

Richland Creek Family,

How's your prayer life?

It's a simple question, but it can be tough to answer. Literally it sounds like, "How has your talking to God been lately?" Emotionally it might feel like, "Sum up your relationship with God at this point in your life." Bible reading, by comparison, is clearer and more "objective." How many pages? How far along in your plan? Which books have you been reading? What have you learned? Prayer doesn't fit into an Excel sheet quite as easily.

God means for your life — married or unmarried, student or employee, young or old — to run on the power of prayer. Prayer fuels the engine of your heart and mind. It's not coffee, or Chipotle, or social media buzz; it's prayer. You need God in and through prayer more than you need anything else. We will not do anything of any real and lasting value without God, which means we will not do anything of any real and lasting value without prayer.

The purpose of this devotional is to motivate us to pray, and challenge us to pray boldly and consistently, beginning with the next 30 days. As we embark on this journey of transition, we pray that God would open our hearts so that spending time in prayer becomes an even more essential part of our lives.

DAY 1 – CHILDREN OF GOD

JOHN 1:12–13

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

The astonishing reality of these verses is that all who believe in the Son of God become children of God. This change in position before God is almost too marvelous to grasp! Have you considered the fact that we move from being an enemy of God to a child of God—by the will of God? Friend, it isn't just that we are forgiven of our sins but that we are then adopted by God. J. I. Packer writes, "Adoption is the highest privilege of the Gospel. The traitor is forgiven, brought in for supper, and given the family name." What does a family member have that a non-family member doesn't? Access. Tim Keller explains, "The only person who dares wake up a king at 3:00 AM for a glass of water is a child. We have that kind of access." Brothers and sisters, as believers in Christ, we have access to the one true God whose love for us is "as high as the heavens above the earth" (Psalm 103). Not only that, He invites us to call Him "Father" (Matthew 6:9).

Question to consider: For some, our earthly father was a poor reflection on our heavenly Father. Perhaps you grew up without a father. Or maybe your father was present but distant. Whatever the case may be, we all tend to impose our concept of father onto God rather than seeing God (as Father) through the lens of Scripture. Friend, will you spend time getting to know your heavenly Father by learning what Scripture has to teach you?

Prayer Prompts:

- Thank God for bringing you into His family and calling you His child (Gal 3:26).
- Meditate on and thank God for Psalm 103:13, "The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him."

2 Corinthians 6:18, "...and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."

DAY 2 – HEIRS WITH CHRIST

ROMANS 8:16–17

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Have you ever received an inheritance? Are you a beneficiary in someone's will? Can you even imagine being the heir to Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos (Amazon) or Warren Buffett? The material blessings these men will impart is unfathomable. Yet, what does the Bible tell us about these earthly possessions? 1 Tim 6:7, "for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world." Friend, whatever earthly inheritances we stand to gain this side of heaven pale in comparison to what awaits us in glory.

Believers, we are children of the one true living God. Therefore, we are heirs to the King of Kings. What belongs to Christ will belong to us! And if we are joint heirs with Christ, we must share in His sufferings as well. This is the call of the Christian life (Matt 7:14).

But what shall we inherit? Charles Spurgeon answers, "In Hebrews 1:2 we are told that God has appointed Christ heir of all things. Then we are heirs of all things—heaven and earth, time and eternity, anything that you can conceive of, the things that can be named and cannot be named, things conceivable and inconceivable, finite and infinite, human and divine. Christ's property extends to all, and we are co-heirs."

Questions to consider: Are you a child of God? If so, are you willing to suffer with Christ? Where is your treasure (Matt 6:21)?

Prayer Prompts:

- Thank God for the gift of salvation, adoption and that we are co-heirs with Christ.
- Spend time reading and praying through Ephesians 1:3–14. Galatians 4:7, "So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."

DAY 3 – ABIDE IN CHRIST

JOHN 15:4-5

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Think of a tree. There are branches that are attached and dependent. Apart from the trunk, the branch withers and dies. Think of a flower on a vine. When the flower is permanently connected to the vine, the flower receives life-giving nourishment. To be unattached is to be separated from life-giving sustenance.

Our dependence is not on ourselves, other people, or the material world. Our dependence is on God. And God is alive and personal. When we are abiding in Him, we draw life, strength, grace, and peace. Abiding is a choice based on the truth that God's Word brings. God's Word tells us that our Savior is the source of strength, comfort, and everything else we need for life.

Concentration camp survivor and author Corrie ten Boom once described it this way: "Connected with Him in His love, I am more than conqueror; without Him I am nothing."

Questions to consider: Are you abiding in Christ or yourself? What does it look like for you to "abide in Christ" in your life? What eternal things are you accomplishing when you are "abiding" in Him?

