

How to Use this Prayer Guide (Vol. 7)

This month we are focusing on praying for three different areas within our church:

- **Love God In Our Worship**
- **Love Others Through Our Generosity**
- **The Deeds of the Flesh**

It is vital that we seek the Lord in prayer with a humble heart and depend on His guidance and leadership. Our previous prayer guides were designed to build on one another, to prepare our hearts and minds to deliberately and continuously seek the will of God for our church.

Below is a list of our previous prayer guides:

- Vol. 1 - Our relationship with God and others and understanding God's will for our church.
- Vol. 2 - The character of God and putting our faith in His promises which results in our obedience to His Word.
- Vol. 3 - Learning how to pray to God and praying through His Word which gives us a right understanding of how to pray for our church.
- Vol. 4 - Understanding how to Love God and Love Others while gaining an understanding of what love is and how true unity looks in our church family.
- Vol. 5 - Praying for our Pastor Search Team, our Church Family, and our Future Lead Pastor
- Vol. 6 - Love God in Our Witness, The Christian Testimony, and Walking in the Spirit

All previous prayer guides are located on our website:

richlandcreek.com/prayerguides

Defined by the **Word**, **Devoted** to **Prayer**

and **Dependent** on the **Holy Spirit**.

Day 1: What Is Worship?

Psalm 145:3 Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.

In his sermon series Come Live The Church's Vision, Dr. Ewart reminded us that all the words in the Bible for worship refer to both an action and attitude. Action is doing something. Attitude is an inclination or posture towards someone or something. Fundamentally, worship is recognizing and declaring God's worth through our hearts, words, and deeds (Psalm 29:2). True worship requires that I take the focus off myself and place it where it belongs—on Him! One pastor sums it up well, "Worship is seeing what God is worth and giving Him what He is worth."

However, we are a fickle people. We love to love. In fact, we were created to love and worship God. But our love has gone awry. Consequently, we love to love people, positions, possessions, prominence, privilege, power, pleasure, and prosperity—more than God. We are continually giving ourselves away to a person, cause, experience, achievement, or status. Although these can be good things, we often make them "great" things and elevate the gifts above the giver.

To be sure, who (or what) we love is who (or what) we worship—which ultimately controls us. Friend, beware: whatever you love and worship in this world is fragile and fleeting. Conversely, giving ourselves over to the love and worship of God secures for us indestructible and everlasting life, joy, and peace.

Our church has identified two primary goals born out of biblical commands: **Love God and Love Others**. Even though sin hampers our mandate, we are still called to love upward (Godward) and outward (people). Our church discipleship goals state: We will love God in spirit and truth by exalting and praising Him in everything that we do both corporately and individually. Moreover, everything we do should be an act of worship in response to God's love for us and an expression of our love for Him.

Questions to Consider:

What actions are you taking to worship God on a daily basis? Is there someone or something that you value or love more than God? Do you praise God in everything?

Prayer Prompts:

- Father, I praise you for your immeasurable love towards me. Incline my fickle heart towards steadfast devotion to you. Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things and lead me in the way of faithful worship.
- Read Psalms 145–150 and offer these up as praise in your prayer time.

Day 2: How Do We Worship? In Spirit and Truth.

John 4:24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

The world was designed to be filled with worshipers of God. As an act of worship, image bearers of God reflect the glory of God to the ends of the earth. "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14).

God's design for the world has not changed. In our passage from John, Jesus tells the woman at the well that we are to worship God in spirit and in truth. But how do we worship in "spirit" and "truth"?

One element of right worship of God is the "spirit" of man, or from "within your being." Internally, or from the heart, is where sincere honor, value, and worth are attributed to God. Worship wells up from a heart motivated by gratitude and love of the God of the Bible, and what He has done. But how do we know this God?

Not only does the spirit within man guide worship, but the Holy Spirit also. Paul writes, "Worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh" (Phil 3:3). The Holy Spirit opens our spiritual eyes and ignites our understanding to right knowledge of God. The Holy Spirit guides to all truth, to knowledge of God.

