

How to Use this Prayer Guide

Remember ring and run? Usually a group of middle or high school teens with too much time on their hands would approach a house after dark. One daring teen would approach the front door, ring the doorbell and then the whole group would run away before the door opened. Hence the phrase “ring and run.”

Prayer can be just like ring and run. We struggle knowing what to say and how to stay attentive. We tire and bore of our repetitiveness. We are carried along by false illusions of self-reliance. We fixate on praying and not on the One to whom we pray. We ring God’s door yet fail to linger long enough to see and experience the God of peace, joy and hope. Given all these difficulties we hurriedly enter into prayer and then hurriedly exit out of prayer. Prayer is hard.

Everyone struggles with prayer. Yet learning to pray is worth all our time, effort and attention. We must cultivate a continuing daily prayer habit that incorporates praising God for who He is, confessing sin in our life, thanking Him for His blessings, and humbly petitioning for His provision. Indeed, prayer is as vital to our spiritual life with God as oxygen is to our physical life.

The purpose of this devotional is to learn how to pray and then become men and women of prayer. We want to be

Defined by the **Word**, **Devoted** to **Prayer**
and **Dependent** on the **Holy Spirit**.

Only then can we thrive in our relationship with God and be who we are called to be. Come join us as we learn together how to pray.

DAY 1 – What is a disciple of Christ?

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.” Matthew 16:24-25

The word disciple means “follower,” or in the biblical context of Christianity, “follower of Christ.” This was both spiritually and physically true for disciples when Jesus walked the earth. For us today it is a spiritual truth, but one that should alter every aspect of our physical existence. The above verses from Matthew 16:24-25 get at the heart of what being a follower of Christ is all about. In fact, this concept is so fundamental to discipleship that it is also found, in the other Gospels (Mark 8:34-35; Luke 9:23-24) and a variation of the same concept in John 12:25-26.

Trusting in Christ as Savior requires a denial of self, and so does following Him with our lives. The phrase “come after me” has the connotation of closeness or intimacy with Christ. The taking up of our own cross speaks of sacrifice and service. Spurgeon states this very well in his commentary: “As our Lord, to fulfill His destiny, must sacrifice Himself, so also must every one who would be His follower.” We are to love God and love others, serving Him first and others second rather than ourselves.

Losing our lives for His sake is an intentional, ongoing process. This is often referred to as “dying to self.” Truly focusing on Christ and eternity brings unity and life, while focusing on temporal things, desiring to accumulate and hold on to what the world has to offer, brings separation and death. John 8:31-32 states “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’” Note the words “**believed**” and “**abide**.” To be a disciple of Christ requires faith; also faith is required for us to live according to His Word. The biblical lifestyle of discipleship is purposeful, continual, and transformational. Simply put, a disciple of Christ is who you are, based on what you know, leading to what you do.

Questions to consider:

Am I a follower of Christ? How can I grow closer to God? Are there worldly things I need to let go of in order to be a disciple?

Prayer Prompts:

- That I identify as a disciple, or follower, of Jesus Christ.
- That I understand that discipleship is an intentional, ongoing process.
- That I will develop a regular habit growing in all areas of discipleship in my life.

DAY 2 – The Great Commandment: Love God, Love Others

Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God..."
Mark 12:38-34

The above passage contains what is often called "The Great Commandment." Jesus tells us to love God and love others. In this commandment, all of the Ten Commandments are represented see Exodus 20:1-17: "Love God" covers Commandments 1-4; "Love Others" encompasses Commandments 5-10. These two commands will also serve as the basis for the eight goals of discipleship at Richland Creek. Four of these goals focus on how we **Love God...** In His Word; In Prayer; In Our Witness; In Our Worship and the other four focus on how we **Love Others...** Through Church Community; Through Our Ministry; Through Our Generosity; While On Mission. Through the following eight pages we will examine each of these goals with an eye towards identifying ourselves, understanding the biblical purpose, and developing a plan of application in each and every area. There are Bible verses for each, as well as key questions to ask yourself and prayer prompts.

The response of Jesus in verse 34 indicates the keystone purpose of The Great Commandment. To be closer to Him and His kingdom, we must follow Him. In order to follow Him we must identify as disciples, understand His Word, and diligently develop habits that lead to spiritual growth. To be disciples we must love God and love others.

Questions to consider:

Do I love God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength? Do I love my neighbors as myself?

Prayer Prompts:

- That I identify as a disciple of Jesus Christ through faith and understand God's Word as the source of truth in my life.
- That I will develop habits that aid in my spiritual growth and reveal in me any worldly hindrances to my spiritual growth.

DAY 3 – Love God...In His Word

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Through our ongoing assessment process, we keep coming back to the truth of being defined by the Word. The Bible is God’s heartfelt message to us. It is what He wants us to know about Him and how He wants us to live for Him. It serves both as a cautionary tale and as a hopeful promise for each of us. The entire narrative of Scripture focuses on God’s love for us, our disobedience to Him, His promised rescue through His Son Jesus Christ, and His plan for us as His followers.

Studying God’s Word is how we get to know Him better. We grow closer to Him as we read, study, and apply His truth in our lives. As disciples, and as a church family, our lives must be defined by His Word. Our leadership team is committed to working toward defining biblically what a growing disciple is at Richland Creek, teaching who a disciple should be, what should they know, and what they should do. Our assessment process has identified that this is something we can, and should, do better.

We encourage you to pray for your own personal discipleship, as well as the corporate discipleship within our church family. Also, please pray for all in church leadership as we work to ensure our discipleship process is defined by the Word.