Prayer Prompts:

- Father, thank you for my salvation, which is the foundation for our relationship. Help me now to daily abide in You to cultivate an intimate, growing relationship with You.
- Pray and meditate on Gal 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

1 John 2:6, "Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked."

DAY 4 – LIVE WITHOUT FEAR

ROMANS 8:1

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

To those who are redeemed by the Son of God, do you know that you can live without fear of being condemned by your Savior? Many of us have done things that we would like to forget. So many believers begin their journey of faith overjoyed that God had given them the faith necessary to believe in His atoning work on the cross and His faithful resurrection. Yet, many Christians are plagued by continual “what ifs” in their thought lives: “What if I had only not said . . . ?” “Why did I get so mad at . . . ?” Dear believer, your Heavenly Father says to you, “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Questions to consider: Are there sins you still feel condemn you? Do you realize “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17)? Have you ever spent time learning about the word “justification”?

Prayer Prompts:

- Lord, I want to live what I know to be true. You have set me free and I am not condemned because I am in Christ Jesus.
- Thank you for the gift of salvation that frees me from sin and death.
- Pray Ephesians 2:8–9 and replace the personal pronouns with your name, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”
- Help me not be ruled by my errant thoughts. I want to take every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

2 Cor 10:4–6, “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.”

DAY 5 – A MANNER WORTHY OF THE LORD

COLOSSIANS 1:9–10

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;...

Paul prays for the Colossians to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. This phrase “manner worthy of the Lord” is speaking of our conduct—how we live our lives as believers. How do we parent? How do we work in our jobs? How do we love our spouses? Everything we do as believers is meant to be “fully pleasing to him.” Moreover, we are to be “bearing fruit in every good work.” The fruit are the good works done because we are in a growing relationship with our God.

Questions to consider: Is your conduct before the Lord pleasing to Him? Do your daily decisions reflect wisdom from Scripture? Do you see fruit in your life that is kingdom focused?

Prayer Prompts:

- God, I desire to live a life pleasing to You. Yet, if I’m honest, I still sin and take my eyes off You and Your Word. Help me to fix my eyes upon You and meditate on Your Word.
- Reveal to me areas of my life that are not worthy of You. Change my heart in areas of stubborn, willful sin.
- Read, memorize and pray Psalm 119:33–37.

Psalm 139:23–24, “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”

DAY 6 – A SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND REVELATION

EPHESIANS 1:17

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. (NIV)

God created us for relationship with Him. He not only desires for us to believe and trust in His Son's substitutionary life, death and resurrection, God desires an ongoing relationship with His children. What Paul asks for here in Ephesians 1 is that the Spirit of God would provide wisdom and revelation (a revealing of Himself) to help us have a growing understanding of who God is. What is He like? What pleases Him? What displeases Him?

Wisdom can be thought of as the skill of Godly living. To have this skill we must fear the Lord. Through reading and studying God's Word we can know, understand and grow in our walk with the Lord by getting to "know Him better." To do this, we must spend time in His Word and prayer.

Questions to consider: Do you know God better now than you did one year ago? Are you spending time in God's Word to know Him better?

Prayer Prompts:

- Pray Psalm 119:36–37: "Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain! Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways."
- Grant me wisdom and understanding as I study Your Word. Psalm 119:125, "I am your servant; give me understanding, that I may know your testimonies!"
- Instill in me a growing desire to spend time in Your Word every day.

James 4:8, "Come near to God and he will come near to you."

DAY 7 – SURPASSING WORTH OF KNOWING CHRIST

PHILIPPIANS 3:7–8

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.

Paul was a man of importance and pedigree. With all that he had going for him he considered it all worthless compared to knowing Christ. To be sure, Christ became Paul's prize, peace, joy, and contentment. That's why he could write in a jail cell near the end of his life with such joy. What is marvelous about knowing God is not just that we know Him but that He knows us, too. Moreover, we know and love Him because He first knew and loved us (1 John 4:19). One scholar writes, "There is no moment when His eye is off me." What a wonderful comfort and encouragement for the believer! Is not knowing God worth far more than anything else we could ever have or be?

Questions to consider: Many of us have a lot of knowledge about God without actually knowing Him. Would you consider everything else in your life "rubbish" as compared to knowing Christ? Are you content in your relationship with Christ alone?

Prayer Prompts:

- God, help me to honestly evaluate my love for other things and people. Show me what or who I love more than You.
- Pray Psalm 16:2, "I say to the Lord, 'You are my Lord: I have no good apart from you.'"
- Father, help me to reorder the loves of my heart so that You alone are my prize possession.

Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

DAY 8 – NOT AS I WILL

MATTHEW 26:39

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as YOU WILL."

Prayer time is personal communication with God our Creator, which brings us into deeper fellowship with Him. So often our natural tendency is to come before the Lord in prayer with selfish hearts and wrong motivation. We pray for our own desires and not for God's desires. We pray for our will, not His.

