reading the first verse, choose key words to meditate on, then paraphrase back to God what comes to mind. Repeat verse two.

For example, consider Hebrews 12:2:

*<sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

I fix my eyes on You, the Perfect Leader of my faith. I don't understand how to have joy while enduring this cross. Please be with me and grant me a vision of You. Steady me with Your endurance and joy. I'm so thankful You went to the cross in my place and anticipated saving me. You are reigning at the right hand of Your Father's throne, and that is my confidence today.

Incorporating Scripture into prayer is a game changer for personal, as well as public prayer and it is simple to start.

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## REFLECTION

- I. How would you describe your prayer life now? 1 (distant) or 10 (rich and satisfying). Does prayer seem predictable, unfocused, and more like a chore? Or is talking with God easily the top conversation you look forward to all day?
- II. If Jesus were across your breakfast table, what would you want to discuss?
- III. What is a favorite section of scripture that you would you like to pray through this week?

*Submitted by: Kristen Holt*



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# DAY 10: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO OBEY GOD?

*1 Samuel 15:22 | 2 Corinthians 10:4-6*

*1 Peter 1:13-16 | Romans 6:16-18*

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**“Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice...”** (1 Samuel 15:22b)

The hymn written by John H. Sammis “Trust and Obey” has the familiar chorus “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.” It seems so simple, doesn’t it? To trust in God and obey His Word is a right spiritual posture for happiness in Jesus. However, we all know life offers many other paths. The opposite would be trusting in ourselves or the world and obeying our own sinful desires. Even mature Christians find themselves misaligned with this song’s proclamation from time to time. What does it mean to obey God? What does that look like in our lives? Let’s first understand what obeying God is not.

Jesus spoke on this topic to the chief priests and elders of the people in the temple. He told a parable about two sons (Matt 21:28-32) who were asked by their father to go and work in the vineyard. One son said no, but later went and worked. The other said he would go, but never did. The message of the parable is that our actions prove whether or not we are being obedient to God. This means that obeying God is not just believing in God. James 2:19 tells us *“Even the demons believe...”* in God. Obeying God is not simply knowing God’s Word. Even Satan quoted Scripture in his efforts to tempt Jesus in Matthew 4. The priests and elders knew the Scriptures better than anyone of the time, and they believed in God. Still, Jesus told them *“Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.”*

Believing in God and knowing His Word are wonderful pillars of a fruitful Christian life, *but God is calling us to more.*

The life of Jesus gives us a perfect example of what it really means to obey God. Phil 2:8 says, *“And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”* Jesus focused His energy on doing the will of the Father (John 6:38). His actions, and the fruit they produced, proved His obedience.

The following observations are certainly not an exhaustive list, but offer some examples for us to follow:

- ◆ Jesus taught us to obey God even when it’s not popular or accepted. He healed a man’s withered hand in the synagogue on the Sabbath in front of the Pharisees. The Pharisees then *“...went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.”* Jesus knew this would bring trouble for Him, but He obeyed anyway. (Matt 12:9-14)
- ◆ Jesus taught us to obey God even when it’s not comfortable. Jesus was under such great stress in the garden of Gethsemane that *“...his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”* Right before this, He prayed *“...Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.”* (Luke 22:42-44)
- ◆ Finally, Jesus taught us to obey God even if we don’t feel the presence of God. We have the blessing of God’s presence with us always, but we may have times where we just don’t feel it. When Jesus was on the cross, there was actually a time where He had to be cut off from fellowship with the Father. Jesus had to endure God’s wrath for our sake. Even in this moment, His actions proved His obedience. He completed the will of His Father for His mission on earth and gave up His spirit. (Matt 27:50)

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## PRAYER

Lord, help us to obey You in the way You truly desire. As Jesus taught us, we pray that just as Your will is perfectly experienced in Heaven, it would also be experienced on earth. Grant us the discipline to obey You in all that we do, Father. Amen

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## REFLECTION

- I. Do I obey God when it's not popular or accepted?
- II. Do I obey God when it's not comfortable?
- III. Do I obey God even if I can't feel His presence?

*Submitted by: Matt Meistering*



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# DAY 11: ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

## *John 17*

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**A**s a new Christian, I struggled with how Jesus' sacrifice could be enough for all my sins and all the sins of every believer. If that sacrifice isn't enough for all those sins, then could I lose the salvation that I gained when I first believed? This caused some major struggles in my mind. Then, I read John 17. This chapter helped change my whole perspective on the subject of salvation. There are many verses that support a once-saved, always-saved understanding of Scripture. Like John 3:16, John 5:24, and John 10:27-28. Once I understood John 17, they all became the support for what Jesus says in this chapter.

This is a fantastic insight into who Jesus is and why His first coming is so important. This is a direct prayer of the Son to the Father. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords to the Almighty Father, the Everlasting God. In verse 3, is this not the Christian walk? To know the true and living God and, Jesus, His Son? Throughout this prayer, Jesus continually says He has used what was given to Him by God and told those whom God has given to Him the words and the knowledge that God wanted them to have.

My struggles ended in verses 20-23. Jesus is praying for all believers that would come from Jesus Himself and those that He has sent. His prayer is that they would all be one, as He and the Father are one. He has given us the glory that God has given to Him. He has shared His glory with all of His believers, not some, but all. Verse 23 wraps it up for me, that Jesus is in us and God is in Him. Jesus has loved us as God the Father has loved Him, from the foundation of the world. This, to me, says that we are wrapped in the love of God, in His salvation, and there is nothing in heaven or on earth that can separate us from the love of God. Father, Son, and Spirit all work together to assure our salvation. John 10:27-28 teaches us that our response to Jesus' voice proves that we are His sheep. Verse 29 gives us the image of our salvation

being secured by the strength of the Father's hands. The New Testament often speaks of the Holy Spirit sealing our salvation, notably in Ephesians 1:13-14. The shared strength of our triune God assures us that there is no way we can lose our salvation because it is all in His hands, not ours.

Salvation is God's gift to us, which we did not, nor could ever, earn in the first place. He seals us on that day as a child of God to inherit all the promises He's laid out in the Scripture.

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## PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I pray for all those that are struggling and wrestling with the knowledge of their salvation. Please do a work in them to see that Your salvation is a free gift that You do not take back. You give us this gift freely and You protect it from ourselves so that we cannot lose it. I pray that Your Word would help all to see that that we stand in Your finished work and nothing is dependent on our doing. I praise You, Lord, for coming to us and providing a way for us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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## REFLECTION

- I. Have you ever struggled with knowing you are saved? Does it give you comfort to know Jesus has prayed for you?
- II. Can you rest in the salvation that God has given you through Jesus His son?
- III. Have you received God's words? Are they stored in your heart?

*Submitted by: Ed Volz*





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# DAY 12: HIS PURPOSES

*1 Peter 1:13-25 | Philipppians 2 | James 1*

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Everyone was made in God's image with a purpose. This purpose may be easily forgotten as we walk through our days worrying about what has to be completed, how much money has to be made, or even how other people think of us. But this is not the will of God.

We are called to live according to the Word, doing nothing out of selfish ambition, or conceit, counting others more significant than ourselves (Phil. 2:3). The Lord does not call us to live comfortably, but rather in a way that we are always ready to give an answer to anyone who asks for the reason of the hope that is in us (1 Pet. 3:15). This is a great practice to master as many people can either walk away, only to continue walking in their sin believing that their view of the world is the pinnacle of all, or their eyes can be opened to the truth to which the Holy Spirit has led them. Our words and our actions could break down a non-believer's walls and allow them to be filled with the Spirit.

Living this way is not easy by any means, and Peter tells us that we are called to suffer for Christ, just as He did for us. When these trials come against us, we should rejoice because we know that it is because of our faith and the Spirit of God living inside of us. These trials, if we endure them, make our faith stronger, and grow our relationship with the One whose whole purpose was to suffer for our sake.



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## PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us another day to grow closer to You, and to spread Your love to those around us. We thank You for Your love and mercy; for giving us another life and chance to live more and more like Jesus. Lord, we pray that You will use us for Your purposes, and not for our own fleshly desire. We have seen how destructive we can be, and without You, we are merely human. Help us spread the best news to our neighbors, and love them as commanded. Lord, help us realize where we may be falling short, and direct our paths. We pray that we would honor You today, in the midst of everyday struggles. Let Your will be done. In Your Name, Amen.

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## REFLECTION

- I. Are you living in accordance with the Word, and if not, why?
- II. How can God use you today to show His love to others?
- III. If someone questioned your faith, would you be able to defend it well, and in a loving way?

*Submitted by: Lake Woodie*



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## DAY 13: WITNESSING AT WORK

*2 Corinthians 2:15 | Galatians 5:22-23 | James 4:6*

*Proverbs 11:2 | Proverbs 16:3*

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Several years back, I had started a new job, where I was in an environment that, at times, wasn't exactly family-friendly with the type of language and attitude used. However, there was one man who stood out. He wasn't like the others. He was someone who had the "aroma" of Jesus on him. He wasn't standing on a podium preaching the Gospel. He wasn't taking each person aside and telling them they needed Jesus in their lives. Most importantly, he wasn't acting like he was better than everyone else. This was a man who was demonstrating the Fruits of Spirit in his actions. We became fast friends, and I've told him on more than one occasion, "I wanna be like you when I grow up."

We both work at different jobs now, but in my new job I've tried to use that experience as a model of how to be a good witness at work. Let's just say that I'm still a work in progress. When people at your job discover you are a Christian, you are, of course, under a microscope. Every time you make a mistake, people call you out. "I thought you were a Christian," or "I thought you were better than that." In a way, they are right. Being a good witness at your job, doesn't mean you always have to be perfect. Let's face it, we aren't perfect. God uses our imperfections, along with some humility on our part, to show others you don't need to be perfect to be a child of God.

We don't need to come to work with our Bible in hand, preaching the Gospel to every person we see. If the opportunity arises, and the Lord provides an opening, yes, speak about the Gospel to someone who seems interested or may need to hear it. Most of the time, though, when you demonstrate the Fruits of the Spirit in your walk, along with some humility when you fall short, people will see something different about you, and wonder what you have that they don't.

When you walk into your workplace, let people “smell a little Jesus on you.”

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## **PRAYER**

Lord, we know that most workplace environments, are not Christian environments. Some can be harsh, crude, and judgmental. Our prayer is that as we are in these workplaces, that we can be the aroma of Christ for those around us, that we can demonstrate the Fruits of the Spirit and humility when we fall short. We pray that the people around us, will see You, Lord, in us, and that it would bring them closer to You. We give You all the glory, Lord. Amen

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## **REFLECTION**

- I. Can people at my workplace tell that I'm a follower of Jesus by my actions and words?
  
- II. In what ways can I improve to be a better example of Christ in my life in the workplace?

*Submitted by: Zig Hyman*



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# DAY 14: THE POWER OF PRAYER

*Psalm 32:6-8 | Psalm 33:16-22 | Psalm 34:4-7 | Psalm 62:6-8*

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**I**n 2018, my mother and aunt were visiting from out of state. During dinner, my aunt opened up that she had been living in secret. Her daughter, my cousin Danielle, had been struggling with addiction for several years. Her drug of choice was a mix of methamphetamine and heroine.

The thought of my beautiful cousin who I grew up with living on the streets addicted to drugs was more than my soul could bear. Right then and there I prayed for the first time out loud with my mother and my aunt.

I didn't know what I was doing. I had never prayed out loud before, but I knew that I needed to do whatever it took for God to move on her behalf.

For weeks, I was relentless in prayer. I prayed with my aunts. I prayed with my father. I prayed with my husband. I prayed with friends. I prayed and poured out my heart in a way that I have never done before. I didn't care if I looked foolish. I didn't care what people thought of me, and I didn't care if my words were perfect. All I cared about was that God would hear me, and that He would deliver her from this addiction. I fought for Danielle in prayer, with all of my strength.

I did not know how to save her, but I knew the One who could, and I called upon Him with all that I had.

Five years later, by God's great mercy and faithfulness, Danielle is sober and thriving. The Lord heard these heartfelt prayers, and He answered them with a "yes". Not only did the Lord heal my cousin, but He grew my faith, and taught me greatly about the power of prayer. I witnessed a miracle that I still cling to this day.

Every day, there is a war for our soul, our attention, our time, our hearts. The enemy is clever, sneaky, and he shows up in countless ways, always seeking to lie, steal, and destroy.

This is not a war we can fight in our own strength. The battle is fought by the Lord of hosts. Our heavenly King.