Questions to consider:

Is my life defined by God’s Word? How can our church improve our discipleship process? How is studying God’s Word important to my discipleship?

Prayer Prompts:

- That I identify I am under the authority of God’s Word in every area of my life.
- That I understand that to know God’s Word fully, I need to study it carefully and obey it rigorously.
- That I will develop a regular habit of studying God’s Word on my own and with other believers.
- That we would teach the Bible in our homes, leading our families well in truth and love.
- That our church would continually be defined by His Word.
- That our church leadership team would biblically define and teach what a growing disciple at Richland Creek should be, know, and do.
- Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.

DAY 4 – Love God...In Prayer

*“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”
Philippians 4:6-7*

Identifying the need to be devoted to prayer has been crucial in our ongoing assessment process. Prayer is how we praise God in thankfulness, turn to Him in repentance, and ask Him in anticipation. It is humbling our own thoughts and will to align with His. It is a continuous circular conversation with our heavenly Father, through faith in the Son, and facilitated by the Spirit.

Prayer is not merely something we do, but an outpouring of who we are in Christ. It demonstrates our utter dependence upon God. An active prayer life is something to be desired, but also something desperately needed. Prayer is our personal communication with God, as well as our corporate voice of unity in Him.

It has been an exciting season in the prayer life of Richland Creek with the monthly prayer services and prayer guides. The Spirit is moving and has already accomplished much in this early stage. We look forward with you all in great anticipation to our next steps and beyond as we grow into a church family truly and completely devoted to prayer.

Questions to consider:

Am I devoted to prayer? How can I pray for our church family, church leadership, and our community? How is prayer important to my discipleship?

Prayer Prompts:

- That I identify as a child of God who needs to pray, privately and alongside others.
- That I understand that as I pray, I am not changing God’s mind about circumstances, but allowing Him to align our thoughts with His.
- That I will develop a regular private prayer habit that incorporates praising God for who He is, repenting of sin, giving thanks for His blessings, and humble asking for His provision.
- That our families would pray together regularly.
- That as a church we would be devoted to prayer, continuing to create a proactive vs. reactive corporate prayer strategy.
- Read Colossians 4:2.

DAY 5 – Palm Sunday

“The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: ‘Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel!’” John 12:12-13

We often refer to Jesus coming to Jerusalem before His death as “The Triumphal Entry.” Indeed it was a triumphant scene as people laid their outer garments and palm branches in the road, a custom reserved for royalty. They rightly called Jesus Lord and King. They shouted “Hosanna,” which can be translated “save us now.” But what kind of salvation were they asking for and expecting?

Most were desperately hoping for the heir to David’s throne to rule and reign right then and there to conquer, or at least provide deliverance from the Roman Empire. Yes, Jesus did conquer and deliver, but from much greater oppressors than Rome. Through His sinless life and death on the cross, Jesus conquered death for all who would trust in Him. Through His resurrection from the tomb, Jesus provided deliverance from death for all who would trust in Him. Jesus was and is the Messiah promised to Israel and the world.

Jesus would go on to cleanse the temple (Matthew 21; Mark 11; Luke 19), preparing for the new covenant through His death, burial, and resurrection. This season is an incredible opportunity to examine ourselves as temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), focusing on what Jesus did for each and all of us. Salvation from sin and eternal life in heaven are promised to all who trust in Jesus Christ. He is our Lord and King!

Questions to consider:

Who is Jesus to me? Are there things in my life that need to be cleansed by Him? How am I preparing for His return?

Prayer Prompts:

- That I identify Jesus as Lord and King through faith in Him.
- That I understand God’s plan of salvation through faith in the sinless life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.
- That I will develop a plan to live as His “temple” and prepare my heart for His return.

“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?”

1 Corinthians 6:19

DAY 6 – Love God...In Our Witness

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8

When someone places their faith in Christ, the most amazing exchange occurs. Christ takes their sins, putting them on Himself having died on the cross as suitable payment for the judgment they deserve. He also gives His righteousness in the person of the Holy Spirit, helping believers live for Him. This is true for all Christians, whether or not they are gifted as evangelists.

We are all not only capable, but also commanded, to give witness of Jesus and how He transformed our lives. Of course, we could all benefit from the help of others who have been walking with Christ longer than we have. They probably know more Scripture than we do. They likely have shared the gospel more than we have. They may also have shared their personal testimony more often.

As disciples of Christ we are commanded to help make other disciples (Matthew 28:19-20). Our leadership team is working towards a strategy that will equip and encourage each of us to be prepared at any time to share the gospel and our testimonies. God is glorified when we share the gospel and tell how Christ has transformed our lives. Through His Word and our witness other lives can be transformed as disciples of Christ.

Questions to consider:

Do I know how to share the gospel and my testimony of faith? How can I help equip and encourage others in evangelism? How is my witness important to my discipleship?

Prayer Prompts:

- That I identify evangelism as a command of Scripture, both of the church corporately and of each believer personally.
- That I understand the Good News of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.
- That I will develop a clear and simple gospel outline and personal testimony that can be shared at any time.
- That I will help encourage, equip, and enlist others in evangelism.
- That I will pray for lost people I know regularly and fervently (pray for them by name).
- That our leadership team would develop and implement a systemic strategy to engage the congregation in personal evangelism.
- Read 1 Peter 3:15.

DAY 7 – Love God...In Our Worship

“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4:23-24

As stated above in John 4:23-24, we should seek to be true worshipers. We can worship God as His children saved by the work of Jesus and, filled with the Holy Spirit. We can worship God as His followers in the truth He reveals through His Word. Worship is our response to a holy, loving, just, merciful, and faithful Father. It is the overflow of a grateful heart, forever thankful for the grace given through Christ.