How do I pray God's will?

Jesus models praying God's will so beautifully for us in Matthew 26:39 when He prays in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus is agonizing over His impending death for the sins of the world and prays for what the Father's will is, not His own.

"Yet not as I will, but as YOU WILL."

As we grow in our faith, our prayers should also, being transformed into God's will, not our own.

Questions to consider: Do you have a heart like Jesus? Have you fallen to your knees in total submission for what your heavenly Father's will is?

Prayer Prompts:

- Heavenly Father, cultivate a submissive, selfless heart in me so that my prayers are about You and not myself.
- God, thank You for the gift of prayer. May it increase my dependence on You and draw me closer to You. Help me to pray for Your will and not my own.

Psalm 19:14, "Let the words of my mouth and meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer."

DAY 9 – FEAR NOT

ISAIAH 41:10 - 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.

The book of Isaiah depicts a people who are distrustful, unfaithful, and blatantly rebellious towards God. They embrace the world and all that it has to offer while rejecting the one true God who called them out of darkness.

Punishment looms over them, and they soon experience suffering under God's hand that will crush them. Yet, "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Psalm 103:8).

Isaiah records for us in 41:10 a description of God's steadfast love and commitment for His people. God is a covenant keeper to persistent covenant breakers (Psalm 78:40–42). How comforting it is to know the Lord will strengthen, help, and uphold us even as we turn away in foolish sin. Brothers and sisters, this message of loving reassurance from Isaiah is just as much for us today as it was for the Israelites then. Oh, how we need to thank Him for His unfailing love. "He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities" (Psalm 103:10).

Questions to consider: Do you sometimes wonder if God has given up on you? Have you "feared and felt dismayed" recently, questioning whether God is even involved in the circumstances of your life?

Prayer Prompts:

- Father, "be a rock of refuge to which I may continually come; you have given the command to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress" (Psalm 71:3).
- "Answer me, O Lord, for your steadfast love is good: according to your abundant mercy, turn to me. Hide not your face from your servant; for I am in distress; make haste to answer me" (Psalm 69:16–17).

Psalm 68:3, "But the righteous shall be glad; they shall exult before God; they shall be jubilant with joy!"

DAY 10 – LOVE GENERATES OBEDIENCE

JOHN 14:15 - If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

Years ago, my friend's seven-year-old daughter had two pieces of candy: strawberry and grape. The child offered her mom the grape candy. It was a sweet moment of generosity and kindness. It was one of those "proud mama moments." After all, the child gave away half her candy! For a seven-year-old, this is no small gesture. Unless you knew the child didn't like grape flavored candy. Then it's no gesture at all.

Granted sometimes extenuating circumstances cause us to act a certain way; however, many times what we do is tied to our motives. And those motives are frequently self-serving. We usually have something to gain (or avoid) as a result of our actions. Similarly, we obey commandments for the same reason—to gain reward from God or avoid the displeasure of God.

People do what they want to do and they don't usually need convincing to do it. Ideally, it would be this way with our God as well. Because we love God, we desire to obey Him. Simply stated, obedience is an inevitable consequence of love for Christ. But if you're motivated by rewards, consider this: John 14:23, "Jesus answered him, 'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.'" The believer who loves God seeks no other reward than God whom he loves.

Questions to consider: Do you obey God? Why or why not? Are your motives for obedience pure before the Lord? Have you considered that not obeying God is not loving God? John 14:24, "Whoever does not love me does not keep my words."

Prayer Prompts:

- Ask God to incline your heart to Him.
- Meditate and praise God for what He has done in you (John 3:16).
- Thank God for His unfailing love and patience (Psalm 86:15).

1 John 2:6, "Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked."

DAY 11 – A PEOPLE OF UNITY

PSALM 133

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.

This Psalm extols the ideal of Christ-followers living life together in unity. When unity is achieved, it is likened to the priests of the temple being anointed with precious oil. This oil symbolized being set apart, consecrated, made holy by God. Unity is also likened to the dew, which is a necessary and nourishing source of water for a healthy crop. God will bring to bear His blessing where unity flourishes. We are called to be a people of unity. It is the ideal of the Christian life within the body of believers.

Questions to consider: Are you doing everything you can to promote unity within the body? Are you striving towards harmony, seeking out peace? Are you thanking God for the blessings He has already provided within this body of believers?

Prayer Prompts:

- Lord, help me to be a member of the body that prays for and promotes unity amongst my fellow believers—“seek peace and pursue it” (Ps. 34:12).
- Lord, help me remember the tongue is a “world of evil that corrupts the whole body” (Jas. 3:6), and that “he who guards his lips, guards his life” (Prov. 13:3).