Prayer is the greatest weapon we have to partner with God against the wiles of the devil (Eph. 6:11). We must use it to push back the kingdom of darkness that wants so badly to distract, break apart, and leave us discouraged and apathetic.

The way we fight the war for ourselves, our marriages, and our children, is by earnestly seeking a holy God by the power of prayer. Faithfully on our knees everyday, praying the scriptures over our marriages, over our children, over our family and friends. We have to diligently fight the spiritual battle that is so pervasive in our culture.

The more I recognize and acknowledge that this battle is not mine to fight, and admit my desperate need for a Savior, the more God is honored as the Lord of my life. The more I pour my heart out to the Lord, the more I trust Him. The more I trust Him, the more I love Him.

The more I see my own sin, and run to Him in repentance, the more I grow in the character of Jesus. My commitment and reliance on prayer is the lifeline of my spiritual growth, and the only way I can persevere in situations and trials beyond my control.

So let us pray! By ourselves, in groups, with our spouse, and with our children.

Let us pray! For our families, for our enemies, for our children, for our grandchildren.

Over our neighborhoods, over our homes.

Let us not be a people who fight the way the culture does, but let us be a people, on our knees, in faithful surrender, to the King of the universe. Prayer is how we, as a church, will wage war on the enemy until Jesus's return.

Let us pray, not in timidity, not without faith, but with the boldness of a lion, and strength of warriors. Praying in faith for the sake of eternity. Let us pray, as Jesus did. Thy kingdom come, Lord, and thy will be done.

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## REFLECTION

- I. When was the last time you honored the Lord with heartfelt, surrendered prayer?
- II. Can you recall a time that God answered your prayer in a powerful way?
- III. How can you avoid distractions in your prayer time?

*Submitted by: Kathleen Pjura*



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# DAY 15: PRAYER FOR FAMILIES

*1 Corinthians 13:4-7 | Ephesians 5:22 – 6:4*

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What are some words, phrases, or thoughts that come to mind when you see that today's prayer topic is "family"? Specifically, **your** family. Are your thoughts warm and fuzzy or are they prickly and spirit-agitating? If we are honest with ourselves there is often a mix of emotions swirling through our heads. Why are our most challenging relationships often with people we share a home or even DNA with? You know it's true - just look at the quotes below. Some may even hit a little too close to home:

"Families, you can't live with them, you can't live without them..."  
– Tate Hallaway

"There's nothing that makes you more insane than family. Or more happy, or more exasperated, or more secure." – Jim Butcher

"If you cannot get rid of the family skeleton, you may as well make it dance." – George Bernard Shaw

"There is no such thing as fun for the whole family."  
– Jerry Seinfeld

If these words of the world resonate with us, how much more should the words of Scripture be written on our hearts, ready to starve the roots of bitterness we too often allow to blossom deep within our souls?

*We love because He first loved us. (1 John 4:19)*

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)*



*Bear with each other and forgive one another if you have a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*  
(Colossians 3:13)

What would our family relationships look like if we memorized these and other Scriptures that remind us of our own need to be forgiven and loved? What if, when we felt those prickly thoughts rising to the surface, we reminded ourselves of His truth by quoting one of these verses? What if we were to treat our family as we want them to treat us? What if we go to the LORD in prayer and ask Him to fix the posture of our heart rather than bringing Him a laundry list of how we have been wronged by family members?

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## **PRAVER**

LORD, family is Your idea and serves to bring Glory to Your Name. You know the struggles each one of us is dealing with regarding the ones we love, whether it be our immediate or extended family. We ask Your forgiveness for the times when we have elevated ourselves over others in our families, for times when we have ranted and raged over the heart wounds or trivial tiffs and never brought our concerns to Your throne. We ask, LORD, that You would make us a people who are patient with our family, and a people who are kind to our family. Help us to be people who do not envy, boast, or proud when it comes to our dealings with our family. May we not dishonor those in our families, be self-seeking, or be easily angered. May we keep no record of wrongs when it comes to those we love. May we rejoice in truth! Make us people who protect, trust, hope, and persevere in our family interactions. In the Name of Jesus, Amen

*Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us...*  
(Ephesians 3:20)

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## **MORE THAN REFLECTION – JUST DO IT!**

- I. Memorize one (or more) of the Scripture verses above and rehearse it to yourself as often as needed when you feel bitterness taking root in your heart.
- II. Pray 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 replacing the word “love” with your name as a reminder of the calling we have on our life as a believer.
- III. Find Scripture passages (like Eph 5:22 – 6:4) that speak of family, and pray God’s Word over your family.

*Submitted by: Susanne Harding*



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## DAY 16: HOSPITALITY MATTERS

*Genesis 18 | Deuteronomy 6:4-6,17 | Leviticus 19 | Matthew 22:37-40*

*Luke 6:27-36 | Luke 10:36-42 | Acts 2:46-47 | Romans 12*

*1 Peter 4 | 1 Timothy 3:1-7*

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I grew up in South Jersey surrounded by fields of tomatoes, cabbage, eggplant, fennel, and few people. We did have as our closest neighbors the Scapellato family, or as I knew them, Aunt Emma and Uncle Joe. They lived about a football field away. Aunt Emma made amazing cookies and bread. I still remember sitting at her table in the kitchen with a big glass of milk (I really hated milk as a kid but would drink it there) and a plateful of cookies. She always made me feel welcome, even when I showed up unannounced, having left my backyard without my mom knowing. I was a sneaky 4-year-old, but Aunt Emma would give me milk and cookies and call my mom to let her know. The comfort of being in her home drew me.

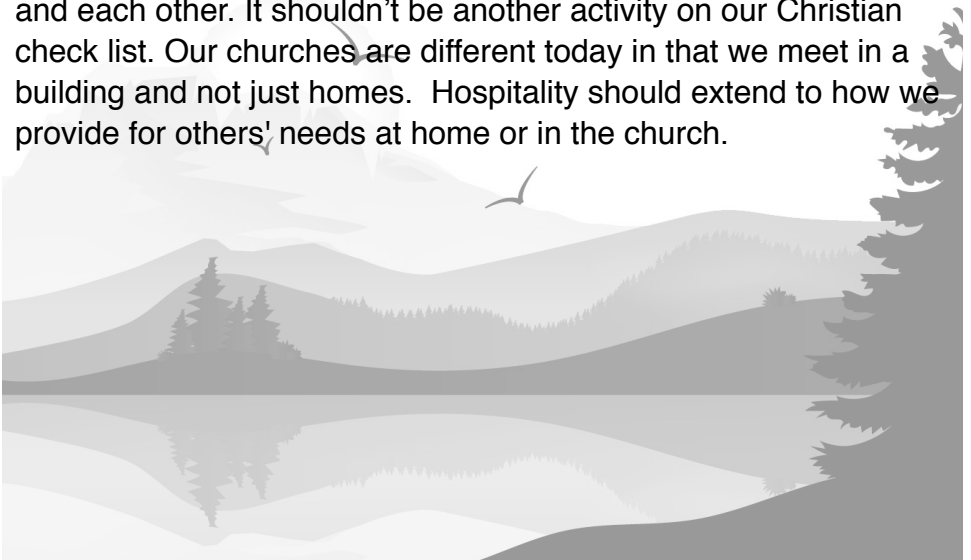
When I think of hospitality that memory comes through. The feeling of welcome even when inconvenient. The sharing of food and comfort for a disobedient little girl. The definition of hospitality from the New Oxford American Dictionary is “the friendly and generous reception of guests, visitors or strangers”. It is derived from the Latin “*hospes*” which is to host or house a guest, stranger, or enemy. In Judaism, hospitality is known as “*hachasat orchim*” or welcoming strangers and guests.

Throughout the Bible, we find examples of hospitality driven from a love, trust, and worship of God. Leviticus 19:17,33 command us to love our neighbor as ourselves and treat strangers with hospitality. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus reminds us we are to love God first and love our neighbor as ourselves. Our love and caring for others should demonstrate our love and relationship with Christ. Romans 12 tells us we are all members of the same body of Christ but have different gifts and purposes. But don't confuse the gift of service with the call to hospitality. We are all

called to show hospitality. Romans 12:13 states, “*Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality*”. Don’t only show it—seek it. I Peter 4:7-11, puts hospitality with loving our fellow believers fervently to bring glory to God. It should be practiced without grumbling or complaining.

True faith in Christ should have a natural demonstration. James explains this better than I can in James 1:22 “*but be doers of the word not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*”. James 2:14-20 goes further and that our faith should be visible, faith without any outward evidence is dead. The caring for others, this practice of hospitality, is an outward demonstration of our faith and love for God. Hebrews 11 is well-known as the “by faith” chapter. In each example, faith had an action. Noah prepared, Abraham obeyed and later offered his only son, the walls of Jericho fell when the people marched for seven days - faith led to action. Two chapters later we are reminded to continue in love for each other in the church, but to also be hospitable to strangers. (Hebrews 13:2)

How do we practice hospitality today? Although it includes opening our homes to each other in the church for meals, Bible study, care groups, and fellowship, it can be so much more. Hospitality should flow from a heart overflowing with love for God and each other. It shouldn’t be another activity on our Christian check list. Our churches are different today in that we meet in a building and not just homes. Hospitality should extend to how we provide for others’ needs at home or in the church.



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## PRAYER

Dear Lord, I have failed You in this area. I have tried to love others in my own strength and not through You. Open my eyes and my heart to those You put in my path. I pray that the love and thankfulness I have for You and Your saving sacrifice for me when I was a stranger and enemy will be visible to those who need it. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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## REFLECTION

- I. How are we treating each other? Without partiality?
- II. Are we welcoming to strangers?
- III. Is our faith demonstrated in our love for others?

*Submitted by: Kim LaRossa*



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# DAY 17: PRAYER FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

*2 Timothy 1:1-14 | Psalm 145:3-4 | Joel 1:3 | Joshua 4*

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*I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. (2 Timothy 1:5)*

Lois and Eunice – is it a stretch to say these women who are only mentioned once in Scripture had an impact on shaping the New Testament church? I don't think so. Their legacy of faithful prayer and trust in the Lord influenced Timothy to become "wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ" as recorded by his mentor Paul in 2 Timothy 3:15.

The Old Testament includes many examples of God's command to teach and pray for future generations. In Joshua 4, the Israelites set up an altar of remembrance to show honor and praise of the Lord for the people's deliverance. This altar was to stand as a memorial so that future generations would know that God answered the prayers of their ancestors. We cannot underestimate the power of praying for the next generation!

I have vivid memories of my father not only praying *with* me but also *for* me. It was a common sight to wake up and find my dad reading his Bible and praying in our den. Most times his prayers were silent, but there were times I could hear him crying out to God for my sister and me. Even as a somewhat rebellious teenager rolling my eyes at my parents' lack of knowledge about any important topic (something I've had to apologize to them for when I became a parent myself), I never doubted their love for me, their commitment to the Lord, or their desire for me to know Christ as my Savior. The Holy Spirit has brought this to mind throughout my life during times of difficulty and doubt, and I am confident that my dedication to Christ was heavily influenced by my dad's early morning prayers when he thought no one was listening but the Lord.

As the head of Perry Hall Christian School, I have the privilege and great responsibility to pray for the next generation on a regular basis. I know that each generation faces challenges as Satan has always sought to destroy, but today's youth confront a world inundated through social media with a message that is so antithetical to the Gospel that they need our prayers more than ever. At PHCS, and in your homes, we teach that each person is a unique and wonderful creation of God while the world teaches you must look and act a certain way to be loved. We teach that putting the needs of others above your own brings true joy while the world teaches you will only be happy if you do what you want. While the world's messaging may not be new, social media makes it difficult to break through with the message of God's love. If only our young people could see and hear the adults in their lives crying out to the Lord on their behalf, what a difference that would make!

It is exciting but also sobering to think about the legacy we will leave for the next generation of believers. Is my life a constant reflection and celebration of what Christ has done for me? Am I crying out to God for the souls of the next generation? And do they know it – will they be able to call it to memory to combat the world's destructive message?



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## PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for who You are. Your love for us is undeserved, and we are grateful for Your grace and mercy. Thank You for the people You have put in our lives that have helped shape who we are in Christ. Thank You for the young people you have placed in front of us that we can mentor and influence. Keep the weight of this influence ever in our minds and hearts, that our lives would reflect Christ's love in all circumstances. Give us boldness to proclaim what You have done for us and to pray Your mercies over the next generation not only in private, but also in front of them, so the image is burned into memory to counter the world's influence. Thank You for the gift of Christ and the promise of eternal life in You. Amen.