It can be hard to define worship, since everything we do as Christians should be done to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). It is our hearts and minds that determine and define worship for each of us. An inwardly or improperly focused heart and mind can lead to idol worship or misguided worship. We also must resist the cultural norm of measuring ourselves and each other based solely on works. Remember, a disciple of Christ is who we are and not what we do. Our works are the result, not the cause, of lives transformed by Christ.

When we are right with God through faith in Christ, we are able to glorify Him with our lives. We can glorify Him at home, work, school, church, the athletic field, or wherever else we are. God has created us to worship Him, and our mission is to bring Him glory. As a church, we can enthusiastically embrace this mission together.

Questions to consider:

Is God the highest priority in my life? How can I glorify God with my life? How is worship important to my discipleship?

Prayer Prompts:

- That I identify the Triune God as the highest priority of my life.
- That I understand that everything I do should be an act of worship in response to God’s love for us and an expression of our love for Him.
- That I will develop a regular habit of worship, through private devotion and in church gatherings.
- That I will worship in spirit and in truth.
- That I will embrace my faith as who I am rather than what I do.
- That our leadership would identify a dedicated full time Worship Pastor to bring before the congregation.
- Read 1 Corinthians 10:31.

DAY 8 – Love Others..Through Church Community

“...that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” 1 John 1:3

God not only created us to have a relationship with Him, but also with one another. In this season of “social distancing” the value of community and fellowship with each other are more apparent than ever. To be clear, the context here is not merely hanging out or passively observing others as they participate. We are talking about interaction designed to intentionally build each other up, hold each other accountable, and produce holiness.

Before we can consider what that kind of interaction looks like, we must first think about the answer to this question: “Why would we do it?” As Christians we are compelled by the grace and love shown to us by Jesus to reach out and share these with others. Jesus fostered community focused on God’s mission throughout the Gospels. Whether He was with one disciple or many thousands, the community was always about the mission.

We see this concept carried on by the early church as recorded in Acts, as well as in many of the Epistles. With an understanding of “why” we can then clearly see that each of us and all of us are the “who.” Now it is time for us to move toward the “what” and “how” questions, focusing on God’s mission as we love one another through church community and fellowship.

Questions to consider:

Do I identify as a member of the body of Christ and our church? How can I love others through church community? How is church community important to my discipleship?

Prayer Prompts:

- That I identify as a member of the covenant body of Christ, that is, the church.
- That I understand the biblical commands for loving one another and their implications for my life.
- That I will develop a regular habit of meeting with other believers for the specific purpose of mutual building up in the faith and accountability in spiritual growth.
- That our church community would grow in quality, leading to quantity.
- That I will embrace my role within our church family, however God directs.
- That our leadership would intentionally foster an environment of loving care for our church family.
- Read Acts 2:42.

DAY 9 – Love Others..Through Our Ministry

“Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.” 2 Corinthians 5:18

John 13:1-17 contains one of the greatest examples of ministry in all of Scripture. Here we read that Jesus loved the Apostles by washing their feet. This is an incredible act of service as this was an undesirable, even disgusting, task. Feet tend to be stinky to begin with, plus there would have been the added filth of wearing sandals in a desert climate. It is no wonder that Peter was surprised by what Jesus did, even doing his best to try to stop Him.

Verses 14-15 tell us plainly why Jesus did this: “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.” Jesus showed love in a very practical, clear, and memorable way to the Apostles. He gave them an example to follow, keeping the focus on God’s mission.

As we follow God’s mission individually and as a church, we strive to not only follow Christ’s example of mercy, love, forgiveness, but also Christ’s example of service. When we truly love God, we can also truly love one another. Christ sacrificed everything for us and we glorify Him when we sacrifice for each other through ministry.

Questions to consider:

Do I identify as a member of the body of Christ and our church? How can I love others through church community? How is ministry important to my discipleship?

Prayer Prompts:

- That I identify as a servant, following in the footsteps of our Lord.
- That I understand my own spiritual gift(s) and my indispensable role as part of the body of Christ.
- That I will develop a regular habit of serving in church ministries, employing my spiritual gift(s) for the good of others, and caring for fellow believers.
- That I will love others by ministering to them.
- That all ministry areas at Richland Creek would align with God’s mission.
- Pray for all Creek Pastors, Elders, Deacons, staff, ministry area leaders, and servant teams.
- Read Romans 12:10-11.

DAY 10 – Good Friday

“And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last. Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.” Mark 15:37-38

On Sunday many thousands were shouting “Hosanna” as Jesus entered Jerusalem. And yet, just a few days later some of the same people were shouting “Crucify Him!” Jesus was convicted and sentenced to death even though He was innocent of any crime and spotless from sin. It can seem heartbreaking to consider the excruciating pain and humiliation our Savior endured. But we must remember that He endured it for us.

Under the High Priest system that God’s people followed, only the High Priest had direct access to God in the “Holy of Holies” within the temple. The High Priest would make yearly atonement for the sins of Israel through animal sacrifice. There would often be a rope tied to one the High Priest’s feet in case he was struck dead in God’s presence due to unconfessed sin and had to be dragged out. A veil roughly 45-60 feet high and 4 inches thick served as a final barrier to the Holy of Holies.

It is of utmost significance that this thick and heavy veil, separating people and God, was torn from top to bottom when Jesus died. Christ’s blood provided the eternal atonement for the sins of humanity. There is no need for further sacrifice as His blood is sufficient. Jesus reconciled humanity back to God, restoring our broken relationship. There is no need for any other High Priest as Jesus gives us direct access to God. As we celebrate Good Friday, let us dwell on Jesus as both sacrifice and High Priest.