1 Peter 3:8–9, “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called.”

DAY 12 – UNITY FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

ROMANS 15:1–7

We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me." For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

It's easy to disagree, isn't it? Believers have been known to argue over everything from music to attire to coffee to decorations and so much more. Some of us have weaknesses that others don't. One person's preference is another's wrongdoing. Yet, despite all our differences and failings, we are all called to join together to worship and glorify the one true God. OUR one true God. We are commanded in Scripture to live in harmony. Why? So that our unified voice will glorify our heavenly Father, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Questions to consider: Are you in discord with another believer now? Are you tearing down a brother or sister in Christ rather than building up? What can you do to bring harmony to this relationship?

Prayer Prompts

- Read and pray through Matthew 7:1–5.
- Father help me to consider the interests of others ahead of my own desires.
- Lord, cultivate a heart in me that seeks to please You first by loving other people as Christ does.

Philippians 2:5 "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus."

DAY 13 – IN DEED AND TRUTH

1 JOHN 3:18

Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

The apostle John is reminding children of God to serve. He is issuing a command, in fact, to not only speak good things, but to do good things. Memorizing Scripture and singing songs of faith will build our confidence in the one true God who calls us to serve—both with words and with action. Consider serving in the many opportunities that are available at The Creek—driving golf carts, serving in the nursery or Special Needs ministry, singing in the choir, just to name a few. If you only hear the Word on Sunday mornings but then go and forget the rest of the week, you are “deceiving yourselves.”

Questions to consider: Do you want to be blessed by God? Then obey His Word! You cannot pray and ask God to bless your life all the while continuing to ignore the clear teaching of Scripture in various areas of your life. Obedience to the Word of God is a must. And the Word specifically tells how we can serve one another with the spiritual gifts given by the Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12; Ephesians 4; 1 Peter 4).

Prayer Prompts:

- Father, help me to not just know Romans 12:1 but live it as well. Create in me a heart that offers myself as a living sacrifice for the body of my church.
- Pray for the gifting God has granted you to be revealed and affirmed through your service in various areas of the church.
- Pray over 1 Peter 4:10, “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”

James 1:22, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

DAY 14 – PUT ON LOVE

COLOSSIANS 3:12–15

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

Paul urges us to put on, like clothing, attributes that align with who we are in Christ as chosen, holy and beloved. Our ability to properly relate to others flows out of our identity in Christ. Christ has perfectly demonstrated all of these traits in what He has done for us and, because of that, we are able to reflect who He is in our relationships. Ultimately, love is the foundation of these virtues. God's love for us in Christ frees us to love others, leading to harmony in the body. Because we have peace with God through Christ, peace with others is possible. Let us pray that we love one another with thankful hearts, understanding that this is only possible through Jesus Christ.

Questions to consider: How does your identity in Christ influence how you relate to others? Do your relationships reflect God's grace toward you?

Prayer Prompts:

- Praise God for His compassion, kindness, patience, forbearance and forgiveness.
- Spend time in prayer confessing the ways you have failed to be Christ-like in your relationships.
- Pray for God to develop in you the traits listed in this passage.

1 John 4:7, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God."

DAY 15 – GREATEST OF ALL

MARK 9:35 - And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."

The world gives countless directions from books and blogs, to celebrity and clergy. The world gives countless direction on achieving greatness—How to be the best version of yourself. Most advice the world offers includes acts of good. Yet these acts are to make oneself great; the Bible teaches quite the opposite.

During this passage the disciples are called out by Jesus for thinking in a worldly vein — who was the greatest among them. Jesus is quick to declare God's truth on this matter. The disciples had to choose to come last and choose to serve others. In our own lives, there is the desire to be seen, heard, acknowledged, and appreciated. All of these desires bring the focus back to our own desire for greatness. They creep into our churches and relationships with our Christian brothers and sisters. A Christian must choose to be last, humble, lovingly choosing to stay late, helping others, doing deeds the world deems menial, going unseen and unacknowledged.

The Christian is also to be opposite from the world they serve. Jesus served everyone, except Himself. Left to our own devices, swayed by worldly wisdom, we would choose to serve ourselves by masking our own agendas, at work and home. This is not the service to which Christians are called.

Questions to consider: Do you use Godly wisdom or worldly wisdom to be "great"? Do you struggle to serve others with pure motives? Who do you choose to serve, God or self?

Prayer Prompts:

- Take time to examine your motives for service. At your core, are your relationships and service achieving self-greatness or Christ's greatness?
- Read and pray through Philippians 2:1–11.

Deuteronomy 10:12, "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul."

DAY 16 – LET US NOT GROW WEARY

GALATIANS 6:9–10 - For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Let's face it. We all struggle with weariness from time to time. Ministry is often difficult and often we do not see fruit in this lifetime. This encouragement from Paul reminds us that it is only in our reliance on the indwelling Holy Spirit that we can truly sow the seeds of good that will reap a harvest of life. The perseverance and endurance to which we are called in Christ are grounded in the assurance of the hope of eternal life. We must all, as we labor with and for one another, rely on His Spirit for strength to press on to the final hope of the heavenly reward that is secure in Jesus our Savior. Do not give up!