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## REFLECTION

- I. How has God used people in your life to point you to Christ?
- II. What is the legacy you want to leave for the next generation?
- III. Which young people are in your circle of influence that you will commit to praying with and for?

*Submitted by: Deena Ruff*





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# DAY 18: PRAYER FOR THE ELDERLY

*Gal 5: 22-23 | Matthew 7:7-12*

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**P**rayer is vital for our relationship with God. Prayer changes us. It carries out His purposes and gives us a supernatural connection to Him and those for whom we pray.

Who are the vulnerable in our midst? In our circle of influence? Merriam-Webster defines a “vulnerable person” as someone in need of special care, support, or protection because of age, disability or risk of abuse or neglect. Today we will focus on the elderly population, specifically; grandparents, aunts, uncles, neighbors, widows, and widowers.

You may know someone among this population who is vibrant, healthy, and active. From all outward appearances, they seem content where God has them in this season of life. Praise God! However, of adults aged 65 and older, 61% live with a spouse or partner, and about 27% live alone. This age group faces many challenges including physical limitations, distance from families, loneliness, and feelings of uselessness – to name a few.

Maybe you have heard a senior citizen say something to show their feeling of frustration like:

- ◆ “Don’t get old.”
- ◆ “Why do they call these the golden years? It is more like rust.”
- ◆ “I do not know why God still has me here.”
- ◆ “I am old, outdated, useless.”
- ◆ “My family has no time for me.”

Ask yourself this honest question: Does your heart break for them or do you say to yourself, “I hope I never get like that.”

Scripture says we are to care for widows, orphans, and the vulnerable. Isaiah 1:17 teaches *“learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause.”* 1 Timothy 5 also says, *“Take care of any widow who has no one else to care for her.”* (NLT)

Part of caring for the vulnerable is not just praying for their physical needs. It’s also praying God will meet them where they are and asking God to touch them with the fruits of the Spirit, (Gal 5: 22-23) to see the importance of a godly legacy. It’s praying God will give them opportunities to share their gifts and bless others.

God calls us to pray intentionally. Matthew 7:7-12 describes effective prayer. Verse 12 instructs us to pray for others as we want them to pray for us.

In Hebrews 4 the writer speaks of a Sabbath rest for God’s people. One who enters God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from His own works. A personal Sabbath into which the people of God are invited to enter is a shelter. The author of Hebrews expresses his concern that those who had heard the “good news” would end up like the faithless Israelites wandering outside that place of rest. One must hear the Gospel and believe the story of Jesus Christ to find rest. (Matt 11:28)

I invite you to join with me in bringing the vulnerable to the throne of grace by asking God to help them to trust in Him and that He will provide what He thinks is best in whatever time He chooses for His honor and glory. Ask God how you can best minister to the elderly in your community. You can start by picking up a pen and writing a few words of encouragement. You, and the recipient of your prayers and encouragement, will be blessed beyond measure.

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## PRAYER

Father, as we pray for the elderly in our lives, we ask that they will not be afraid or discouraged (Is. 41:10). Please fill them with joy and peace (Rom. 15:13) that they will not become bitter or resentful (Phil. 2:13-14). We ask that You increase their desire to pray for future generations and be prayer warriors for young people (Ps. 71: 17-18). In Your Son's Name. Amen.

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## REFLECTION

- I. How might you minister to the elderly in your community?
- II. How can you encourage the elderly to share their gifts with others?

*Submitted by: Sally Myers*



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# DAY 19: TRUSTING GOD IS GREATER THAN YOUR FEARS

*Psalm 34*

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There are so many quotes about our homes: there's no place like home, home sweet home, home is not a place it's a feeling. When that feeling turns to fear, you can find yourself unable to take any steps forward.

*The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trust in the LORD is safe. (Proverbs 29:25)*

A snare is an excellent description of how it feels when fear takes hold of us. We had a home invasion last year and I was attacked while some of my children were asleep in their rooms. Fear took hold of me, after that, and the security of our home was shattered. Feeling safe to even go outside was taken away. I was afraid to check the mail. I was afraid to go in my basement where the assault happened. I was afraid to leave the kids home alone. I was afraid to let them play outside. The fear was crippling.

The dictionary definition for fear is “a distressing emotion aroused by impending danger, evil, pain, whether the threat is real or imagined; the feeling or condition of being afraid.”

Fear can have many physical effects on our bodies; weakened immune system, cardiovascular damage, increase in blood pressure, headaches, body aches, and difficulty breathing. Fear is the number one most powerful emotion. All of this is very serious, which is why God has so much to say about fear in the Bible.

*For God gave us a spirit, not of fear, but of power and love and self-control. (2 Tim. 1:7)*

Satan whispers for us to fear because when we are holding on to fear, we can't have joy.

*I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. (Ps. 34:4)*

Our steps forward are unsure, our trust in God is not. When we know God, we must have faith that He will strengthen us and restore our souls.

*Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)*

For me, the absence of fear was gradual- tackling one thing at a time. Consistent prayer and time in God's Word gave me strength. Strength to move out of the snare I was in and to live the life God has planned for me.

It is difficult to avoid fear. Most people in their lifetime will be faced with fears. When we turn from fear towards God, we will be wrapped in His comfort. While it is wonderful for our homes to feel secure, if we trust in Jesus, our real home will be in heaven. That is exciting news! We will be free from fear and all the ugliness of this world. We are new creatures in Christ, yet still being sanctified. We continue to struggle because we are learning and growing. God is not finished with us until we are called home to be with Him.

*"Today I know that such memories are the key not to the past, but to the future. I know that the experiences of our lives, when we let God use them, become the mysterious and perfect preparation for the work he will give us to do." ~ Corrie Ten Boom*

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## PRAYER

God, we ask You to protect us from fear. Remind us that You are more powerful than any of our fears. We desire to draw closer to You, to know You. Help us to feel Your comfort, especially in times of struggle. Give us a thirst for Your word, so we may stand strong against our fears. Thank you, God, for the difficulties we face, knowing it is in those times You pull us close to You. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

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## REFLECTION

- I. In what ways are you preparing for fearful times?
- II. What is in your heart, how will you respond in faith instead of fear?
- III. How can you help others with fear in their lives?

*Submitted by: Wendy Dalby (Assisted by Charlotte Dalby)*



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# DAY 20: OUR CALL TO BE FIRST RESPONDERS

*Mark 1:1-20*

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**A**s a new mom of a healthy baby boy, I did not expect to find myself in an ambulance with him after only one day home from the hospital. I felt helpless. There was nothing I could physically do to help my son. In between tearful prayer for a spared life, I watched the paramedics. Listening to their conversation, I knew things weren't looking great. However, their demeanor did not match their words. They were calm and reassuring, offering a message of hope. They took everything in stride and did what was needed to make sure our arrival to the hospital was swift, successful, and led to the miraculous recovery of my son.

On a daily basis, there are people all over the world who respond to others in a time of crisis: police officers, firefighters, paramedics, nurses, etc. The dangers that others run away from, these people run toward in an effort to maintain order and minimize catastrophe. Now, you may not be a first responder, but surely you know one somewhere. There are many in our church body alone. Nevertheless, as followers of Christ, we are *all* called to be "first responders" in a much larger way.

The first disciples, Simon and Andrew, did not delay in their response to their calling. We read in Mark 1:17-18, "*And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men. And immediately they left their nets and followed him'*". Christ called them and they answered *immediately*. You may be tempted to think that it was easier for those men to quickly answer that calling because they had Christ, in the flesh, in front of them. However, God makes Himself clearly known to us when we abide in Him and His Word.

The disciples did life with Christ. They didn't just have coffee with Him once a week. They traveled everywhere with Him, spoke with

Him, prayed with Him, sang with Him, and got to know Him on a very deep, personal level. When we give Him our whole lives, not just portions of it, we grow closer to Him and reflect His character more. We do this through spending quality time in His Word daily, praying, and worshipping Him. We respond to His call by serving Him, as well as others, and then telling others of the salvation that comes through Christ alone. Through all of this, we are able to continue the cycle of redemption and restoration, through Christ Jesus, and make disciples of others (Matt. 28:18-20, Eph. 2:10, Rom. 10:14-15).

The Bible makes it clear that Satan is actively seeking to do his best to keep people from hearing and seeing the Truth (John 8:44-47, Ephesians 6:11-16, 1 Peter 5:8-11, 1 John 5:13-20). Those who do not yet know the Father, living in darkness and despair, are in need of a first responder. They need someone who is calm, gentle, and reassuring, offering them a message of hope.

So I ask you, who will help bring those in darkness to the One who sets them free, if not us? How will you answer the call?

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## **PRAYER**

Lord, thank You for being the God that sees me and yearns for a close relationship with me. Help me to draw closer to You through Your Word so that I may be confident and boldly equipped in my knowledge of You to be able to share Your Truth with others. Amen.

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## **REFLECTION**

- I. How can I draw closer to God this week?
- II. Is there something in my life that I prioritize over the call of making disciples? If not, what is stopping me from doing so?

*Submitted by: Samantha Gryetz*



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# DAY 21: THE IMPACT OF CAMP MINISTRY ON CHILDREN AND STUDENT MINISTRIES

*Mark 1:35 | 1 Peter 4:10-11 | Philippians 2:4 | John 15: 12*

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Camp ministry is important to me because I know first-hand the impact it can have on a young person's life. When I was a little girl, I spent countless summers from ages 8-12 going to a camp called *Camp Good News* learning about Jesus and making new friends.

As a teenager, I would work as a counselor at that same camp, and as a young adult I would spend my summers, from age 20 to 26, working as a Vacation Bible School Director for the church we were attending. Now, I get to devote much of the summer watching the Lord use the same ministries that shaped and molded me, in the lives of the younger people at our church. My husband, Kenny, and I get to spend a week with the students from Bonfire at Student Life Camp, serve alongside some of those same students at Mountain Top Bible Camp, and spend a week serving the younger children at Adventure Camp. It's incredible to watch and causes me to reflect on the biblical value that camp ministry has for us all.

At Student Life Camp, the leaders and students break away from all electronics and focus on intentional time with the Lord. I remember the first year we asked students to leave their phones at home- it was a BIG ask- even for a 33-year-old (at the time) like me. The blessing gained from that time away, however, was incredible. We saw students confessing sin, relationships restored and healed, and lives impacted by the Gospel.

Scripture talks about the importance of being refreshed and renewed by God. Jesus, during his earthly ministry, would go to be alone to commune with His heavenly Father. Mark 1:35 says "*And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.*" One thing

I notice in reading this verse is what happens before and what happens after His prayer; Jesus had healed many before this verse and would preach after this verse. If Jesus, God in flesh, saw the importance of time with His Father, who are we to not also consider the importance or the need for time alone with God? For one week of the summer, we make this possible for our students. Yes, they get to create memories and have fun, but more importantly, they get to know their Savior in a deeper way.

Some of these same students serve at Mountain Top Bible Camp. The act of serving is biblical (1 Peter 4:10-11) and it emphasizes the influence that they have on the 8–12-year-old children who attend camp. Serving others teaches humility (Philippians 2:4) and it shows love (John 15:12). For the younger children at Mountain Top, they get to create memories, learn about Jesus, wrestle with the teachings, and some decide to follow Jesus.

My favorite of all the camp ministry events is Adventure Camp. I think it's because I get to see the fruits of this ministry up close and personal with my 6-year-old son. I get to hear him talk about what he learned at camp for months to follow. I've seen his love for Jesus grow through this ministry and it gives me a snapshot into how his life will be impacted for years to come.

Would you join in praying for our camp ministry?