Questions to consider:

What does Good Friday mean to me as a disciple of Christ? Are there things in my life that keep me from growing closer to Him? How do I handle my sin before a holy God?

Prayer Prompts:

- That I identify Jesus as both sacrifice and High Priest.
- That I understand God’s plan of salvation through faith in the sinless life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.
- That I will develop a plan to grow closer to Him, regularly repenting of sin.
- Read John 19:28-30.

DAY 11 – Love Others...Through Our Generosity

“So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” 2 Corinthians 9:7

Mark 10:17-22 contains an interesting encounter between Jesus and a rich young ruler. To paraphrase the account, the ruler asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Christ’s response was to keep the commandments, which the ruler said he had done from an early age. Jesus then instructed him to sell what he had and give the proceeds to the poor, and then come follow Him. The ruler did not abide Christ’s words, but instead went away saddened.

Jesus knew this man had great earthly possessions and was not willing to let go and “take up the cross” (verse 21). This man had treasures on earth, but not in heaven. He was about accumulating resources for himself rather than the mission of God. His heart was focused on the material rather than the eternal.

We are merely stewards of the resources God has entrusted to us. He grants us this stewardship in order to bring glory to Himself. Our hearts and minds must remain focused on the Provider rather than on the provision. Generosity is an outpouring of our love for others because of the love God poured out for us. Whether by using our time, talents, or treasures we show love to others by sacrificially giving of these for their benefit.

Questions to consider:

Do I identify as a steward of all that God has entrusted to me? How can I love others through my generosity? How is generosity important to my discipleship?

Prayer Prompts:

- That I identify as a steward, and never an owner, of my time, talent and treasure.
- That I understand biblical giving is both a command and a privilege, and should be done joyfully.
- That I will develop a regular habit of financial giving, to my church first and also to God’s kingdom agenda.
- That I will love others through my generosity.
- That through our generosity, the church budget would grow to provide greater kingdom impact.
- That our church leadership would operate with humility, integrity, and transparency regarding God’s resources.
- Read Mark 10:21.

DAY 12 – Resurrection Sunday: Easter

“He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.’ And they remembered His words.”
Luke 24:6-8

After Jesus died on the cross, some of His disciples took and buried His body in a tomb. If this was an ordinary man, simply a prophet or gifted teacher, the story would end there in the tomb. But we know that Jesus was no ordinary man. When Jesus rose from the tomb on that Sunday morning, He proved that He is indeed God’s Son and the promised Savior. That Sunday morning the angels reminded the women at the tomb of what Jesus had previously said about His mission, and they remembered.

Later in this same chapter, we read about two disciples on the road to Emmaus talking about the resurrection. The risen Lord joins them, but they do not recognize Him. They expressed discouragement as they hoped Jesus of Nazareth would be the redeemer of Israel, but now He was dead. Then Jesus opened the Scriptures “And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27). Jesus again reminded His followers of His mission.

Jesus then revealed Himself to these two disciples before vanishing. They were astonished, and they burned inside for more. As disciples, we too should hunger for His Word and even burn for closeness with Him. Our Lord is alive, ever present and active in our lives. He longs for us to know and follow Him with all we are and all we have. Like with the women at the tomb and the Emmaus road disciples, His Word reminds us of who He is, how He loves, and why He died and rose for us.

Questions to consider:

What does Easter Sunday mean to me as a disciple of Christ? Are there things in my life that draw my focus away from Him during this season? How does His Word remind me of who He is, how He loves, and why He died and rose for me?

Prayer Prompts:

- That I identify Jesus as the risen Lord.
- That I understand God’s plan of salvation through faith in the sinless life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.
- That I will develop a plan to remember all He has done for me as recorded in His Word.
- Read Luke 24:32.

DAY 13 – Love Others...While On Mission

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.” Matthew 28:19-20

The above passage is famously known as “The Great Commission.” Before His ascension into heaven, Jesus gave His disciples their marching orders. It is exciting to see this in action in our Sunday morning series in Acts. The clarity and simplicity of this command underpin the enormity and importance of the task. God’s desire is that all people would follow Him as disciples.

Discipleship is not incumbent upon race, geography, language, age, culture, wealth, or anything other than faith in Christ. The gospel is the gospel no matter what, and salvation is equally offered to all. Even as Christians it is extremely difficult for us to see the rest of the world the way God does, though it is impossible for us to do so without Christ.

We can show God’s love to others by intentionally and sacrificially engaging our communities and the world with the gospel. God’s mission will always be for all people.

Questions to consider:

Do I identify my responsibility to make disciples among the nations? How can I be involved in our missions efforts at Richland Creek? How is being on mission important to my discipleship?

Prayer Prompts:

- That I identify my responsibility as a church member to make disciples among all nations.
- That I understand God’s heart is for all peoples to worship Him, from every tribe, tongue, and nation.
- That I will develop a plan to be involved in the church’s cross-cultural mission efforts by praying, giving, and going to support this mission.
- That I will pray for our missionaries and their families.
- That I will pray for our upcoming mission trips.
- That our church leadership would prayerfully and continually seek God’s direction in mission partnerships, planning, and provision.
- Read Luke 10:2.

DAY 14 – What Love is...

*“By this all men will know that you are my disciples that you Love one another.”
John 13:35*

Jesus said that one way the lost world will know if we are truly His disciples, His real followers, is how we show love toward each other. This love isn't based on anything to do with us -- not our emotions, not our preferences, not our circumstances. It is based on the Gospel. Our example, to love one another, is the example of God Himself who gave us His Son that we would be saved from sin and death. (John 3:16, Romans 5:8) Based on this greatest of all examples, we are compelled to truly, biblically, love one another.