Questions to consider: Are you relying on the Spirit or your own strength to do what is good? Are you focused on circumstances or on Christ? Are you working for the temporary rewards of doing good or the eternal?

Prayer Prompts:

- Ask God to shift your focus to Christ and thank Him for the hope of eternal life.
- Pray that God would renew your strength and help you to rely on the Holy Spirit to persevere.

Philippians 3:14, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

DAY 17 – COUNT OTHERS

PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4 - Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others

These two verses command us to do something that seems utterly impossible to accomplish. As sinners our very nature drives us to selfish ambition, so to regard others as more important than ourselves is completely foreign to us. After having outlined in the previous verses the necessity for the church at Philippi to seek unity in Christ, Paul is unpacking for them how they might go about doing that very thing. To do this, to find unity, they must put off their selfish ambition. They must leave behind vain conceit and run fast after humility that drives them to place others above themselves. In a church where everyone is looking out for the needs of everyone else, unity is born. On the contrary, preoccupation with self is a sin that will destroy the unity of the body of believers. This putting aside self for the unity and care of the body can only be accomplished by the power of the indwelling Spirit in believers who surrender to Him. Our very example for such living is found in Jesus Christ who left the glory of heaven to share our humanity and die on the cross so that we can have eternal life. He is our model. The key here is the gospel. John Piper explained, "The gospel breaks us, frees us, from the mindset of merit, deserve, and entitlement. That brokenness frees us from all conceit, and we are empowered for service to others."

Questions to consider: What is our mindset towards serving others? What does it look like to count others as more significant than ourselves? Do we find our joy, our fulfillment, in Him or in our personal accomplishments? Do we recognize the humility demonstrated on the cross?

Prayer Prompts:

- Thank God for Christ's example of humble service demonstrated on the cross (Philippians 2:5-11). Father, reveal to me areas of my life that are not honoring to You as I pursue fulfillment of my selfish desires over service to others.

Psalm 131:1-2, "O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me."

DAY 18 – LOVE ONE ANOTHER

JOHN 15:12–13 - This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

Let's be honest. We have difficulty showing kindness in the church parking lot much less loving others as Christ has loved us. To add insult to injury, our culture has redefined love to mean anything and everything that meets our own wants, needs and desires. Worldly love is rarely sacrificial love.

In contrast, God's love took human form in Jesus and is our model of love. Love is why God sent the Son (John 3:16), love is why the Son humbled Himself in coming (Eph 5:2), and love is why the Spirit draws people to Jesus (Romans 8:1–11). Jesus' work and mission to save mankind is based on His love for us. And this love has no limitations. Jesus will surrender and lay down His very life for us. This is the pattern of love Jesus commands us to extend to one another.

What does the Bible say love is? While the Bible has plenty to teach us about love, consider this verse: Romans 5:8, "But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Brothers and sisters, we too are called to model this same love to everyone—not just those within the body.

Questions to consider: Friend, do you love only those who love you? Who in your family, work, neighborhood and church have you not loved even while Christ has loved you?

Prayer Prompts:

- Father, thank You that you are a gracious and loving God. Thank You that You have shown us perfect love in Christ. Help me to offer Christ's love to others.
- Lord, open my eyes to the love You have shown me, and fill my heart with that same love for all those I come in contact with today.

John 13:34–35, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

DAY 19 – IRON SHARPENS IRON

PROVERBS 27:17 - Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.

This verse is a pretty well-known verse as it points to some of God's instructions given to us regarding relationships.

Context surrounding Scripture is crucial to a proper understanding of it. Why is the illustration of iron used in this verse? In Old Testament times, one iron blade would be used to sharpen another until both blades became more effective. There were no other tools or sharpening devices back then. It took time and persistent effort to achieve the desired sharpness. However, if left alone, both blades would become dull and eventually useless. You see, they needed each other to be effective in their work.

The same is true in the life of a believer. God did not intend for us to do His work alone, nor can we. Through salvation, God adopts us into a community with other believers to pursue relationships that are rooted in Him. Transparent, godly friendships hold one another genuinely accountable—allowing another to see, identify and address areas of weakness in your life with the ultimate goal of pointing you to look more like Christ. Friendships such as these are refining to the believer and equip you in a closer walk with the Lord.

Questions to consider: Think on your biblical friendships. Do you surround yourself with “iron” to sharpen you and hold you accountable? Or do you allow yourself to be surrounded by bad company?