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## PRAYER

Dear Jesus,

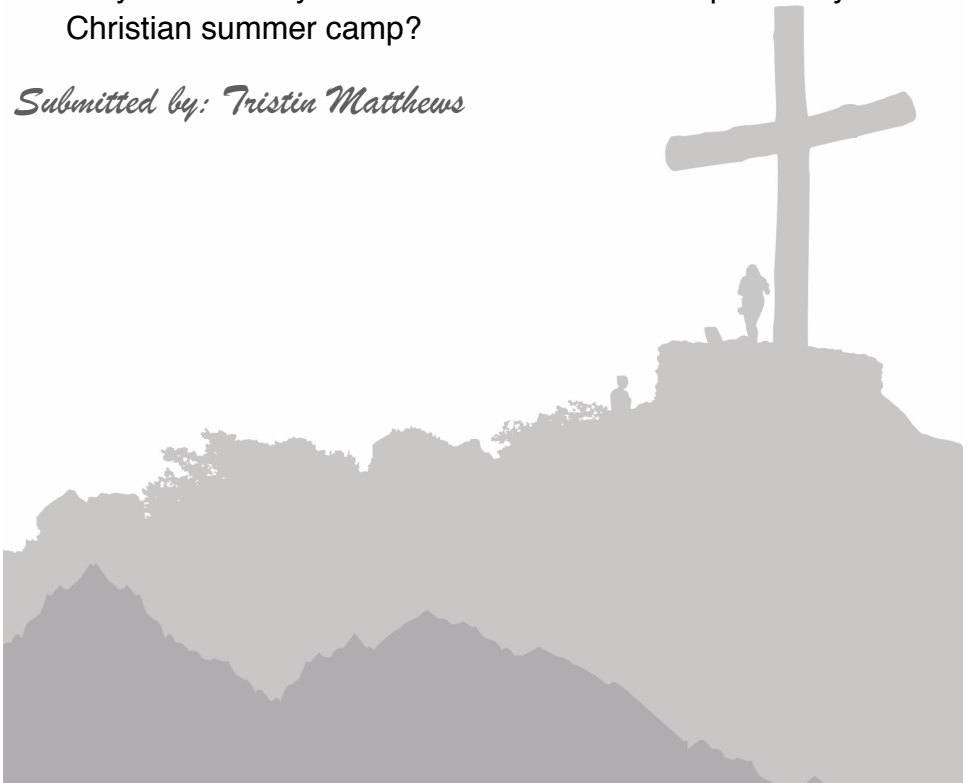
Thank you, Lord, for the many ways we get to serve You. Thank you for the camp ministry and how it has impacted the lives of the young people and families at our church and beyond. As we prepare for this summer, please bless our service, strengthen those serving and transform those impacted by this ministry for Your glory and their good. Amen

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## REFLECTION

- I. What can you do to support the camp ministry of PHBC (pray, give financially, give time)?
- II. How are you seeing the PHBC camps affecting the church's children and youth?
- III. Do you know any students who have been impacted by a Christian summer camp?

*Submitted by: Tristin Matthews*



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# DAY 22: HOW TO PRAY FOR OUR MISSIONARIES

*Rom. 15:30-32 | 2 Cor. 1:10-12 | Eph. 6:18-20 | Phil. 1:19  
Col. 4:2-4 | 1 Thess. 5:25 | 2 Thess. 3:1-2*

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In his inspired letters, we read of Paul, arguably the greatest missionary ever, strongly requesting prayer for himself and his ministries – all over the map, and in prison.

A primary desire of the PHBC mission team is that every member of this church will know all our missionaries and support them in daily prayer. When the mission team interviews our missionaries about what we can do for them, almost always the first response is simply – and profoundly – pray! How can we pray for them?

First, we need to know who they are and where they serve. PHBC supports missionaries who serve in Poland, Mexico, Brazil, Italy, Bolivia, Hungary, Philippines, Southeast Asia, Spain, Colombia, France, Bonaire, Belarus, Ukraine, and in the U.S. from Florida, North Carolina, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and right here in Baltimore. Many who are based in these places travel extensively to other countries to support and advance their ministries.

Do you know who they are, and what they do?

Our church office sends out a weekly email that highlights our missionaries, what they are doing, and how we can pray for them so our church body can carefully and prayerfully keep up with each of our missionaries' achievements, obstacles, and prayer requests.

So, you may be wondering how to pray for our missionaries.

A simple and practical checklist comes from one of our mission agencies, Wycliffe Bible Translators, which sponsors and has supported some of our own missionaries. Here is their list, which I think is a helpful guideline for us to follow:

**Pray for Open Doors** (Col. 4:2-4)

Pray that God will open doors of ministry, blessing partnerships, and friendships.

Pray that those who serve will be led by the Holy Spirit and recognize open door opportunities.

**Pray for Boldness** (Eph. 6:18-20)

Pray that they will have the boldness to overcome the fear of embarrassment or failure.

**Pray that God's Word will Spread** (2 Thess. 3:1-2)

Pray that God's Word will indeed spread rapidly and be honored wherever it goes.

**Pray for Protection** (2 Thess. 3:1-2)

Pray that God will keep missionaries safe.

Pray that God will change the hearts of those who are resistant to his Word.

**Pray for Effective Ministry – for the Source and the Fruit**  
(John 15:5)

Pray that seeds will be planted and that missionaries would be able to see the fruits of their labor.

Pray that an abundant harvest will be produced as more people learn about the love of Christ.

**Pray for Travel – Our missionaries are always in transit.**  
(Mark 16:15)

Pray for protection and provision during travel.

Pray for God's grace and favor when challenges or obstacles appear on any journey.

## **Pray for Refreshment – Pray they will tap the Source**

(Matthew 11:28-30)

Pray that God will provide times of peace and relaxation to refresh His workers.

Pray for restoration – physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually – that can only be found in Jesus.

I'm sure that God will guide you as you keep informed and pray to open other areas that He would have you commit to Him for our missionaries.

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### **REFLECTION**

- I. Am I really concerned with what God is doing around the world from PHBC?
- II. Will I increase my own personal prayer life in intimacy with God through His Word, so that He can show me where I need to focus my attention through His will?
- III. Will I commit to keeping informed about our missionaries and, in cooperation with fellow members, be a part of spreading the Good News throughout the world?

*“...be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable, and perfect.” (Romans 12:2)*

For more information on our missionaries, or how to pray specifically for the missionaries we support, you can ask a mission team member. Your PHBC mission team members are Tom Lewis (Chair), Bill Barrans, Rebecca Fisher, Mary Beth Lewis, Jim Maurer, Bill Marsheck, Joe Hne, Tim Zittel, and Bill Zittel.

*Submitted by: Bill Zittel*

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## DAY 23: PRAYING FOR MARRIAGES

*Genesis 2:18 | Ephesians 4:23 | 1 Corinthians 13:13*

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**M**y husband and I have been married close to fifty-six years. Neither of us came from a Christian home. My husband's mom was married three times, and my mom was married three times as well. Therefore, each of us brought lots of heavy baggage into our home. We were clueless as to what a good, healthy marriage looked like.

Moving forward many years, I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior, and several years after that, my husband accepted Jesus, too. But life did not become any easier.

We separated three times and almost a fourth. We had a little counseling, but to no avail. There was so much heartache and many tears caused by selfishness, pride, and the need to be right.

I remember one Sunday morning, sitting on the church pew, listening to the sermon, and in my heart, I said to God, "I just can't do this anymore. It just hurts too much to love him." And I heard in my spirit, God say, "Yes, you can. You can love him through Me."

Several years later in Florida, life took a turn for the worst, and I found myself on my face with tears running down my cheeks, crying out to God. In that moment, I wanted to end my marriage. But, instead of doing that, I begged God to tell me what to do. Again, in my spirit, I heard God say, "Just trust Me." I have and will continue to do just that!

Marriages are so important to God. After all, He created them. We all took vows before God, family, and friends - promising from that day forward to have and to hold, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death do we part.

Marriage is hard work and, at times, will cause hurt and bring out the worst in us. We are two imperfect people living in a sinful, broken world. But with prayer, forgiveness, God's Word, mercy, and grace, we can continue to run the race that lies before us. All things are possible with God!

Jesus didn't come only to take away our sins and give us the promise of eternal life, but also to walk with us through our darkest moments.

We have been married all these years only because of the Grace of God. Oh, how I praise God! I love my husband more today than the day I married him!

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## **PRAYER**

Dear Heavenly Father, open our eyes and hearts to see our mates like You see them. Help us to show grace, mercy, forgiveness and love, Lord. Just as You did on the cross. Remind us that love is a choice. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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## **REFLECTION**

- I. How about you? If you asked God what you should do regarding your marriage, what do you think He would say?
- II. Do you pray regularly with your spouse? If not, how might that discipline impact your marriage?

*Submitted by: Diane Johnson*





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# DAY 24: FINDING GOD IN A SEASON OF DARKNESS

*Psalm 139*

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*"If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,' even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you." (Psalm 139)*

**A**bout a year into my renewed journey with the Lord, I found myself stepping into an unexpected season of darkness and questioning. It felt as though the very foundations of my life were being shaken, leaving me grappling with uncertainty and doubt. My relationship with the man I was seeing at the time, whom I believed to be my life partner, began to unravel before my eyes. His struggles were not only affecting our relationship but also casting shadows over our shared ministry within the church we both attended.

The familiarity of my lifelong church home became entangled with the complexities of my personal life. The question of whether I should find a new church added an additional layer of turmoil to an already challenging situation. As we were both actively involved in ministry, the decision felt even weightier, and I found myself at a crossroads.

In the midst of this turmoil, I sought direction and wisdom from the Lord through prayer and sought counsel from trusted individuals. It was during these moments of intentional seeking that God began to reveal His plan for my life. The path forward became clearer as I grappled with the realization that the relationship I had invested so much in needed to come to an end. Simultaneously, I felt a gentle nudging from God to say goodbye to the church that had been my spiritual anchor for as long as I could remember.

It was in this season where the Lord transformed my understanding of Him, and my theology. The very foundation of what I believed about God was reshaped in the crucible of uncertainty and loss. As I leaned into His presence, I discovered a

God who was not confined to the walls of a church or the expectations of a relationship. Instead, He met me in the depths of my pain, offering a grace that transcended my understanding.

Through the pain of goodbyes, God revealed the depth of His love and the beauty of His redemptive work. The theology I once held onto became a living, breathing reality in the hands of a God who makes all things new. I realized that my faith was not built on the stability of circumstances but on the unchanging character of God.

In this refining fire, I discovered how much I truly valued my faith. It was no longer a set of beliefs confined to a doctrinal statement; rather, it became a vibrant and dynamic relationship with a loving God who walks with us through the valleys and on the mountaintops. The season of darkness, though painful, became a catalyst for a deeper, more authentic faith.

As you navigate your own season of darkness and questioning, may you find comfort in the knowledge that God's light is ever-present, transforming your understanding of Him and deepening your appreciation for the precious gift of faith.

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## **PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, thank you for being my guiding light through the darkest seasons of my life. In the midst of uncertainty and questioning, You transformed my understanding of You and deepened my appreciation for the gift of faith. Continue to lead me, Lord, and may my journey serve as a testament to Your transformative power. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

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## **REFLECTION**

- I. How did God use challenges or changes in your life to deepen your relationship with Him?
- II. Are there specific theological truths that have become more real and intangible through personal experiences?

*Submitted by: Leanna Seidel*

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## DAY 25: THE SHEPHERD'S FEAST

*Psalm 23 | Matthew 11:28-30 | John 15:5 | 2 Corinthians 12:9-10*

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In the Fall of 2019, God graciously opened my eyes to the beauty of abiding. In my tireless work to earn the approval of God and man, I had become riddled with condemnation. My constant failures and weaknesses were a glaring reminder of my inadequacy. I was consumed with shame, but finally aware of the power it held over my life. I accepted my utter need and dependence on God (2 Cor. 12:9-10) and determined to abide in Him (John 15:5). One morning I was meditating on Psalm 23, when the fifth verse struck me in a new way. *“You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies...”* (NLT). I recorded in my journal how I imagined this feast might look...

“A sanctuary of plenty lay strategically in the midst of a wasteland of want. Desperate, yet cautious, I make my way to the entrance. Immediately, I am greeted by a joyous Host, curiously dressed in shepherd’s garb. I check my heavy coat at the door, and I suddenly feel light; I hadn’t realized how much of a burden it had been to wear. As I search for a place to sit at the long, artfully adorned table, I am relieved to find an open seat. I approach an antique, ornate chair. It is masterfully created. I look closer to read its inscription and see my name. MY name, carefully carved into this very chair! This seat had been lovingly crafted for me long before I was born. Starving, bruised, and filthy from the battle I’d been fighting in my meager strength, I take my seat. The gracious Shepherd had been waiting all this time for me. All at once I realize, I was never meant to live a life of lack, and I wasn’t meant to fight the battle alone. Weary, wounded, war-torn... it is here, surrounded by fire and destruction, that the Shepherd’s flock is seated at the banquet together. Clothed in beautiful garments, and enveloped by ornate décor, we join in the holy communion. I savor every bite and every moment. I eat and drink my fill. I am cleansed, and my wounds dressed. At my Shepherd’s table are peace, love, and rest.”