As we, as a church, go through this transition, we must prepare ourselves to move forward in the process of finding the lead pastor God has prepared for Richland Creek Community Church. First, we must examine ourselves and remove anything that doesn't adhere to the Word of God, and we must put on what the Word tells us to obey. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we are called to walk in love and unity.

This month we will apply the Word to ourselves in prayer and allow God to transform us in the image of His Son. This is of utmost importance; we must be serious in our repentance and obedience as we move forward as the church of God in Wake Forest, NC.

Questions to consider:

Do I love others based on who they are and how they treat me, or do I love others based on who Christ is and what He has done for me?

Prayer Prompts:

- God, remind me again how much you love me. Show me my life of sin and how You saved me through the sinless life, atoning death, and powerful Resurrection of your Son.
- Open my eyes, ears, and heart to the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that I would understand true biblical love, that I may love others in such a way that lost people would ask for the same love.

DAY 15 – Love is Patient

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love is patient.

Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, teaches us what love means and how important it is. As you read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, you see the priority of love in context to serving. No matter how great your gifting, no matter how great your service to the Lord or each other, without love it means nothing.

As we walk through this transition and move in the direction of searching for the new lead pastor God has prepared for us, let us prepare ourselves by making love a priority. In verse 4, we learn **love is patient**. The word patient means long-suffering. It is a term used to describe people who allow themselves to be repeatedly inconvenienced and yet not become angry.

The world teaches us to become angry at every offense no matter how small; God’s Word teaches us as brothers and sisters in Christ to be patient, to allow ourselves to be inconvenienced by our brothers and sisters over and over, not reacting with harsh words or actions, but instead loving patience. When any change occurs, there are always things that are frustrating. People will act like people. But instead of reacting like the world does, we will act in love with patience.

Questions to consider:

With whom have you been harsh?

To whom should you have shown patience?

Prayer prompts:

- Pray God reveals to you someone you need to show patience toward.
- Pray God reveals to you someone who has been patient toward you, and that you are moved to thank them.

DAY 16 – Love is Kind

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love is kind.

Love is kind. While **patience** takes harsh words and actions from others without anger or retaliation, to be **kind** is to be useful, serving and gracious. John McArthur calls it “active goodwill.”

“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” Ephesians 4:32

Kindness is not an emotional word but an action word. When we show kindness, we don't wish someone to be better, but we actively work for them to be better. It's our love for others that causes us to reach out to them and discover what they need, then fill that need so that they may be better. This is without reward to ourselves, not for our good but solely for them. Again, as always, God is the perfect example.

“But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Titus 3:4-7

Questions to consider:

To whom can I be kind today, and this week?

Prayer prompt:

- God, fill me with the desire to be kind, not in thought, but in deed so I may follow your example.

DAY 17 – Love is not Jealous

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love is not jealous.

Here, Paul starts the first of eight things love “isn’t.” Love and jealousy cannot coexist in people. Jealousy shows itself in us in two ways. The first is that we wished we had what others have. Instead of rejoicing in their blessings, we complain that it’s not us. The other is to desire that others would stop receiving the blessings of God all together. We see a brother or sister in Christ being noticed for their giftedness or sacrifice, and instead of thanking God for His gifting and thanking them for their service, we instead talk behind their back, or worse, wish they had not come here.

Like the seven things that follow in this chapter of 1 Corinthians, jealousy has no place at Richland Creek Community Church. It has no place in the Christian’s life.

Questions to consider:

When have I acted in jealousy?

Is there anyone I have been jealous of?

Prayer Prompts:

- God, expose any jealousy in my life.
- God, may your Holy Spirit prompt me through Your Word to ask forgiveness of anyone of whom I have been jealous.

DAY 18 – Love does not Brag

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love does not brag.

Only yesterday we learned that love is not jealous. Yet, when we brag of our successes, we tempt others to be jealous of us. When we brag, we want others to want what we have achieved, accomplished, or possess. The bragger wants attention, and ultimately, the praise of others. God knows all of your sacrifices and successes, because He orchestrated them all. God deserves the praise, no one else. The bragger wants to be lifted up. Love does not desire to be lifted up, but to lift others up, not to be served, but to serve.

Therefore, Paul says: *“May it be that I would never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.” Galatians 6:14*

We have no boasting or bragging rights. All Glory, All Honor, All Praise is for the Lord. Love does not cause our brothers and sisters to stumble but instead turns all our accomplishments toward the glory of God where the focus of His children should be.

Question to consider:

Where have you been bragging in your life?

Prayer prompt:

- God, show me how I can take every accomplishment, every gift, every success and focus all the praise and honor toward You. Show me how to be crucified to this world.

DAY 19 – Love is not Arrogant

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love is not arrogant.

To be arrogant is to be proud, puffed up, to see yourself better than others. Love cannot act in pride. Paul speaks to the church at Corinth about their arrogance:

“Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” 1 Corinthians 4:6-7

The church at Corinth felt superior to others because they had been taught by Paul, or by Apollos, or felt pride that someone like Paul had baptized them. Paul reminds them that it is through God that all good things come. He also reminds them that, no one is superior and as brothers and sisters in Christ we are equal in all things. Remember that we need the mind of Christ:

“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Philippians 2:5-7

Question to consider:

Do you see yourself as better than anyone else?

Prayer prompt:

- God, show me where my pride needs to die so that I may love others like You love me.

DAY 20 – Love is not Rude

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love does not act unbecomingly.