Prayer Prompts:

- Lord, thank You for the beautiful gift of friendship You have given us. Allow my life to be refined and filled with biblical friendships full of accountability and love where You are at the center.
- May I have proper motivation and a willing heart to allow others to see my weaknesses so they can encourage me to look more like You.

1 Corinthians 15:33, “Do not be deceived: Bad company ruins good morals.”

DAY 20 – BE RECONCILED TO YOUR BROTHER

MATTHEW 5:22–24 - But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Anger is not something we have; it is something we do. Very rarely is our anger “righteous anger”—anger that aligns with God’s anger. Most human anger is sinful.

Jesus, of course, is perfectly aware of what’s inside people and calls attention to anger and its offspring. His words aren’t directed at just anyone. The word brother is used four times and identifies fellow believers. Jesus is greatly concerned about the condition of His children’s hearts. To be sure, Jesus is so concerned He instructs His children to interrupt their worship to bring reconciliation.

Friends, we are literally spiritual siblings with one another, and our Father desires that we love one another as Christ loves us (John 13:34). Anger is divisive and destructive. As children of God, we are called to “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:31–32).

Questions to consider: Evaluate your anger—is it unrighteous anger? Who are you currently angry with? What stops you from reconciling with this person?

Prayer Prompts:

- Father, I get angry. Help me to manage my anger and not sin while I am angry.
- Help me understand the root of my anger. Help me understand why I get angry.
- Grant me a heart that wants and seeks reconciliation, especially with my fellow believers.

Galatians 6:10, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

DAY 21 – WE ARE HIS WORKMANSHIP

EPHESIANS 2:10

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Just prior to this verse, Paul reminds us “by grace you have been saved through faith” (vs. 8), and God has “seated us with him in the heavenly places with Christ Jesus” (vs. 6). Christ has done the work of salvation for us. And now, as His new creation, He has amazingly purposed to work through us. This is not toilsome labor we are commanded to do. Instead, the works set before us are “good” and “prepared beforehand.” As we participate in these fruitful activities, we should remember the world will see these “good deeds and glorify God” (1 Pet 2:11). Our goal is His glory!

Questions to consider: Are you trusting in Christ’s work alone for your salvation, and not in any good work you do? Are you actively serving within the body, remembering there are good works He has already planned for you to do? Are the “good works” you participate in for God’s glory alone?

Prayer Prompts:

- Lord, help me to walk out my faith through participating in the good works You have already planned for me. Give me discernment to recognize which works You would have me participate in.
- Lord, let me bring You, and You alone, glory in what I do. When I become prideful in my own works, convict me and let my lips bring “a sacrifice of praise that acknowledge your name” so that I may please You (Heb 13:15–16).

Matthew 5:14–16, “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they set it on a lampstand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

DAY 22 – NOT NEGLECTING TO MEET TOGETHER

HEBREWS 10:24–25

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.

Recently I read a quote regarding fellowship that would eventually come into regular use in my vocabulary. Here is the quote: "True Christian fellowship is 'the Jesus in you meeting the Jesus in me!'" Wow! Did you get that? We are Christians (a.k.a. little Christs), and when we meet each other, the Jesus in you smiles at the Jesus in me.

That's why coming to church each Sunday and Wednesday is so important. Our individual faith becomes more effective and strengthened when we gain biblical knowledge of every good thing that is in the believer for Christ's sake. Meeting together is a tool to encourage believers to continue in acts of righteousness. Those who receive true salvation begin to have true fellowship with one another. In fact, this fellowship (or *koinonia* in the Greek) is really just "the Jesus in you meeting the Jesus in me!"

Questions to consider: Is coming to church a delight or a duty? Do you see the need for true fellowship with one another? What can you do to stir another believer to love and good works?

Prayer Prompts:

- Lord, let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together.
- Lord, remind us of the importance of believer's fellowshiping together and encouraging one another to love and to good works.
- Father, encourage me to encourage others. Remind me of this verse as I walk the hallways and serve in the body.

1 Thessalonians 5:11, "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."

DAY 23 – GOD'S CHURCH AT WORK

ROMANS 12:4–9 - For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

Each one of us have been placed by Christ into His body of believers where He is the head of the body. The beauty of the church is revealed when all believers seek to glorify God by putting Christ first in all aspects of their lives. This unity is the unity that is distinct from the rest of the world. The church is a unified whole with our identity in Christ (one body), yet we are distinct within that one body (individual members). As Paul points out in this passage, it is by God's grace, not by anything we have done, that all believers have been given spiritual gifts to edify the church. Spiritual gifts are special skills and abilities God gives His people to accomplish the work of His church. God has given us diversity within our spiritual giftedness to use for His glory. In the body of Christ there is unity but not uniformity and that should be celebrated! Our almighty God is a God of purpose, and there is purpose behind our differences. The local church functions best when its members, with different spiritual gifts, exercise those gifts in a way that honors Christ.