After meditating on this verse, it became clear that God wanted me to draw on His strength in my time of need. He didn't design me to walk through life independently. My independence didn't make Him proud - it served only as a barrier to intimacy with Him. I no longer needed to be afraid of my weaknesses, or my inability to fight the enemies life brings, because "*The Lord is my Shepherd; I have all that I need.*" When I feast on His Word and rest in His presence in prayer I am truly filled. "*My cup overflows with blessings. Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the LORD forever.*" (Psalm 23:1,6, NLT)

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## **PRAYER**

Dear Father, I am weary, and I carry heavy burdens. Apart from You I can do nothing. I am merely the branch, and You are the Vine. I give You my burdens and take Your yoke upon me. Please teach me to walk with You, my humble and gentle Shepherd. Teach me to boast about my weaknesses so that the power of Christ can work through me. I am not worthy of a feast. I fall short of Your glorious standard, yet with undeserved kindness You declare that I am righteous through Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:23-24). Thank You that You lead me, and You provide for me. When I am surrounded by my enemies, You seat me, fill me, and heal me. Today, I check my heavy coat at the door and choose to take my seat at Your table. Amen.

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## **REFLECTION**

- I. What burdens am I carrying right now? Am I willing to surrender them to the Lord?
- II. When I go through hard times, do I choose to spend time with God, in His Word and in prayer? Or do I tend to lean on my own strength?

*Submitted by: Lisa Meistering*

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# DAY 26: BUILDING GOD-HONORING COMMUNITY

*Hebrews 10:24-25 | Acts 2:42-46*

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**W**e live in a world where you can be a part of any community that you desire. People choose to bond over just about anything. In a quick search, I found out that you can join a group of people that like to accomplish something before the microwave hits zero or a group named, “Dear Pringles, I Cannot Fit My Hand Inside Your Tube of Deliciousness.” Although these examples may be quite trivial, I think we all can see and identify within our own hearts that all of us desire community and friendship. And that longing has been instilled in us by our Maker.

In fact, God has commanded us to love one another and fellowship together. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, *“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”*

Often, we fall into the trap of saying that we love people because they are kind or nice when they interact with us, which is half of it, but Christ’s love is active and intentional. It does not just tolerate or deal with others, but it encourages and sacrifices for one another. To rightly love someone, you must spend time with them, which is the central point of this passage. This passage does not simply mean to not skip church. Christian community has the potential and blessing to be beautiful if lived out biblically as can be seen in the early church, *“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having*

*favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:42-46)*

What are the implications of this testimony? Believers devoted themselves to the Word of God, prayer, and dining all in community and what happened? Awe came upon every soul, they shared all that they had, they praised God, had favor with all people, and others were saved as a result of Christ-honoring community. We often have lower expectations of what Christian community can look like in comparison to the church described in this passage. We are not meant to simply be friends that hang out together over some food or sports game.

Why does community in our churches not often look like this passage? To be honest, loving each other as Christ calls us to is hard, but it can be deeply rewarding. So, you may ask, how do we build community or strive to look more like the early church. First, we must be devoted to Christ in His Word and through prayer. Second, we must purposefully gather together. In a world where so many things compete for our time, making time for fellowship can be a challenge and a sacrifice. Third, we are called to *“submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”* (Eph 5:21) and to *“count others more significant than ourselves”* (Phil 2:3) which may be the most challenging out of all of these. Cultivating community takes time and is a sacrifice of love. God has graciously given us community to encourage, bless, and sanctify us. My hope is that you would be encouraged to pursue Godly fellowship for your enjoyment and God’s glory.



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## **PRAYER**

God, thank You for bestowing Your grace upon us through community and fellowship. May we continue to learn what it looks like to commune with others as it gives a glimpse of the communion we will have one day in heaven. Help me to put others before myself in my daily life. Teach me to actively love others. May You bless the community that You have given me and help us to grow in our enjoyment of You. Amen

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## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

- I. In what ways are you participating actively in community that is growing you in your walk with the Lord? If you are not, what steps can you take to change that?
- II. How can you choose to submit to others in your daily life?
- III. Who are some people in your life that you can intentionally spend time with and encourage?

*~ Submitted by: Nate Harding*



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# DAY 27: PRAYING FOR CHILDREN'S MINISTRY AND LEADERS

*Psalm 78 | Colossians 3:23-24 | Hebrews 12:1*

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**S**erving and working with children is HARD work. It often feels like a thankless job. You can feel unnoticed and underappreciated. It feels a lot like parenting, and anyone who is a parent (or a teacher) can tell you the difficulty of the daily work with kids. I call it GRUNT work, but I should call it GOD work.

It is God work because God has called us to raise up our children to know Him, to follow Him, and to serve Him. The discipleship of children is obedience to what God has said. (Psalm 78) God instructs us to train up a child in the way he should go and to teach them the fear of the Lord. Parenting and serving in children's ministries are doing exactly this!

Every diaper changed, every nose wiped, every lesson planned and executed, every game or craft organized is pointing our children to our heavenly Father who created and loves them fully. You are being the hands and feet of Jesus to each little one you love on! I thank God for your servants' hearts and your obedience to your calling.

One of the best ways we can support and encourage our children's ministry, and its leaders, is to pray for them. We should pray that they love their often-difficult work and find deep joy in presenting the Gospel to kids. We should also pray for our leaders to seek God's direction as they plan and teach lessons, as well as for their own relationships with Christ to deepen. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of prioritizing your own time in God's Word, in prayer and in cultivating your own relationship with the Lord. The overflow of your love for Christ will extend easily to both our children and their parents.



What a privilege to be part of God's work by loving on and teaching His children. As you do so, I pray for perseverance to run the race marked out for you (Hebrews 12:1). When you become weary (and you will), I pray that you will be reminded of Colossians 3:23-24. *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."* We can pray that our children will develop impactful, godly relationships with their leaders and with friends. We can also pray for soft hearts that are open to the Gospel and will result in an authentic, saving relationship with Jesus.

We should also pray that parents would make church attendance a priority, setting the example for lifelong devotion to the Lord and to the Body of Christ. By investing your time and talents in children's ministry, you are helping to raise up our next generation of Christ followers, who can continue to share His love with our community and to the ends of the earth.

Thank you again for your labor of love. May it lead to an infinite legacy for Jesus!

*"I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in truth."* (3 John 1:4).



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## PRAYER

Dear Jesus, thank You for the privilege of leading and teaching children. You love children and desire that they grow into adults who love and serve You. We ask that You strengthen and encourage our children's ministry staff and volunteers - that they will imitate You as they share the Gospel with the least of these and that many will come to know and love You through their teaching. In Jesus' matchless name, Amen.

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## REFLECTION

- I. Why are children so important to God?
- II. How will our children's ministry help a child grow in their faith?
- III. What can you do to make sure you are growing in your own faith, knowledge, and love of God?

*Submitted by: Laura Robinson*



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# DAY 28: TRUSTING GOD THROUGH ADDICTION

*Galatians 5:1 | Mark 11:24 | Mark 9:22b-24*

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It seemed like such a simple request. I was asked to be a contributor to this year's *40 Days of Prayer*. I was, of course, grateful that anyone would think that I had something worthwhile to say to my Perry Hall Baptist Church family. I naturally supposed that the folks behind this project had heard about my testimony; about my recovery from alcoholism and my coming to faith in Jesus Christ. I have told my story many times, to groups both large and small. So, I thought that it shouldn't be hard for me to prepare something uplifting.

However, I struggled with even getting started. The more I tried to create something, the more my mind became filled with thoughts of my past sins. I have prayed that God would wipe away the memory of them, but this is one of those prayers that has, thus far, been answered with "not yet."

God has done a mighty work in my life. I don't live as I once lived, but it appears that this effort is not enough. My past still haunts me, at times. Why is that? I thought I was saved but sometimes I feel like my salvation seems less than secure. I must admit that there are days that I feel like I am barely hanging on. I may be religious, but am I of faith?

*"I believe; help my unbelief"*, the request made of Jesus in Mark 9, is at once a statement of faith and an admission that this man's faith (as well as my own) is far from perfect. When I was first getting sober, in AA, and was struggling with coming to a belief in a God of my understanding, AA's suggestion was "fake it 'til you make it." I thought that I was long past having to rely on such a bromide.

At moments like these, I feel not only helpless, but somewhat hopeless. If I am not trusting in Him, who am I trusting in? Me? How can I trust in me when the one on whom I am relying is a

sinner? Why can't I just put my trust in the One who is sinless? Why is it that, when I have received so much grace already, I don't just simply say "thank you" and accept the freedom that has been granted me?

I trust God. I trust Him to take care of me and to direct my life. Despite this, I am sometimes faced with something that overpowers my faith. It hovers over me like a dark cloud, keeping the Light from shining through. Why can't I just ask for more faith and expect it to happen?

The answer may have come to me from brother Bill Heidel. He gave the last sermon of 2023. It was on Christian freedom. In it, he asked a question, "Have any of you ever had the opportunity of going to traffic court for something of which you were absolutely guilty?" He reminded us that sometimes a judge says, "Yes, you're guilty, but I'm giving probation before judgement." Or, perhaps, the judge simply dismisses the charges against you for some reason. Just like that, I remembered such an occasion.

In 1985, I was arrested for drunk driving and, as they say, was guilty as sin. I should have been convicted but I was not. I should have lost my license to drive, but I did not. The judge simply dismissed my case. I won't go into the details here but, trust me, God's grace was evident. If you ever want to hear the story, just ask and I will be happy to share it with you.

I was elated as I left that courthouse. How could I have forgotten something like that? Sadly, this was not the only blessing that I have forgotten. Another Judge, the Great Judge of all, who knows of all my sins and would be justified in finding me guilty, has declared me righteous and, in one sense, dismissed my case. How could I have ever forgotten that? Thank you, Bill, for the reminder. Thank you, Jesus, for finding me guiltless.

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## PRAYER

Father, please flood my mind with the remembrance of Your grace and mercy. Help me to put on the full armor of God, which will protect me from the accusations of the enemy to weaken my faith. Thank You that there is no condemnation in Christ because of Your precious and glorious Son Jesus! In Your Son's Name, Amen.

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## REFLECTION

- I. What is an area of life where you struggle with fully believing God's promises? (Forgiveness? To never leave or forsake us? To take us in as a son or daughter? To see Him as your highest need?)
- II. Have you considered confessing a sin pattern or addiction and trusting that He wants something better for you? Do you trust that He has the desire and the power to do that in you?
- III. Is there a relationship in your life where you could extend mercy and undeserved forgiveness as an act of love and gratitude toward your heavenly Father's mercy to you?

*Submitted by: Gary Johnson*



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# DAY 29: PRAYING FOR UNBELIEVERS

*Mark 16:15 | John 14:6 | 2 Peter 3:9*

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*“How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard.” (Romans 10:14-15)*

How indeed will the unbelievers be saved if they do not know the Truth? Jesus commands us to *“Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.”* (Mark 16:15). Praying for the salvation of others is as important as going out into the world and teaching the Gospel. The Lord hears our prayers and will open the eyes of the unbeliever if that is His will. The Lord knows the hearts of all His children. He knows the heart of the unbeliever. God is sovereign and can change even the hardest heart. As believers, we must pray for the heart and salvation of the unbelievers in our lives. We also need to pray for other nations to turn to the only living God.

Prayer for the unbeliever is a wonderful way to express to God your desire to do His will. We should begin by asking God to help us in our prayer for the unbeliever. Pray for the unbeliever’s heart to soften and be ready to accept the truth. Pray that their eyes will be opened, and they will see that Jesus is the Truth. Jesus answered, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me* (John 14:6). Be confident in your prayers, knowing that the Lord is sovereign and can change the hardest of hearts. God wants all of us to be saved through the blood of Jesus; to live with Him on the New Earth for eternity. In 2 Peter 3:9 it says, *“The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”* Praying for others to come to know Jesus is pleasing to God.

My family consists of mostly unbelievers. My mom prays constantly for her children to be saved, but maybe a little more for the ones who are unbelievers. My middle brother had a tough life - not a happy childhood due to a speech impediment that made him the butt of many jokes. As his life went on, he turned to alcohol as a way to cope. Sadly, the happiness he was looking for comes only from God, who my brother, Dave, thought hated him.

Fast forward 55 years, my brother was still struggling with life. Because of chronic alcohol abuse, he became ill and had a massive stroke that left him barely aware of his surroundings. His wife had no other option than to put him in a nursing facility. My mom, my other brother, Paul, and I constantly prayed for Dave to be saved. I prayed for a softened heart and that his eyes would be open to the Truth. One day when we went to see Dave, my brother, Paul, brought a simple speech with him. He read it to Dave. It was about the forgiveness of sin by Jesus' work on the cross, and how the blood of Jesus has saved all of us. He told Dave the Truth, that we are all sinners and need the forgiveness and mercy that only Jesus can give us. He told Dave that he wanted to see him in Heaven and how our mom wanted to see him in Heaven. He left the note with the nurse and asked her if she could read it to him occasionally. He seemed to be aware of what Paul was saying, however, Dave never tried to speak again.