To act unbecomingly is to be rude, non-caring of the feelings of others. At first it may not sound as harsh as bragging or arrogance, but at its core it is. To be rude, to be non-caring are the actions of someone who doesn't regard other people. Others don't matter - they are just the background of your life.

Who are we rude to? The men volunteering in our parking lots on Sunday? The childcare worker in the lower level where you drop off your kids? Why are they less than human to you? Why don't you see them as people? Were you in a rush, in a hurry because you were late? Did you feel as though they should be serving you better? Have they become tools to use or are they people that Christ died for? To be rude is to be unloving.

Jesus had time for all, regard for all. There were no invisible people to Jesus. His love was equal for all.

Questions to consider:

Who was the last person you were rude to?

Who are the invisible people in your life?

Prayer prompt:

- God, let me see people not like tools to get things that I need done, but instead as brothers and sisters You loved so much that You sent Your Son to die for them. Their value is not in what they do for me, but in how much You paid for them -- everything.

DAY 21 – Love is not Selfish

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

I Corinthians 13:4-7

Love does not seek its own.

We do not love only to receive gain. Love isn't selfish. It gives not to receive, but for the act of giving itself. We are not taught to love others only when we can receive love back, but we are to love others even when we know they can give nothing back. We are to love our enemies even when they only wish to repay us with harm. How much more are we to love our brothers and sisters in Christ selflessly?

“But God demonstrate His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8

God does not love us because we can do something for Him, He just loves us.

“Love does not insist on its own way...” I Corinthians 13:5b (ESV)

“Here is one of the most striking reminders of what love looks like in true religion. Why is that? Being selfish strikes at the very heart of every single one of us. “Insist” here means a continuous strong desire that demands “its own way.” Conversely that means being inconsiderate of the good or happiness of others. The Corinthians were abusing their Christian liberty. Paul told them on the one hand, God gives us all things to enjoy. But on the other hand, he said let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. Even when it comes to things that we have a right to enjoy, our freedom must always have a careful consideration for others. My happiness never trumps the life of my brother or sister in Christ.” - The Gospel Coalition

Question to consider:

Who am I loving just for something in return?

Prayer prompt:

- God, expose any selfishness in my relationships.

DAY 22 – Love is not easily Angered

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love is not provoked.

To be provoked is to be aroused to anger. That I would allow the actions of a brother or sister in Christ to cause me to be angry with them is unloving. Love drives us to try to find answers to problems, to reach out and ask questions, to see how we can help.

Our first response to a perceived attack should be love, not anger, not irritation toward another, not being “upset.” We should seek reconciliation, not retaliation, in every relationship in Christ; we must respond to an attack with peace, that we may walk together in our transformation into the image of Christ.

“Anger itself is not sinful but can quickly lead to sinful expressions. For this reason, Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “In your anger do not sin’: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry” (Ephesians 4:26). There are times when we become angry, yet we are called to express our anger in non-sinful, constructive ways. Love will guide us in the proper handling of anger.

Being hot tempered usually involves making snap judgments, seeking instant vindication, and refusing to grant second chances. However, true love refuses to jump to conclusions, take revenge, or hastily judge anyone.”- GotQuestions.org

As we will see in the next few days, love does not excuse sin, but it doesn't repay sin with sin.

Questions to consider:

When do I get angry? Who do I get angry with?

Prayer prompt:

- Father, show me how to replace anger with love.
- God, is there anyone who has provoked me to anger that I need to make reconciliation with?

DAY 23 – Love keeps no Record of Wrongs

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love does not take into account a wrong suffered.

“Take into account” is a bookkeeping term. It is a writing down of wrongs done to me so that I will remember to keep that person accountable for them. Love doesn’t keep an account of wrongs in order to punish others for our pain. Love forgives.

Nevertheless, we must remember that forgiveness is not forgetting. There is no way we can forget the harm others have done to us in this life. We cannot expect others to forget how we have hurt them. Forgiveness is not trust. Just because I have forgiven someone, I do not automatically have to trust them - that is not the point of forgiveness. Forgiveness is to leave all judgment and punishment to the only one who judges and punishes justly. Only God can justly and completely punish sin.

When my brother or sister in Christ sins against me, I cannot forget it. I may not be able to trust them right then, but I can immediately forgive them. I must not attempt to punish them myself, but leave that punishment up to the Lord.

There is a difference between what is legal and what is personal. I must legally report crimes. Having someone arrested for a crime is not punishment, but many times could be the road to help and healing. If I lend my tools to someone and they sell them for drug money, I should call the police; it may be the best thing for that person. I won’t forget what they did, and I won’t trust them with my new tools. However, my goal is not to hurt them for my pain, but instead help them.

Love keeps no account of wrongs suffered, but instead strives to show forgiveness.

Question to consider:

What wrongs have I suffered that I have not forgiven?

Prayer prompt:

- Father, teach me to forgive others as you have forgiven me.

DAY 24 – Love rejoices in what is right and good

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth.

Love cannot excuse evil. Using love to excuse unbiblical behavior is sinful and hurtful to others. It is a false love. Excusing sinful behavior is not love at all, but instead it is hate. Sin leads to destruction and death, so we should never excuse sinful behavior, especially in someone we claim to love.

Then when lust has conceived it gives birth to sin and when sin is accomplished it brings forth death. James 1:15

To celebrate sin in the name of tolerance or by trying to be kind by using language like “I don’t want to push them away” is all sinful and hateful. It means you would rather watch them suffer in their sin than to see them walk in righteousness. To rejoice in unrighteousness is to justify sin and love cannot do that. True love will not do that. Instead, love rejoices in Truth. God’s Word is Truth.