True knowledge of God is found in Scripture, "Your Word is truth" (John 17:17). Jesus said we are to worship in truth. Our worship must be informed by the truth of Scripture. By understanding God as He has revealed Himself in Scripture, we are "truthfully" informed as to how to honor, value, and give weight to God. We are then able to worship in spirit and truth.

Questions to Consider:

Does Scripture inform my worship of God? Do I have indwelling sin that impacts my worship of God?

Prayer Prompts:

- Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.
- Incline my heart to your testimonies and not to selfish gain.
- Reveal to me whatever interferes with my worship of you.

Day 3: Do You Know The God You Worship?

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

We were created in the image of God to worship God. Yet, we all worship something else: our jobs, our spouses, our children, our money, creation and more. Are these your gods? We worship what we love most. Worshiping to Adam and Eve was as natural and instinctive as breathing. They did not have to think about it; they just lived a life of rightly ordered love. Once sin entered the world through Adam’s disobedience, everything good became distorted. Romans 1:25 tells us “they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.” Worship has become distorted because man has lost sight of the God of the Bible.

We worship what we know and love. Do we know the God of the Bible? How do we worship the God of the Bible if we do not know Him? Furthermore, how do we get to know the God of the Bible? We must learn who God is by learning about Him in the place He revealed Himself—His Word. Moreover, we must pray without ceasing and sit under the sound teaching from our church leaders. Without studying God’s Word, you will not know the God of the Bible. How often do you study your Bible? Many say they just do not have time, but how often do we watch TV? Or browse through Facebook? If you are not taking the time to learn about God, then you are worshiping an “unknown” god. God has clearly revealed Himself in His Word. Without Bible study, you will not know the God of the Bible, because you cannot love a God you do not know. If you do not know how to study the Bible, our church has resources that can help you.

Questions to Consider:

How often are you in prayer and Bible study? Do you need help in these areas? Contact our church office and ask to speak with Pastor Jim. Are you spending more time with the TV or computer than you are with the God of the Bible?

Prayer Prompts:

- Thank you, Lord, for revealing to us who you are in your Word; thank you for providing us with godly pastors and teachers who want to teach us your Word.
- Create in us a clean heart and renew a steadfast spirit within us that we would want to learn more about you and grow to look more like Jesus.

Day 4: Family Worship, Part 1

Deuteronomy 6:6–7, And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

Gen Z (children born after 1996) is the largest generation in America, comprising 27 percent of the population. A recent Barna research report disclosed Christianity Today has less influence on Gen Z than on any previous generation. That's alarming. Thankfully, that same research also revealed Christian parents want to participate in the development and longevity of their children's faith. To be sure, God calls parents to lead the family in the worship and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). For this reason, parents must model worship within the home visibly demonstrating God is worthy of our love, devotion, and time.

Yet, many parents did not grow up in a Christian home and, therefore, have no experience with family worship. Moreover, family worship time seems to carry with it an aspect of reluctance and disinterest, no matter if the children are young or old. Perhaps you've been down this road and experienced some discouragement. When asked what encouragement Don Whitney had for families about family worship, he said, "Cheer up, you're normal. I have never come away from a family worship time saying, 'Boy, the Spirit of God was there in great power tonight and we were almost on our faces before God and revival almost happened. Never.'"

It would help to remember the fruits of our labors are often seen over years, not days or months. So, decide today to be faithful in the responsibilities God has given us. Tomorrow's prayer guide will focus on practical "how to" and useful resources for starting family devotions in your home.

Questions to Consider:

What is preventing you from having consistent family devotion time in your home? What actions can you take today to begin fulfilling your role as leader of your family?

Prayer Prompts

- Lord, grant me strength, wisdom, and patience as I lead my family to know, love, and treasure you.
- Father, I want my family to grow strong in their love for Christ. Let them see my example of worship and love for Christ and know you, Lord, are worthy of praise, honor, and devotion.
- Pray for God to grow you in your relationship with Him as you lead your family to do the same.