God's grace extended to us should produce action within us for His church.

Questions to consider: Do you know what your spiritual gifts are? Read Romans 12:6–8, 1 Corinthians 12:4–11 and 1 Corinthians 12:28. Feel free to talk with a pastor to learn more.

Prayer Prompts:

- Lord, thank You for Your grace and mercy in our lives. We praise You for enabling Your body with spiritual giftedness and diversity.
- We pray that Your church, Richland Creek, would be full of members of ONE body, where each believer utilizes their spiritual gifts given to them by Your grace, to edify the church.

Ephesians 4:12, "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,"

DAY 24 – GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES

MATTHEW 28:18–20 - And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

God gave Jesus full authority over heaven and earth. With that authority, the last words Jesus left the disciples with was to GO and make disciples in all nations through the good news of the gospel! Jesus was with them physically until His ascension into heaven, then with them spiritually through the Holy Spirit. Just imagine being one of the disciples for a moment. Not only did they have the awe-struck wonder of seeing Jesus after His resurrection, but they also had the blessing of hearing more instruction from Him one last time!

This command is not a command to just merely make decisions or converts, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, to make disciples of Jesus. The church body plays a great role in honoring this command through our obedience in praying, giving, and going as part of God's will for the church.

Not all believers are called to cross cultural missions but all believers are called to live on mission. This can even occur in your own neighborhood, school, job, etc! God desires our obedience in making His name known both here and to the nations. He is worthy of praise, honor, and glory among all the peoples! This is the mission of the church.

Questions to consider: Are you obedient to God's command in being a disciple who makes disciples? If you are unsure of what that looks like, please talk to a pastor.

Prayer Prompts:

- Lord, thank You for Your timeless Word and Your instruction to be disciples who make disciples. We pray that this is what others will see in the body of Richland Creek as obedient followers of Your command.
- We pray for countless opportunities where Your name will be made known both here and to the nations through this body of believers.

John 14:15, "If you love Me, you will keep my commandments."

DAY 25 – PROCLAIM THE EXCELLENCIES

1 PETER 2:9–10 - But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

What a glorious description of the church - our church! We are chosen, royal priests, holy, God's own possession. This is our collective identity as the people of God, but this identity is set against the backdrop of who we once were. Before Christ, we were in darkness, without an identity, without mercy. We have a great story to tell about the great God who brought us into light, made us a people and has mercy upon us. This is our purpose as a church - that we would proclaim the excellencies of our Savior Jesus Christ. We must preach, teach, tell, write, and sing this story over and over. Let us pray that as a church we never stop declaring the glory of Jesus Christ to each other and to the world.

Questions to consider: How can you help our church proclaim the excellencies of God? Do you talk about what Jesus has done in your life?

Prayer Prompts:

- Using today's passage as a guide, praise God for what He has done in your life and who He has made us to be as the church.
- Pray that both individually and corporately we would be faithful to the mission of telling others about Christ.

Psalm 96:2–3, "Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!"

DAY 26 – ONE GOD, ONE LORD, ONE SPIRIT, ONE CHURCH

EPHESIANS 4:1–3 - I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Our hurried culture creates urgencies. For example, completing tasks as soon as possible. Yet, in rushing to complete tasks, we may alienate ourselves. If you want a task complete, do it yourself. We hope that peace will follow these completions, but it never comes or never lasts, for these urgent completions are focused only on temporal tasks.

In Ephesians, Paul gives Christians an urgency with eternal value—that is, the unity of the church. Unlike our worldly efforts to complete tasks on our own, this urgency cannot be satisfied when Christians are alienated from one another. Every Christian is called to model Christ in his or her own life, but the model does not stop there. Every Christian is called to model the unity found in our God within the church. This is what Paul calls for in Ephesians 4: One God, one Lord, one Spirit.

With the same God, Lord, and Spirit, unity ought to be natural, easy. However, this unity is one that is fought for and won by the church as a whole. A Christian cannot choose alienation and be united to the church. The battle for unity is won through humility, love, patience, and walking through hardships together. When Christians are eager to make this an urgency, the Spirit will bring peace.

Questions to Consider: How often do you place the completion of temporal tasks over eternal tasks? Do you fight for unity within our church or are you content to alienate yourself?

Prayer Prompts:

- Is there anyone in our church with whom you need to seek unity? Be eager to reconcile.
- Read and pray through 1 Corinthians 13, knowing that Paul is referring to the church, not an individual.

1 Peter 3:8–9, “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.”

DAY 27 – THE MIND OF CHRIST

1 COR 2:14–16 - The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

New beginnings can be a wonderful thing. Many people seriously evaluate home organization skills, homeschooling methods, business practices, fire escape plans, and even relationships, etc. To be sure, those items that affect daily life do need some attention. But we often find our worth and value in them. Identity (or who we are) is easily tied to what we do, what we own, people we love (or who loves us), and even where we live.