Sanctify them in truth thy Word is truth. John 14:15

Love celebrates obedience to God’s Word. It is in obedience to the Word that people will find peace, joy and hope.

“True love rejoices in what is right and good. Anything that covers up sin or seeks to justify wrongdoing is the polar opposite of godly love. Love does not sweep sin under the rug. Love does not try to find ways to get away with bad behavior, and it does not put up with injustice. Instead, it treasures truth, celebrates good behavior, and promotes virtue. True love has nothing to hide.” - GotQuestions.org

Questions to consider:

Is there any unrighteousness in your life that you tolerate?

Are you rejoicing in the sin of others?

Prayer prompt:

- Father, give me the courage to point out sin so that I may demonstrate love.

DAY 25 – Love Bears, Believes, Hopes and Endures

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love bears all things. This is a helping word. A word that helps carry burdens. We love on another as we help carry each other's trials and tribulations. When we forgive and show patience and kindness and walk through this life together. *"Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep."* Romans 12:15

Love believes all things. Love acts as if someone is innocent until proven guilty. The first thought of love is "I must be mistaken." When I think my wife has said something hurtful to me, I must first assume it's not. She loves Jesus and she loves me, so whatever was said wasn't in malice. Love always gives the benefit of the doubt. Job's friends immediately believed all of Job's problems were a result of his sin, not giving him the benefit of the doubt, and not showing the love that Job needed from them. (Job 21:27)

Love hopes all things. Even when wronged by someone, love hopes for that person's restoration. Love prays for our enemies and hopes for them to find salvation in Jesus Christ. Love drives us to hope not despair -- for God's work in someone's life.

Love endures all things. To endure is to hold fast. It is a military term to stand fast, don't move, endure everything, to keep your ground. Love endures hardship, strife, arguments, trials and tribulations. Love doesn't leave, love doesn't abandon. I remember when someone my wife and I cared about deeply was walking in disobedience to the Word of God. She left the church in an unbiblical relationship. We couldn't call an evil thing good. In love, we pointed out sin and would not participate in any unrighteous behavior. But we always left the phone on, always answered those calls. Always speaking truth, love, hope, peace in Christ. Then as the Lord moved in her heart, she came home in repentance. Love endures.

Questions to consider:

Who needs help bearing something today? Who has lost hope? Who do you need to reach out to today and endure with them?

Prayer prompts:

- Take time to praise the Lord for his perfect love.
- Thank God for demonstrating His Love toward us in His Son Jesus.

DAY 26 – Unity Defined

“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” Ephesians 4:1-6

One definition of the word unity is “singleness or constancy of purpose or action.” In our culture there are many ways this can be achieved. One is through performance, or simply doing your job or part while being uninvolved in the bigger picture. Another is through incentive, where the promise of reward or fear of punishment are used to gain the desired results. Yet another is compliance, when the agreement is forced, manipulated, or threatened and dissent is disregarded. If you’ve experienced any of these you can attest that these are not truly unifying at all. They are merely ways to get something done.

Now, let’s look at these same three things in view of the above passage from Ephesians. First, our performance is not what is important. Our focus is always on the bigger picture of God’s mission and what Jesus has already done. Second, while God does promise rewards for His glory, our works are the outpouring of His grace toward us and not a result of anything we accomplish. Third, God does not force or manipulate compliance to His Word or His mission. We have free will, and each of us is of equal importance to Him. While not forced to do so, we can agree on His Word as the only source of truth in our lives.

Unity in the context of the church is about oneness: one God with one message. It means oneness of mind, heart, and accord. It’s an overarching agreement on the biggest things that join us together, allowing us to focus far less on littler things that may divide us. It’s being on the same track, in the same train cars, going in the same direction. Simply put, biblical unity is indispensable as we follow God and His mission for our church. Read Ephesians 4:13.

Questions to consider:

What is my role in the body of Christ? How can I use my spiritual gifts to serve others? How can I help promote and maintain unity within our church?

Prayer Prompts:

- That I understand that unity within the body of Christ is all about glorifying God and not about getting what I want.
- That I will develop a plan to walk in unity with my brothers and sisters in Christ.
- Pray for unity among our church leaders as they serve and lead.

DAY 27 – Unity through Mission

“So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” Acts 2:46-47

The concept of “one accord” is frequently present in the Book of Acts as the early church began. This is the idea of all being on the same mission, or moving in the same direction. It is very much the train track analogy we have become so familiar with through Dr. Ewart’s sermons. It was vital to the growth of the early church, and is just as vital to Richland Creek today.

Notice how God blesses the unity through mission displayed by the people in verse 47. God added to the church. The Holy Spirit worked to bring about three thousand to salvation (Acts 12:41), and many more after that. Sure, they had just heard Peter give a powerful speech, but this wasn’t Peter’s doing. The people were focused on God’s mission, unified in mind, heart, and purpose.

We must strive for that same kind of unity today. As we continue to live through this season of uncertainty we must be of one accord, focusing on God and His mission. For not too far down the line we will be past Coronavirus, church transition, and even the pastor search process, looking forward in unity to a bright future.

Questions to consider:

Am I a part of God’s mission?

Are there things that I am allowing to hold me back from true unity?

How can I promote and maintain unity in this time of transition?

Prayer Prompts:

- That I identify as a follower of God and His mission for our church.
- That I understand that unity through mission is vital for our church.
- That I will develop a plan to promote and maintain unity in this time of transition and beyond.
- Pray for the pastor search team, the process, and the man God will call to humbly serve as lead pastor.
- Read Acts 4:24.