Day 5: Family Worship, Part 2

Family worship is simply gathering the family together to worship God. When we worship we turn the family's hearts and minds towards Christ. You don't have to know everything to lead. God will honor your willingness and obedience. So lead! Here's how:

Keep it simple and short. The main reason we struggle with family worship is we make it too hard. Keep the goal achievable. Get together, sing, read a short passage, and pray. Pick days and times that you can gather. Also, better do it for ten minutes regularly and keep it up, then aim longer and make it impossible for your kids and yourself.

What to do:

- Sing: sing along with favorite hymns. If anyone plays a musical instrument, have them lead a song or two.
- Read the Bible. Read a portion of the Word together. Talk about what you read.
- Involve the kids. If they can read, give them a verse or passage to read.
- Ask a simple question about the passage.
- Pray! Make prayer a part of your family devotion time. See volume three of the Creek's prayer guide for more help and ideas in praying.
- Persevere: Not every family devotion will feel or appear fruitful. Just keep going. Be faithful in leading your family.

Helpful Resources:

Book: *Family Worship by Don Whitney*. Amazon https://www.amazon.com/Family-Worship-Bible-History-Your/dp/1433567229/ref=tmm_pap_swath_0?_encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=

Video: *How Do You Do Family Worship*. YouTube <https://youtu.be/v9SUYzSLmrE>

Books: *New City Catechism*. <http://newcitycatechism.com/books/>

App: *The New City Catechism* mobile app.

Music: *Songs For Saplings* <https://songsforsaplings.com>

Family Worship: *Seeds Family Worship* https://www.seedsfamilyworship.com/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_

Day 6: Misconceptions of Worship—Sacred Or Secular?

Romans 12:1 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.

Many are the misconceptions that can corrupt our worship. Perhaps the most common misunderstanding is that worship is a particular day, time, place, or activity. Without question corporate worship is a biblical mandate (Hebrews 10:24–25) and vital to the life and development of every believer. Once a week we come together to publicly profess our faith, build one another up, study God's Word, pray, and so much more.

Yet to think the other six days are somehow different in offering God what He is worth (through our hearts, words, and deeds) is to make a grave error in our worship. In truth, all of life is worship (Romans 12:1)—more on this in tomorrow's post. Inevitably, we struggle to remember this. Monday rolls around, and worship fades from our sights as the week ahead unfolds. Why is that? Why do we struggle to see that worship encompasses "all of life"?

Perhaps, one reason the other six days are so disjointed from Sunday morning is that we see our lives in categories or compartments—most of which we believe have nothing to do with God or our faith. We section off parts of our lives into work, home, sports, leisure, and social as if they are in some way disconnected from God. In truth, weekday life ought to look just like Sunday morning life (Col 1:17). Friend, God does not see our life in parts (1 Cor 10:31). Nor is God a one day a week God. He sees every part of our life as one—all of which is to be devoted to Him (Rom 12:1; Psalm 146:1–2).

Corporate worship is a command and is vital to the practice of our faith. But truth be told—our private worship occupies the majority of our day to day lives. Paul Tripp writes, "We must expand worship to everything we say and everything we do." If we view our lives in compartments and categories divorced from God, we will view our Monday through Saturday life as secular, and Sunday life as sacred. Maybe this is the reason why we view worship as a day, time, place, or activity on Sunday but not on Monday.

Questions to Consider:

Is your worship primarily songs, sanctuaries, and sometimes (once a week)? Are you exchanging the worship of God for the worship of created things?

Prayer Prompt:

- Meditate on Romans 1:25 and pray for God to give you greater awareness of the things or people you worship? Pray to worship the Lord with the right heart.

Day 7: All Of Life Is Worship

Psalm 103:1 Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.

For many years, I saw worship as something you did in church on Sundays. I now know that worship is all of life, not intermittent. What's more, worship is not optional—it's an obligation. True worship requires I shift the focus from me to Him. This awareness is what helps us make our day to day lives worshipful.