We all continued to pray for Dave's salvation. He passed away a few weeks later. We didn't know if he prayed for forgiveness and accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior. In the middle of our celebration, a beautiful rainbow appeared in the sky. The rainbow is not only a sign of God's promise not to flood the earth, but also a symbol of God's grace and mercy to His redeemed. This brought great encouragement to me, and I was reminded of the hope we have in our sovereign Lord.

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## PRAYER

Father, we know that You answer prayer. May You continue to put people on our hearts who do not know Jesus Christ. May we be faithful to pray for lost family and friends. Amen.

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## REFLECTION

- I. Who can you pray for today?
- II. How can you pray for an unbeliever?
- III. How has the Lord answered your prayers already?

*Submitted by Betsy Rudolf*





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## DAY 30: WAITING WELL

*Isaiah 40:31 | Psalms 40 1-3 | Proverbs 18:10*

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**A**s an adult, my favorite missionary story has always been about Irish-born Amy Carmichael. She was a missionary to India from 1895-1950. She spent 55 years of her life living among the women and children of India. As a child, Amy struggled with her looks. Amy had lovely brown eyes and dark hair, but she wanted blue eyes like her mom. As a child, Amy had a strong faith, believing that God answered the prayers of the faithful. She prayed every night that God would give her blue eyes. Every morning, she ran to the mirror, prepared for the change to be there. Every morning, she still had brown eyes. She waited and prayed. “Mom, every day I pray that God would give me blue eyes, and every day I still have brown eyes. When is God going to answer my prayers?” “He already did,” answered her mom, “Isn’t ‘No’ an answer?” At that moment, Amy did not like that answer. But later in her story, we find out God’s hand in the plan.

Waiting is one of the hardest things we all must do. Accepting the answer is sometimes harder. As believers in Christ, we pray trusting that God has a plan and are confident that God is working that plan. The human side of us, however, sometimes gets scared and weary. Isaiah 40:31 says, *“but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength...”* How do we renew our strength when we are scared, when weary and tired of waiting? What if the answer is NO?

Scripture gives the answer.

RUN! Yup, I said RUN.

The key is where you run.

Proverbs 18:10 says, *“the name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run into it and they are safe.”* Run to the Lord in your thoughts, in your prayers, in your music, in your conversation.

Fill your moments with gratitude for all that God has done and is doing. Even if the answer is “no” and you don’t know why, be grateful that we have a God who has a plan and “*works all things together...*” (Romans 8:28).

I was waiting for *the* phone call. I was scared, weary, and impatient. My husband, Howard, in his always calm, gentle manner, reminded me that no matter what happens, God has a plan and together we will make it. The phone rang: cancer, surgery, and radiation were in the very near future. The answer - yes, and I didn’t like it. I ran head on into the Lord for strength and relief from fear. I was thankful the breast cancer seemed contained, and the doctor was confident that surgery and 10 radiation treatments would serve me well. Why me? Why now? Seven years cancer-free and God has given me the opportunity to minister to others through breast cancer and other forms of cancer. My “yes” had a purpose. I have had the blessing of being able to share how God’s love and peace gives hope, no matter the outcome.

Let’s go back to Amy Carmichael.

In her 20s God called Amy to the mission field in India. Amy wanted to see what happened in the pagan temple. She dyed her skin with tea and then because she had brown eyes and dark hair, she was able to go into the temple unnoticed. What she found was appalling. Girls who were part of the ancient practice of abandoning baby girls on the pagan temple steps to find favor with the many gods of the temple. These children would grow to serve as temple servants, living in fear as prostitutes. She began an orphanage and safe house for the girls.

Amy did not stand out physically, but her heart was strong in faith in the God of the universe. He had used a child’s plea for blue eyes to begin a life-long journey of trusting in God’s perfect plan.

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## PRAYER

Dear Lord, please give me opportunities to grow in my ability to wait patiently as I go through my day. Put a desire in my heart to run daily into Your strength and grace. Help me to share the joy of the Lord as my strength. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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## REFLECTION

- I. What is the first thing **you** do when you must wait for anything?
  - II. How would you describe patience? What would it look like?
  - III. Does your description from question two sound like you?
  - IV. How can we become faithful, confident people who wait well?
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## CHALLENGE

Try to memorize the 3 verses above, train yourself to recall them with each moment of waiting you have in your day. Energize yourself in gratitude and lean into the strong tower!

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## GOING FURTHER

Children: [Amy Carmichael Can Brown Eyes Be Made Blue?](#)  
by Catherine Mackenzie

Adults: [A Chance to Die](#) by Elisabeth Elliott

*Submitted by Dawn Baker*



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# DAY 31: ASKING GOD TO GROW YOUR FAITH AND TRUST IN HIM

*Hebrews 11*

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**H**ave you ever read a title like this and expected to find a checklist of principles and actions that would guarantee success in this area of your life? Tempting as it may be to treat our spiritual journey to a dose of “self-help”, that checklist isn’t the answer. I challenge you to take a much simpler approach; just ask the Father.

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. (Prov 3:5-6)*

Recognizing that you desire a deeper relationship with Jesus is growth! Spend time in prayer. Don’t just bring a laundry list of requests to God but, spend time praising Him and asking Him to reveal Himself to you. Surround yourself with other believers- and not just on Sundays! Get plugged into a community group, a Bible study, a ministry, etc. Just as we need to feed our bodies to grow physically, we need to feed our minds and souls to grow spiritually. Being around the body of Christ helps our faith to grow.

Read your Bible! Knowing and studying God’s Word shows us who He is. The more we read, the more we learn about God’s character. God is faithful and loving and He keeps His promises.

We all face challenges and difficulties as we go through life, but that’s where the opportunities lie. Left to our own devices, we’ll likely fall short in tough circumstances. God, on the other hand, knows exactly what we need and when we need it. He has given us the resources to face difficult times through prayer, scripture, and community with fellow believers. It sounds so simple, yet we tend to get distracted and try to figure things out on our own. It’s through the tough times that our faith is tested and refined. Strides

are made when we begin to develop a longing to seek God in these times. God's faithful provision in our lives is what grows our faith. We trust God more as our faith and understanding of who He is grows. Hebrews 11 gives us many examples of people who demonstrated great faith, as God made a way.

As Christ followers walking this faith journey, we have daily opportunities to put our trust in God and grow in our faith. Take a few moments to inventory His blessings in your life. Doesn't His steadfast love and faithfulness in our lives make Him worthy of our trust?

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## **PRAYER**

Father, please give us a deeper desire to know You and spend time with You each day in Your Word and in prayer. Lord, help us to trust You in challenging times. Please put people in our paths that will strengthen and refine us. Thank You, Lord, for Your faithful provision. Amen.

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## **REFLECTION**

- I. Have you ever hesitated to bring your \_\_\_\_\_ (pain, fear, worry, sorrow, etc.) to God? Why?
- II. Recall a difficult time you or a loved one faced. How did you respond? How was God made known through that circumstance?
- III. Can you name a time when you were overwhelmed by God's provision in a time of great need?

*Submitted By: Joel White*



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# DAY 32: WITNESSING TO NEIGHBORS

*Matthew 28:19-20 | Acts 1:8*

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**P**astor Dave reminds us weekly that we should be witnessing and telling neighbors about the Good News of Jesus. He has convinced me that I must tell others how He has changed my life since accepting Him as my Lord and Savior, and to tell them how He can change and enrich their lives. I have been thinking about my neighbors. I know who my immediate neighbors are, but my neighbors are anyone I meet no matter where I am (Acts 1:8).

I have been praying daily for God to give me opportunities to tell others about our Lord Jesus' love, faithfulness, and forgiveness. He has given me many opportunities to speak with others. I must say that when you pray for the opportunity, He does provide. Sometimes it is just to say, "Have a blessed day," or "God bless you." Sometimes people tell you about sick spouses or other family members and when you ask their names and say, "I'll pray for you and your family", they are so thankful. It has become clear to me that if I ask God to show me people to witness to, He will be faithful and put people in front of me. My job then is to be alert and obedient when He does.

Recently, an elderly man came in the store and asked for two sets of keys to the kingdom. I said, "To the Kingdom?" He said, "No, to my condo. My children want them because I'm old and they feel they may need to get in if they can't get in touch with me." As I made the keys, he mentioned that he felt safe in this shopping center, but in some malls, and parking lots, and while shopping in other areas, he was afraid because of all the crime and the crowds of young people hanging around who are cursing, smoking, roughhousing, and generally doing nothing but intimidating folks. I handed him his "Kingdom keys" and asked him if he knew that God had a Kingdom that he could be a part of. He said, "I do know, and I believe, but my children don't because they are way too busy to be bothered with God and church."

I suggested that when he gave them their keys, that would be the perfect time to talk with them about Jesus, His Kingdom, and forgiveness of the sin in our lives.

I followed up with reminding him that when he is fearful, to pray for God's protection because He is in control of every situation and circumstance, and that praying to Him will guarantee that he is in His great, loving hands no matter what the outcome is. As he left, he thanked me for the reminder that God loves and cares for him and said he would be speaking with his children about God's love.

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## **PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, we pray that You will provide us with opportunities to tell others that You love them and want them to come to You seeking forgiveness of their sins. We ask that Your Holy Spirit give us Your words to speak as we encounter others wherever we are in our daily walk. Amen.

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## **REFLECTION**

- I. As I say that prayer in the morning, am I looking and listening for the opportunity to share God's love?
- II. Do I ask the Holy Spirit to help me with the right words before I speak?

*Submitted by: Les Johnson*



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## DAY 33: CHOOSING THE GOOD PORTION

*Luke 10:38-42 | Psalm 27 | Lamentations 3:22-24*

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“I’m a Martha.”

“Martha. Definitely Martha.”

I’ve yet to meet a woman who doesn’t, at first blush, align herself with Martha rather than Mary during the glimpse of time we’re shown in Luke 10:38-42. Luke is the only one of the Gospel writers to capture this scene. Since we don’t get extra details from the perspectives of other apostles, we have to pay careful attention to what he’s written. There’s much wisdom to be gleaned from these verses, pointing to the tenderness of Jesus and what He wants from us.

Martha is a doer. She’s got a house to run, people depending on her, chores that need tending, and guests waiting for the meal they’ve been promised. Most of us can relate. The text tells us key things about Martha on this day. She *welcomed* Jesus to her home, she was *distracted* by much serving, and she was *anxious* and *troubled*. What started out as a well-intentioned opportunity for hospitality turned sideways. Who among us hasn’t been there a time or two?

In contrast, we learn that Martha’s sister, Mary, wasn’t being lazy. She wasn’t dumping all the chores on her sister. Jesus tells us Mary *chose* the good portion. She chose to sit at the feet of Jesus, which means she put herself under His authority (at a time when women were not welcomed or desirable students, I might add. This shows us more about Jesus). Mary recognized that her time with Him was more important than the chores calling her name. She was focused on and attentive to the One who would give her something that could never be taken away. In the deepest part of her heart, she wanted what the psalmist describes in Psalm 27:4.



She wanted to *“dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of [her] life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.”*

Both sisters had a decision to make, as we all do each day. On this day, Martha chose to give in to the demands set before her. The never ending to-do list took control of her racing mind and changed her heart posture. She relied on her own strength to accomplish all the tasks that she faced rather than leaning into the wisdom of the Teacher who wanted her affection and fellowship. The result was a grumbling heart. She became so agitated that she confronted Jesus about it. She wanted validation for all of her effort. She wanted to be seen. Sound familiar?

The beauty comes in Jesus' response. He uses her name twice, which gives us a clue that they have a close relationship. He knows her true heart, and He gently and lovingly points out that her sister made the decision to focus on what truly matters: Him.

On that particular day in Bethany, Martha made a poor decision. She allowed herself to feel the anxieties of social pressure and found a false security in her own abilities. Fortunately, for her, and for all of us, there is a patient, faithful, gentle, and generous Redeemer who continues to reveal Himself to His children. He tenderly points us back to Himself and directs our paths. He has given us the pathway to grow in wisdom and intimate community with Him. Each morning we have the opportunity for new mercies and to choose the good portion. Great is His faithfulness (Lam 3:22-24).