DAY 28 – Unity through Diversity

“But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be?”
1 Corinthians 12:18-19

In 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 Paul uses the extended metaphor of how our physical bodies function to illustrate how the body of Christ is to function. Our bodies have great diversity and complexity. Many of our body parts are among the most incredibly and specifically designed things in all of creation. Think of our brains, eyes, and fingers just to name a few. Now think about how effective any of these, or any other body parts, would be on their own.

The brain is essential, yet would cease to function without the heart, lungs, and spine. The eyes are amazingly designed, but would do nothing without the optic nerve or the skull. Our fingers are extremely useful, but would be useless without hands, arms, or muscles. To put it another way, the whole is so much greater than the sum of the parts.

In a similar fashion, unity within the church body comes through great diversity. Each of us filling the same role in the church would be like having our entire bodies made up of eyeballs. Every one of us has a function within the body, and all parts are required for optimum effectiveness. With all parts focused on the mission of God, our diversity brings tremendous unity to glorify Him.

Questions to consider:

What is my role in the body of Christ?

How can I use my spiritual gifts to serve others?

How can I help promote and maintain unity within our church?

Prayer Prompts:

- That I identify as part of the body of Christ.
- That I understand that God has “set” me here with a role He wants me to fill.
- That I will develop a plan to promote and maintain unity through diversity within our church body.
- Read 1 Corinthians 12:20.

DAY 29 – Unity through Service

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” Romans 12:1

In Romans 12:1, Paul encourages believers to be “a living sacrifice” as our “reasonable service.” Reasonable implies something expected, or the natural outcome of a cause. In this case, that cause is faith in Jesus. We are to lay aside our own will and sacrificially follow Him. A significant part of our sacrifice involves our service to others.

This passage goes on to direct us to use our spiritual giftedness for the benefit of others. The areas of giftedness, along with the things we have learned to be good at, are varied. There’s teaching, giving, exhortation, leadership, hospitality, and more. While each of these differs in function and application, the mission remains the same: to glorify God through service to others.

So, what does this look like in your life at Richland Creek? Let’s join together in prayer and examine our hearts, laying aside our desires and seeking what God desires for us. You have an essential role to play in God’s work here, serving Him by serving others. Please contact one of our Pastors today to help find out how you can reasonably serve others as we follow God’s mission.

Questions to consider:

How am I spiritually gifted?

How am I a “living sacrifice” for God? How can I serve others?

Prayer Prompts:

- That I identify as a servant of God, willing to serve others.
- That I understand that God has gifted me to serve Him and others for His glory.
- That I will develop a plan to serve regularly and sacrificially.
- Read Romans 12:6.

DAY 30 – Unity through Humility

“Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” Philippians 2:1-4

There’s an old song that goes “It’s hard to be humble when you’re perfect in every way.” However, the only one that was “perfect in every way” did, in fact, humble Himself to the point of death on the cross. Now, if there ever was anyone who had cause to be an elitist it was Jesus. He was and is one of a kind. He was and is greater than everyone else all the time, every time. And yet He was humble. He gathered with sinners and tax collectors, submitted to human law, and even wept when His friend died. So how can any Christian justify acting as an elitist, whether about their faith or any other part of their life?

The answer is that they cannot. No high-minded rhetoric can match a humble prayer. No amount of theology or education can match a transformed mind. No amount of life experience can match faith in the sinless life and sacrificial death of Christ. When we are truly humbled before Christ we are able to esteem others above ourselves, as He did for us. Jesus gave us the pattern to follow.

The above passage from Philippians mentions love, comfort, mercy, and joy. These come from being like-minded, thinking and acting for the same mission. There is great strength in this kind of humility, submitting our own wills to God’s greater purposes. Trusting in God gives us that unified mind and accord. Putting others first gives Him glory through our humility.

Questions to consider:

Am I humble before God? How can I esteem others greater than myself? How can I promote and maintain unity through humility?

Prayer Prompts:

- That I identify as a humble follower of God, submitting to His mission.
- That I understand that unity through humility is vital for our church.
- That I will develop a plan to humbly put the needs of others before my own.
- I will pray for our church leadership team to operate with humility in all things.
- Read Philippians 2:8.

Extra Day – Unity in Disagreement

Read Acts 15:36-40

Two leaders in the early church, Paul and Barnabas, had a pointed disagreement regarding John, called Mark. For some reason Mark departed from them during their previous journey. The Bible doesn't explain why, but Paul was not pleased. We read that the disagreement was strong enough to cause Paul and Barnabas to part ways. Even so, this disagreement did not break the unity of their mission.

We all know very well that Paul would continue on many further journeys and would go on to author most of the New Testament, but what about this Mark that Paul was so against? Well, this John called Mark is traditionally acknowledged as Mark the Evangelist, author of the Gospel of Mark. Most of church history agrees with this line of thought, even positing that Mark founded the church in Alexandria, bringing the gospel to Africa.

Even though Paul did not want to take Mark with him, both remained unified in their mission. God accomplished much through both of these men in spite of disagreement. There is much for us to learn from this example today. As we follow God's mission we won't always see eye to eye on everything. We can agree to disagree, unified as we look to God and continue to follow His mission.

Questions to consider:

How do I handle disagreements with others? How can I "agree to disagree" on things I have strong opinions or feelings about? How can I promote and maintain unity even in disagreement?

Prayer Prompts:

- That I identify as a child of God, willingly laying aside personal agendas to follow Him.
- That I will develop a plan to handle disagreements in a godly manner, seeking to glorify God.
- Pray that I will pray for our church leadership team to be unified, even in any disagreements.

Thank You Church

To all who contributed to make this prayer guide possible.
To God be the glory!

"But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another."
1 Thessalonians 5:12-13