Think about all the blocks of time you have in a day—driving from place to place, sitting in the carpool line, lunch breaks, feeding an infant, mowing the grass, sitting in traffic, and waiting in waiting rooms. What do you usually fill that time thinking about? Begin to see those times as opportunities to worship. For example, worship Him with scripture reading and meditation, or thank Him for the ability to do what you are doing at that moment. Transform social media time by reading through a Psalm on your phone.

Likewise, before you get up each morning ask God, "Can you receive worship from me today?" If the answer is no because of unconfessed sin, confess to Him those things that are keeping you from true worship. Also, as you start your day, ask yourself, "How can I worship God in the things on my schedule today?" Don't overlook even the most mundane tasks of your day as worship time. Spend a few minutes giving your schedule over to God, laying all of your day on the altar before Him. Think of all the different roles (spouse, mother, father, grandparent, employee) as a means by which to worship the Lord. Other acts of worship that can be incorporated into your day include memorizing Scripture and serving the body of Christ.

Most importantly, worship must begin at home spending devoted time in Bible study and prayer. Review our church's discipleship goals—they are created to help worship God by loving Him and loving others. These goals place priority and importance on God.

Questions to Consider:

Do you make worship a part of your day or an afterthought of your day? Throughout the day, do you check your thoughts and motivations and confess sin to God?

Prayer Prompts:

- Lord, I desire to worship you all day every day. I lay my schedule before you today and ask that you show me areas where I can spend time worshipping you.
- Ask God to give you a hunger and thirst for Him in every area of your life.

Day 8: An Example Of Worship

Luke 7:37–38 A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and poured perfume on them.

When I read the account of what this woman did to worship Jesus, it helps me see how far short my worship falls. First, a woman sinner, walking into a group of men was unheard of in those days. Yet, her desire to worship her King was greater than her fear of death.

Secondly, she brings a very expensive jar of perfume. God’s Word doesn’t tell us where she got it. Perhaps it was a family heirloom—the cost of about a year’s wages. However, she wanted nothing but the best for her Savior.

Next, without a thought of what those around her would think, she begins to weep. I imagine she was weeping because she was in the presence of Holy God. She laid out her sins before Him to the point her tears were so great she had to wipe them from His feet. What a cleansing that must have been. Without another thought, she takes the perfume and pours it on Him, giving all she had to Him. Wow, what a picture of worship! I want to weep with her every time I read this story.

When was the last time I worshiped like that—totally forgetting everything going on around me and solely focusing on my Lord and Savior? Do I come into worship offering Him the best of me or do I give Him what’s left over after worldly things have demanded so much of me? Do I weep over my sin in the presence of His holiness or am I even aware of His holiness? Do I come into worship in an attitude of service to Him or an attitude of expectation, thinking only of what He can do for me?

Questions to Consider:

What does your worship look like? Do you come into worship as boldly as she did, forsaking all else to spend time with your Savior? Are you so in love with Him that you can worship in tears, in joy, in sorrow, no matter the trials of life? Do you worry more about what the person sitting next to you may say if you worship openly?

Prayer Prompts:

- Lord, I want to worship you with everything I have.
- Forgive me for the times I’ve offered half-hearted worship.

Day 9: Perverted Worship—Idols

Exodus 20:3 You shall have no other gods before Me.

Think back over the last twenty-four hours. To what or whom did you devote your thoughts, love and actions? What we spend our time thinking about and acting on tells a lot about what we deem most important in our lives or, in other words, what we worship.

In the above verse, God says we shall have no other gods before Him. This is a command in Scripture and one we need to take seriously. What does this verse mean? It means God will not tolerate any other gods. This is idolatry. Idolatry misdirects worship from the true God to some kind of substitute, in other words, a fraudulent deity. All false gods stand in opposition to the true God, and the worship of them is incompatible with the worship of God.