Not so with the believer. Our identity is in Christ. That means that our worth, value, purpose and even citizenship is in Christ. As believers, we are to no longer find our identity in worldly things. God desires that we know who we are—In Him. And the way that I know who we are and know Christ Himself is to study His Word more.

You can know the mind of Christ. Not only that, 1 Corinthians 2:16 says that "you have the mind of Christ." We as the church of the living God of the universe have the mind of Christ. How can that be? It can be because you have the Bible; you have the mind of Christ revealed to you in the form of Scripture. Therefore, jump in and read it daily. Meditate on it. Don't be distracted by daily pressures of life. Make time to put Christ first in your day.

Questions to consider: Do you realize you can know the mind of Christ by continually reading His Word?

Prayer Prompts:

- Ask the Lord to deliver you from distraction.
- Ask the Lord to help you set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth (Col 3:2).

Psalm 19:14, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord my strength and my redeemer."

DAY 28 – BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO DWELL IN YOUR HOUSE

PSALM 84:1–4 - How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise!

Psalm 84, often referred to as a Pilgrim Psalm, finds extraordinary delight in worshipping God. While the Psalmist longs for and journeys to the place of worship, it is God who is the object of his joy. It is the living God (v. 2) where the Psalmist finds his joy, strength and blessing.

Longing for God Himself, the author desires not just to be in "church" but also to be in the very presence of God. While many must be coaxed to church, here the writer is literally begging to be near God—to have a relationship with God. This intensity shines through again when he jealously points to the little birds who have built their homes right next to the place of worship—yes, even the very altar of God. As Christians, we are to be at home in Christ and His church. The author again stresses his passion by declaring, "My King and my God." He is consumed by a desire to worship in God's presence. Verse 4 declares that those who are in God's house will continually praise Him.

Questions to consider: New Testament saints are able to boldly approach God because of the work of Jesus on the cross, worshipping daily right where we find ourselves (Heb 4:14–16). Do you cultivate a deep desire to daily be in God's presence? If you find your passion for praising God to be dwindling, renew that desire by daily spending time in His Word. Are you relying on God's strength to make it through your daily life?

Prayer Prompts:

- Ask God for a heart that cries out to worship.
- Petition God to create in you a desire to read and study God's Word and to "wait on the Lord" to "renew your strength" (Isaiah 40:31).

James 4:8, "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."

DAY 29 – SERVE ONE ANOTHER THAT GOD MAY BE GLORIFIED

1 PETER 4:10–11 - As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

In these verses two important words need clarification: gift and service. Gift is an ability to do something. Abilities vary from person to person as well as the level of abilities. Serve means to aid, help, supply, or provide for others. Peter is explaining here that we, the members of God's church, all have an ability to help, supply or provide for the needs and building up of others in the church.

Why is this so important for our church? To strengthen, encourage, and build up other members of the body. In this way, the church as a whole will be positioned to effectively carry out its mission of reaching, teaching, and discipling more people to the glory of God.

Don't know your gifts? Serve in a variety of places and roles and see what you are good at, what you're affirmed at, and if opportunities exist in this area. If all three line up, you've found your gift.

Questions to consider: What are you doing to strengthen and encourage fellow believers in our church? What are your spiritual gifts? What can you do this week to discover and use your spiritual gifts?

Prayer Prompts:

- Read and pray over 1 Corinthians 12.
- Ask God for opportunities to serve in multiple areas of the church to discover your gifting.

1 Corinthians 12:7, "To each has been given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

DAY 30 – SALT & LIGHT

MATTHEW 5:13–16 - You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Jesus frequently uses everyday objects as a means of teaching important truths about people, the world and God's kingdom. Salt and light serve as metaphors for what God's people are to be and do in a decaying and dark world. Salt purifies and light illuminates. So it is to be with us. We, the body of believers, are to serve as ministers of the Gospel, proclaiming it to those who do not know Christ as Savior.

Friends, the church has work to do. Being people of love, grace and truth, we labor to "purify" a world of increasing corruption and evil. Similarly, as we shine the righteousness of Christ to the world, we draw unbelievers to God. Our lives in word and deed are to be lived not to draw people to ourselves but to point them to our heavenly Father. Simply stated, God has chosen us, His church, to be stewards of His good news.

Questions to consider: Does your "light" shine in your home, workplace or neighborhood? What can you do to be salt and light today? What hinders you from being salt and light to those around you?

Prayer Prompts:

- Father, give me eyes to see everyday opportunities to be salt and light to those around me.
- Pray for God to place someone in your path today with whom you can share God's truth.
- Father, cultivate an obedient heart within me that I may obey Your commands to proclaim Your Gospel and make disciples.

Psalm 96:3, "Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!"

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