Take heart, brothers and sisters. Each day, we have the opportunity to not stay frozen in a poor decision, but to start fresh and choose the good portion as our sister, Mary, did.

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## PRAYER

Father, I pray that You will quiet our hearts and help us to remove the distractions that divert our attention from intimacy with You found in Your Word and through prayer. Give us a fresh sense of awe and wonder at Your affection for us - broken, sinful, people who are in desperate need of a Savior. Let us remember it is You, LORD, who has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Your Son. Let us tremble at the knowledge that there is an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for us, Your children, who are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:3-5). Help us, Father, to choose the good portion each day. In Your Son's name, Amen.

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## REFLECTION

- I. Do you choose to sit at Jesus's feet?
- II. Are you making God's Word a priority in your life by studying it daily?
- III. What steps can you take to remove distractions from your life so that you may enjoy regular fellowship with the Father?

*Submitted by: Natalie Headley*



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# DAY 34: HOUSE OF PRAYER

*Matthew 21:13*

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Just days before the cross, Jesus made a profound declaration which would resonate as a guiding principle shaping the essence of our worship, church family, and personal devotion. Jesus said, *“It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers”*. Jesus, obedient to the word, was quoting from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11.

Why is this important? What does it mean for us today as His children and church family?

Jesus knew that His time on earth was short; He knew that He would soon be joining His Father, preparing for the Holy Spirit to become active and alive in each of His children. His local church would be a gathering place for believers, a community where hearts are knitted together in fellowship and worship. Jesus’ proclamation emphasizes that at the core of this gathering is prayer. Prayer transforms the very fabric of our individual and communal lives.

God’s church here at PHBC is not merely a physical structure, but a spiritual home where believers in Christ come together to commune with God. We come together, echoing the prayers of the faithful. The power of prayer is foundational; we not only bring our requests, but our praises, confessions, and gratitude. Prayer, both corporate and personal, is the heartbeat of our worship, permeating every aspect of our church. In prayer, we experience the transformative work of the Holy Spirit, shaping us into the likeness of Christ.

Jesus’ words and actions challenge us to examine ourselves. Is there anything within our lives which is hindering our relationship with Christ? Are we truly letting go, turning the “steering wheel” over to Christ? Will we trust Him in every circumstance?

In Matthew 11:28, Jesus extends an invitation, *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”*.

The ancient temple in Jerusalem is gone, but we approach God now in prayer, in all reverence and awe that His holiness demands. We are made acceptable to God through the sacrifice of His Son. The call to be a house of prayer is an invitation to cultivate a deep and abiding reliance on God in every aspect of our church and individual lives.

Jesus’ emphasis on the Scriptures and prayer is inseparable in our worship and spiritual formation. Through prayer, we delve into the richness of God’s Word, seeking understanding, guidance, and transformation. The “house of prayer” is where the Holy Spirit instructs, convicts, and empowers us to live out our faith. Jesus’ proclamation challenges us to prioritize prayer at PHBC as well as in our personal devotion, recognizing the transformative power it holds.

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## **PRAYER**

Lord, we ask that You help PHBC reflect the beauty of a devoted, prayerful communion with You, our Heavenly Father! May we come to You with our requests, praises, confessions, and gratitude. May all that we do glorify You. Amen.

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## **REFLECTION**

- I. How is your prayer life?
- II. Are you trusting Christ with everything in your life?
- III. What might help your life be more prayer-full?

*Submitted by: Ron Schlicht*

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# DAY 35: LAMB OF GOD

*Exodus 11 & 12*

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When I first became a believer, I didn't know why Jesus was called the "Lamb of God". I didn't connect Him with the Jewish Passover. To understand who Christ was and what He did, I had to begin with the Old Testament celebration of Passover — the remembrance of the time in Israel's history when the Lord moved through Egypt destroying the firstborn of all people and animals (Ex. 11 & 12). This was the final of the ten plagues God inflicted upon Egypt designed to force Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave the country and their captivity. The Israelites were commanded by God to take the blood of a male lamb—one without blemish—and smear it on the doorposts of their houses. When the LORD saw the blood, He would "pass over" that house. This is a foreshadowing of the spotless Lamb of God, Jesus, whose blood would cover the sins of those who believe in Him, causing God's judgment to pass over them. Ever since that night, Jews have celebrated the Passover in remembrance of God's grace to them.

The sacrifice of lambs also played a vital role in Jewish religious life and sacrificial system. Every morning and evening, a lamb was sacrificed in the temple for the sins of the people (Ex. 29:38-42). In fact, the whole sacrificial system established by God in the Old Testament set the stage for the coming of Jesus Christ, who is the perfect sacrifice God would provide as atonement for the sins of His people (Rom. 8:3; Heb. 10).

The New Testament establishes a relationship between the Passover lamb and the consummate Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ. *"Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed."* (1 Cor. 5:7) The prophet John the Baptist recognized Jesus as the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29), and the apostle Peter links the lamb without defect (Ex. 12:5) with Christ,

whom he calls a “lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:9). Jesus is qualified to be called One “without blemish” because His life was completely free from sin (Heb. 4:15). In Revelation, John the apostle sees Jesus as “a Lamb”, looking as if it “had been slain” (Rev. 5:6). Jesus was crucified during the time that the Passover was observed (Mark 14:12).

I continue to be in awe, and I am humbled by His sacrificial love for you and me.

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## **PRAYER**

Father, I am eternally grateful that Your only Son, Jesus, would sacrifice His life for each of us who have received Him as Lord and Savior. Thank You that You are the perfect Lamb of God, and that Your blood cleanses us from all our sin and makes us holy and righteous before You. In Jesus’ precious Name I pray, Amen.

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## **REFLECTION**

- I. Do you fully appreciate the love of Christ, and His sacrificial death on the cross for you and me, while we were yet sinners?
- II. How do you give thanks, and remember Him during this holy season? How do you show your love and worship Him?

*Submitted by: Fred Walker*



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## DAY 36: MOURNING YOUR SIN

*Psalm 51:4 | Psalm 51:10 | Luke 22:60-62 | James 4:8*

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**“Seek a broken heart for sin, for without that there is no meeting with Christ”** (Letters of Samuel Rutherford)

**W**hen was the last time you had a good cry? This morning? This week? Last year?

What was that cry about? A missed opportunity? Grieving a loved one who is ill or no longer with us? Anger over a wrong done to you?

Without question, each of these is cause for great lament and sorrow.

When was the last time you cried over your sin, sin that in your heart you know truly grieves a holy God? No sin is so small as to escape God’s notice; no sin is too little for us to properly grieve over it.

Does your sin have to reach the depths of David’s adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband to catch and hold your attention and drive you to heartfelt repentance and grief?

Is great mourning over sin reserved for the likes of the Apostle Peter?

***And he went out and wept bitterly.***

[Luke 22:62 (emphasis added)]

Do you mourn over your sin? Or is sort of a casual “Sorry, God” kind of apology more typical? Maybe a more penitent acknowledgement of your sin? A plea for forgiveness coupled with the promise to never “do that again”?

Do you weep bitterly? Peter anguished over his sin against – and abandonment of – a Man he knew and loved. Isn’t that what you’re doing when you sin - essentially abandoning the One Who

was nailed to the cross for YOUR sin? Shouldn't your sin cause you to "weep bitterly"?

How do you mourn over sin? Pastor Colin Smith offers these thoughts on mourning your sin in a blessed way:

**1.** True spiritual mourning begins by naming one or more sins, stating them clearly without excuse and without evasion. Admit they are an offense against God. Once you have named the sin as being really in you, you are ready to enter into spiritual mourning.

**2.** Take a long, hard look at the cost of this sin, and you will enter more deeply into spiritual mourning. First, think about other sins into which the sin you are mourning has led you: sins of deception and pretense. Then, consider what this sin of yours has cost others. Finally, think about how costly the sin you are mourning was for Jesus, as He bore your transgressions on the cross.

**3.** To develop heartfelt sorrow toward some attitude or action that has held (and may still hold) a powerful attraction, you must become poor in spirit, recalling your own inadequacy and recalling your sins as the motive for Christ's sacrifice.

**4.** When you mourn your sins, it can be natural, maybe easy, to despair. Instead, remember that when God shines the light on your sins, His great purpose is to lead you to Jesus, the friend of sinners. In Him you will find hope. Hope is a signature mark of spiritual mourning.

**5.** True spiritual mourning always leads you to the cross. That is where you forsake these sins and break a pattern of habitual sin. And the love of Christ is always found at the foot of the cross.

**6. Spiritual** mourning is the key to breaking sin's compulsive power. This is why we can speak of spiritual mourning as being a blessing. When a sin has become habitual or when its repeated pattern has become engrained as an addiction, spiritual mourning will be your key to breaking its compulsive power, and it is for this reason that we can speak of the blessing of spiritual mourning.



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## PRAYER

Father God, teach me to mourn my sin, to grieve over it as You do. Lord, draw near to me as I seek to draw near to You. Cleanse my hands for I am a sinner, double-minded, in desperate need of a purified heart; please create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. In Your Son's precious Name, Amen.

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## REFLECTION

- I. How seriously are you taking your sin? How do you demonstrate it?
- II. How accountable to God are you? How do you demonstrate it?
- III. What are you going to do to properly mourn over your sin?

*Submitted by: Mark Thayer*

For more on "Six Ways to Mourn Over Your Sin", visit:  
<https://openthebible.org/article/how-to-mourn-over-your-sins/>



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# DAY 37: FORGIVENESS

*Luke 17: 3-4 | Luke 23:34 | Matthew 18: 21-22*

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Forgiveness is mentioned four hundred ninety times throughout the Bible. It's a significant part of the Christian's journey of sanctification and close to the heart of Christ. In the book of Luke, Jesus says, *"Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."* (Luke 17: 3-4) Forgiving is a command from Christ, not a choice each person makes himself.

Just because forgiveness is used many times throughout the Bible does not mean that it's a simple act to perform. In fact, it could be one of the harder things a Christian experiences on their Christian walk.

Forgiveness can be easy; for instance, if someone bumps into you when you're walking down a crowded sidewalk and the person offers a quick apology, you will typically accept it and forgive immediately. However, when a close friend or family member deeply hurts you, how hard is it to forgive them? How much harder is it to forgive the person when they don't apologize?

The word forgiveness has multiple definitions. It could refer to an intentional decision to let go of resentment or anger, to cancel as a debt, and to bear each other's burdens. On a hill in Golgotha, Jesus Christ Himself took on the burdens of all of us and, became sin Himself, to save us from the depths of Hell. While hanging on the cross, He cried out, *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* (Luke 23:34) While suffering a fate as brutal as crucifixion, a battered and broken Christ forgave those who wronged Him.

Who better to model forgiveness when it's at its hardest than Christ Himself? Jesus' actions on the cross solidified His forgiveness of your sins. Simply saying "I forgive you" isn't sincere if your actions don't follow. This isn't to say that you must be crucified to show someone you forgive them, but you must be willing to treat that person as if nothing had previously happened. In the book of Matthew, the apostle Peter asks Jesus *"Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times? Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times."* (Matthew 18: 21-22) Christ doesn't say wait for repentance before forgiving. He commands forgiveness. A practical application to move forward in forgiveness is to pray love over your offender. This is not a prayer for justice or rehashing the offense to simply judge, but rather praying for your wrongdoer. The more you bring this individual to the Father, the harder it will be to hold resentment. Friends and enemies have one thing in common – a need for God's grace.

Christ knew that forgiveness wasn't going to be easy, so He showed us the greatest example of forgiveness in human history. Whether seventy-seven times or four hundred ninety times, the call to forgive others is constant even when it's hard or it hurts. As we go on running the Christian race, let us focus on the words of Christ and strive to follow His example of how to forgive in the worst of times.