For a long time, I thought worshiping other gods meant bowing down to a little statue. I felt good about the fact that I was not an idol worshiper. When I grew in the spiritual discipline of Bible study, I soon realized there are many forms of gods or idols—worship of myself being the most prominent one. When I seek to glorify myself, I take God off the throne and erect my own golden calf and ask it to satisfy me in ways that only the one true God can. This golden calf can be any number of things such as work, success, money, spouse, children, grandchildren, friendships, drugs, alcohol, food, time spent on social media, you fill in the blank. Anything that takes your affection off of God and puts it on something else is an idol in your life.

Pastor A. W. Tozer (1897–1963) once said, *“True worship is to be so personally and hopelessly in love with God, that the idea of a transfer of affection never even remotely exists.”* Are you worshiping the one true God or are you violating His command and sharing Him with other gods?

Questions to Consider:

Who or what are the golden calves (idols) in my life? Is there a sin that is blocking me from worshiping God with all my heart, soul, and strength? Whose glory am I seeking? Do I present the God I claim to worship in what I do and say?

Prayer Prompts:

- Lord, cleanse my heart in preparation for worshiping you.
- Lord, I confess and repent of the idolatry in my heart that is often disguised as a good thing.
- Lord, because I love you, I long to keep my focus on you and you alone. I don't want to transfer my affections anywhere else.

Day 10: The Test of Worship

Habakkuk 3:17–18 Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.

True worship bends the knee no matter the circumstances. But let's be honest; sometimes life is painful. How do we worship amidst loss, deprivation and grief? It's one thing to worship when the good times roll. Praise pours forth for the One who blesses abundantly. Yet, it's quite another thing to worship when the rains come and the tears flow. Still, Job rightly asks, "Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"

Recall from day one of this journal that worship is "seeing what God is worth and giving Him what He is worth." One pastor writes, "Life is hard. But life is not God. God is God. And God is good all the time!" Indeed, He is. All the Bible is a testimony to God's goodness (Psalm 107:1; 1 John 1:5). This is what we must remember when trials ensue. This is why we worship in all seasons—because God's goodness does not fluctuate with circumstances. He is worthy even when we suffer. In truth, Jesus told us we would experience trials (John 16:33).

I recently read, "God must be more beautiful to us, more glorious to us, and more valuable to us than whatever it is suffering threatens to take from us." To Job, God was more beautiful. Job 23:12, I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food.

Lastly, it would help us to have perspective about the short and long views of life. Perspective is the ability to see the end from the beginning. It is bifocal vision—the ability to see what is directly in front of us in light of the long range. This isn't to say we don't hurt, mourn and lament now. But, our eternal perspective is life, hope and peace in Christ. Without the long view, the short view is overwhelming. Keep the long view in sight at all times and worship—even in trials.

Questions to Consider:

Is your fig tree barren? Are your fields empty? Do you worship the Lord anyway because He is good and worthy of praise? Or are you a fair-weathered worshiper?

Prayer Prompts:

- Pray 2 Corinthians 4:16–18.
- Lord, help me suffer well. Let me not withhold worship from you even when life is hard and troublesome. Instill in me a steadfast spirit that recalls Christ's sacrifice and leads me to trust you no matter the trial.
- Offer up Psalm 91 as a prayer and a praise.

Day 11: What Is Generous Giving?

1 John 3:17 “But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?”

On the counter at the snow-cone booth was a foam tip cup with the words, “Tip—because money is the root of evil.” Yes, the teenagers dealing with sticky, sweet syrup deserved a tip, but the writing on the cup was a distortion of the well-known Bible verse. The word “love” was missing. “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils” (1 Timothy 6:10).

As Christians our goal is to love God and love others—not love the world or the things in the world. John goes on to say in his letter, if we do not help those in need, the love of the Father is not in us. Love is a distinguishing mark of a disciple. Likewise, generosity is, too. To be generous is to be ready to give more of something than is expected. A generous giver has a willing heart and a ready spirit. Therefore, a disciple of Christ will develop a regular habit of sacrificially giving in order to advance God’s kingdom agenda.