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## PRAYER

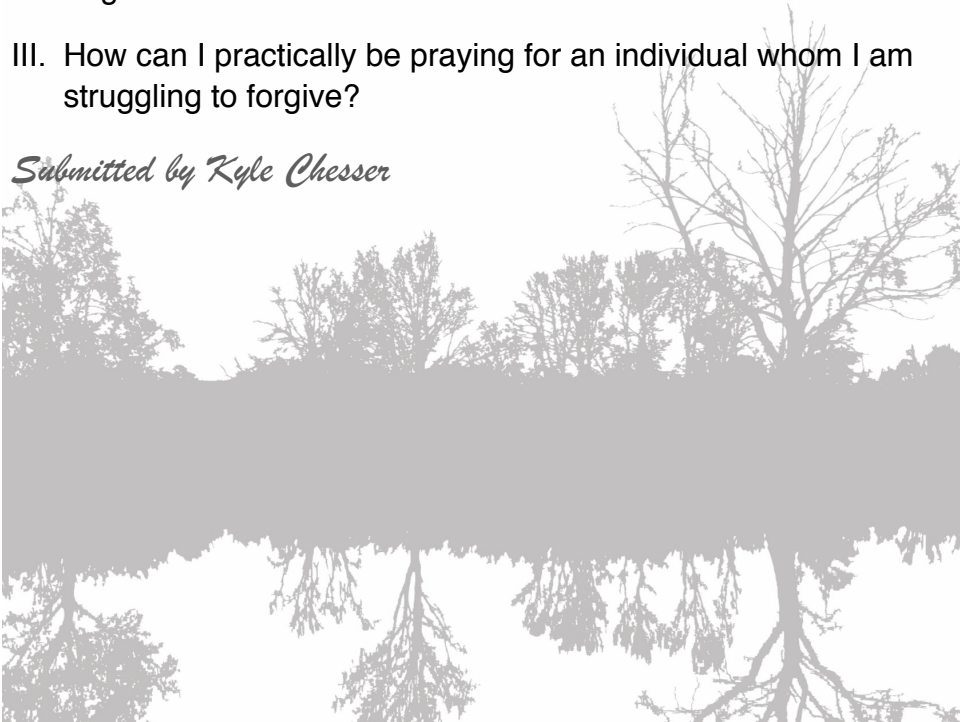
Oh, gracious and forgiving Father, I come before You and offer up my grief and hurt. Please overflow my cup with grace and peace and soften my heart toward my offender. Please bring to my mind all You have forgiven me of so that I may freely forgive those who have offended me. I thank You that I can trust You with perfect justice so that I may be free to forgive. Holy Spirit, grow long-suffering in my life, that I may have abundant fruit. Christ, bless me with Your love—may I be conformed to Your image in the way that I relate to those who have wronged me. Lord, I also lift up those who have trespassed against me—I pray for good in their life and blessing. Thank you, Father; I praise You. Amen.

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## REFLECTION

- I. Do you have anyone in your life that you have not forgiven because of the pain it caused?
- II. How can we forgive those who have hurt us, just as Christ forgave those who hurt Him?
- III. How can I practically be praying for an individual whom I am struggling to forgive?

*Submitted by Kyle Chesser*



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## DAY 38: JUDAS FOR DINNER

*Matt. 26:49-50 | John 13:16-18 | John 17:9*

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*Would I have Judas over for dinner?*

What does this stir up in my heart, either good or bad? Or better put, pleasing to the Lord or not. There was a time about 13 years ago when a very, very wealthy neighbor wanted to prevent us from building our creamery. Her reason... it would ruin her view from the top of the hill when she looked out. She wrote that in a local paper. She enlisted a neighboring farm family to be the face of the battle: a farmer battling a farmer would be more palatable opposed to a wealthy business owner going after a struggling small family farm. This was all very public. We were lied about, slandered, attacked, vilified in newspapers, day-to-day conversations, meetings, and ultimately false testimony in a Towson courthouse with five lawsuits against us.

I had gone to the bathroom during a break in one of the hearings and as I was washing my hands, I heard a lady say, "There's a special place in Hell for people like you." I looked around wondering who she was talking to, and I realized I was the only other one there. She was talking to me. What a weird feeling that was.

The end goal of this wealthy neighbor was to bankrupt us, forcing us to sell our farm that's been in Bobby's family for five generations.

*Would Jesus have Judas for dinner?*

Not only did He choose Judas, the Father gave Judas to Him. The Father's plan *included* Judas! Judas was ordained to be part of the intimate inner circle of Jesus and yet we never hear Jesus during those years single out Judas in such a way to set him apart from the other disciples. No glaring, unkindness, no silent treatment or disowning, even with Jesus knowing Judas would "eat bread with Him and then lift his heel against Him" (Jn. 13:18).

This speaks more of Jesus' relationship *with His Father* than with Judas. Jesus trusted His Father with the relationships He gave Him and lived before them in loving obedience *to Him*.

It's not until the Feast of the Passover that Judas is revealed. But what happens before Jesus reveals him? *Jesus...washes... Judas'...feet*. Washing other feet, sandal wearing, dirt walking, sweaty, gross feet, was reserved for the lowest ranking servants. Jesus is teaching that nothing is below us in our service to God's glory and the good of others. Jesus says, "*For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you*" (Jn. 13:15). And more... after Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss, Jesus says, "*Friend, do what you came to do*" (Matt. 26:50). "*FRIEND!*"

Feel our human hearts push against that. But Jesus....

### **We are witnessing humility beyond compare.**

One takeaway from this is that God will place people — sometimes difficult people — in our lives to bring about His purposes and to glorify Him. How does this bring Him glory? When His image-bearers mirror His merciful, long-suffering, kind, forgiving, gentle, humble, and beautiful character in the midst of a difficult time or trial.

So, would I invite the wealthy lady or the neighbor farm family over for dinner?

*In a heartbeat!*

Judas, the son of perdition whom Jesus faced, would never know salvation. The Father is giving us the privilege, by the strength of Jesus' Spirit, to participate with supernatural humility and trust, in His saving work of salvation with the ones He gives us.

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## PRAYER

Father, help me, by Your Spirit, to understand that all my relationships belong to You for Your use. And while living out those relationships, enable me to humbly submit and obey Your Word out of trust in Your holy character and loving purposes for me and those You give me. Amen.

*\*This devotional speaks of difficult, painful relationships. Abusive relationships would need another conversation.*

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## REFLECTION

- I. Do I believe that all my life, even God's chosen opposition, serves His good and holy purposes?
- II. Do I desire God's glory enough to serve my enemies in humility?

*Submitted by: Pam Prigel*



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# DAY 39: GETHSEMANE PRAYER

*Luke 22:39-46*

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**W**hat is the worst circumstance you have ever taken to God in prayer? Maybe it was at the advent of a cancer diagnosis, or suffering under a cruel and unfair boss, or in the midst of financial/legal struggles you believed would surely ruin you.

Have you ever taken the time to truly contemplate and meditate on the suffering our Lord endured in the garden of Gethsemane?

In those holy hours before His arrest, torture, and brutal slaying, our Savior faced a depth of agony that transcends human comprehension. His sweat, like great drops of blood falling to the ground, exemplified a phenomenon known as hematidrosis, a medical condition that only occurs when someone is under the most extreme forms of emotional and psychological distress.

Picture the Son of God, grappling with the impending horror of the cross, bearing the sins of the world. Abandoned by His closest friends and soon the Father, as those sins force a separation He has never known. In our moments of despair, aren't there times you and I have hesitated to approach God with our deepest fears and suffering? Yet, Jesus, fully God and fully man, exemplified vulnerability before the Father.

In our most desperate times, let us follow the Savior's example. We may not have the capacity to be strong, but we can cry out to Him with the anguish of our suffering, for God invites us to bring our burdens before Him. As Christ pleaded, "*Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.*" (Matt. 26:39)

Therefore let us go to the Father in prayer.



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## PRAYER

Heavenly Father, You who holds the universe in His hands, placed the stars in heaven, and breathed life into me, search my soul and build in me a resolve to follow Jesus's example in Gethsemane and approach Your throne of grace with honesty and humility. Let me, like my Lord, share the depths of my heart and bare my soul to You the LORD of Hosts, my Abba. Search me and cleanse me from all that tempts me to trust the things of this world over You. Forgive my sin of pride and replace it with a reliance on You and a holy passion to see Your will done. Father, I want to trust You so fully that even in my darkest hours, Your grace, mercy and compassion abound in my acceptance. For You know the plans ahead, and I don't. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

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## REFLECTION

- I. 1) What things do you find especially hard to pray for?
- II. 2) What things in your life, do you need to say "Not my will, but Your will be done"?
- III. 3) Examine yourself deeply. What prevents you from accepting God's will over your own will for your life?

*Submitted by: Bill Heidel*



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## DAY 40: SHARING A TESTIMONY WITH A THIEF

*Luke 23:32-43 | Isaiah 53:7-12 | 2 Cor 4:1-6 | Eph 2:1-10*

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On the way to the cross, we meet an entire cast of characters, each one a piece of a puzzle that would depict an incredible picture of grace. A disciple chosen with the full knowledge that he would one day become synonymous with betraying the Messiah. Pontius Pilate, who unironically says the most ironic thing ever, looking at the Son of God eye to eye and asking, “What is truth?”. Pilate’s wife, who would plead with him to free this mysterious innocent man because of a dream. Barrabbas, a ne’er-do-well who would somehow see his life exchanged for the life of the same innocent man in a God-ordained twist of fate. Herod, Simon of Cyrene, Joseph of Arimathea, the centurion at the foot of the cross... The story is rich with eyewitness details compiled both firsthand and through the diligent research of Doctor Luke.

Yet, which of these ancillary stories is more intriguing than the tale of the two thieves that hung with our Lord on that dark day? We know very little about them, except that we can see the hands of God’s providence in their story. When did their lives take a turn toward evil? How many times had their mothers wept over them? Isaiah 53 predicted that the suffering Servant would be numbered with the transgressors. Matt. 27:28 confirms that these men were, in fact, not simply thieves, but robbers, which carries a presumption of violence in the Greek. These men were likely guilty of armed robbery, with attempted, or even actual, murder in the mix. And they compounded their sin that afternoon as they **both** mocked Him (Matt. 27:44; Mark 15:32), bitterly taunting Jesus with a challenge along the lines of “go ahead and save yourself, your royal highness.”

Only a few hours later, the dialogue had changed. Grace was sovereignly overflowing from the audacious display of love coming from Jesus. One of the criminals continued to seethe and mock Christ between his labored breaths. Only this time, his accomplice

showed that something eternally significant had changed in the way he saw the Man on the middle cross, as Alistair Begg famously refers to Jesus. Was it when Jesus inexplicably said, *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”*? (Luke 23:34) These were Jesus’ only recorded words from the cross before our future brother in Christ gave the best deathbed conversion testimony the world has ever known. Likely gasping for air, the thief, who had been given eyes to see Jesus anew, rebukes his former comrade, revealing an awareness of his own sin. Then, in what was likely an answer to a lifetime of prayers from his mother and father, he turns to Jesus and says, *“remember me when you come into your kingdom”* (Luke 23:42).

This strangely complete confession of faith did not originate in the heart of a man who was mocking Jesus only hours prior. This faith was exactly what we’ve always been told in Ephesians 2:8-9. It was a sovereign gift of God. The phrase “dead man walking” refers to when a condemned man is escorted from his prison cell and takes his final steps toward the execution chamber. This confession came from a *dead man hanging*. Hanging from a Roman cross, but also hanging under the weight of his sins.

How do you go from mocking the Son of God to yielding your future to Him? Ephesians 2:4-5 gives a complete summary of what had happened. *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved [this thief], even when [he] was dead in [his] trespasses, made [him] alive together with Christ- by grace [he had] been saved...*. This thief’s conversion is likely more dramatic and certainly more well-known than yours. Yet, it happened in much the same way. Grace had broken out, and the eyes of his heart saw something new. His testimony and yours are more similar than you may have thought.

Jesus is only recorded to have spoken seven times over the six hours He hung on the cross. The second time He speaks, He declares that everyone who ever prayed for this man had been heard by heaven. Jesus turns to him, straining to be understood

as His lifeblood is draining, saying, “...today, you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 22:43). Our Savior knew He would finish this day victorious. Talk about blessed assurance! A moment of pure trust unlocking an overflow of eternal grace. No sinner’s prayer, no systematic theology class, no carefully assembled journal of sermon notes... Purely a simple faith that this Jesus was exactly who He claimed to be.

Can you imagine the thrill of hope - to borrow a phrase from another season – that must have washed over this dying thief after Jesus promised him paradise? I pray that you can. Take a moment to wonder again why it is that the same God who said, “let the light shine out of darkness,” has shone in *your* heart to give you a saving trust in this bloodied Christ (2 Cor 4:6). “Why me, God?” Ephesians 2:4-5 is our answer.

While your testimony may not be as dramatic as the thief saved on the cross, it is no less glorious. Something dead was brought to life. Spend some time today quiet before the Lord. Ask Him to bring to mind all the events, relationships, and struggles that His sovereign plan brought together to bring you to faith in His Son. Then, thank Him for the forgiving heart of Christ, who was willing to be slaughtered on your behalf.

*Submitted by: Pastor Chris*





**Perry Hall**  
**Baptist Church**  
*Come Thrive*