Christ, the generous giver exemplar, willingly laid down His life that we might have life and have it “to the full.” Not a cupboard or bank account full, but a rich, kind, and quality of eternal life found only in Him. From an overflow of gratefulness to Christ, we are to follow His example and generously give to the mission of God and the people of God.

Remember, every good and perfect gift you have is from the Father’s gracious hand. You have what you have, not to hoard, but to give. Sure, you must budget for today and save for tomorrow; however, hold loosely the things of the world—which are passing away. We must have an open heart to share, and a spirit that reminds us the things of the world are temporary.

So, yes; tip the snow-cone maker, generously contribute to the work of the ministry, and look for ways to share with others. We are to “do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share” (1 Timothy 6:18).

Questions to Consider:

Do I remember everything I have is from God? Do I generously share with others and the mission of God?

Prayer Prompts:

- Father, remind me that all I have is Yours.
- Give me the desire and obedience to live a life of generosity.

Day 12: Why Give Generously?

Matthew 6:19–21 Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Our God is an abundantly giving and generous God! In light of this, how should believers respond? When we think about giving, which can be a difficult subject for some, we must look at it through the right lens. A biblical lens. Why should we give?

Generosity is an attribute (characteristic) of God and one that He chooses to share with us. Our giving reflects God's character and His generosity to us. Be careful to not miss the point—giving isn't about money; it's about the heart, just like Matthew says, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." We have just spent ten days in our prayer guide on worship. Worship and giving are connected. How are they connected, you might ask? Giving is a joyful act of worship! We worship God in and through our generosity.

Genesis 1:1 tells us that God is the creator of everything. All of it is His, not ours and we are to worship the Creator, not the creation. Giving should be done with a rightly postured heart and an attitude of worship toward God. Because of what Christ has done for us on the cross and the amazing grace we receive, our giving should reflect what our heart treasures.

Questions to Consider:

Are your treasures earthly treasures or eternal treasures? When you give, is it truly an act of joyful worship?

Prayer Prompts:

- "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).
- Lord, help me to worship you in and through my giving as I contribute to kingdom work.

Day 13: The Heart Of Giving

2 Corinthians 9:7 Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver.

Giving is a response to God's amazing grace whereby we offer up our money, time, and talents sacrificially. But there are two other words to consider in regards to giving: generous and cheerful. When we consider the verse above we learn that giving is a matter of the heart. As a matter of fact, our money is a barometer for our heart. To be sure, giving is an act of love towards God and others as we give up our resources for kingdom purposes. This is evident in 1 John 3:17-18, "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and truth."

What can we do to posture our hearts to give generously and cheerfully? First, we must realize who owns our material possessions, money, talents, and time. Everything belongs to God. We are merely stewards of our earthly possessions. The word "steward" is derived from the Old English word "stigward," which means "housekeeper." Stewardship can be defined as the faithful management of God's resources, in God's world, to achieve God's objective.

Once we develop the correct mindset towards giving, it becomes easier to give with a cheerful heart. Indeed, giving is an act of obedience, demonstrating that we recognize God's authority over us, creation, and the material world. Yet, we also recognize that giving is a privilege, as we give sacrificially to meet the needs of the poor, the local church, missions, and His Kingdom. In doing so we bring glory to God. Likewise, we grow in Christ-likeness. As we mature in our faith and better understand our salvation, we gain a new view of eternity such that the things of this world no longer grip our hearts as they did before.

Questions to Consider:

How can you develop a heart for giving cheerfully? How can you find ways to give of your time and talents? How can your prayer life affect your giving?

Prayer Prompts:

- God, give me a heart for giving sacrificially that flows from my understanding of the gospel.
- God, help me understand that giving is both a command and a privilege. Thank you for the resources you have entrusted to me.

Day 14: What Is Tithing?

Deuteronomy 14:28 At the end of every three years you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in the same year and lay it up within your towns.

Reading up on Old Testament tithing practices probably did not make your list of top ten things to do this year—or last year. Confusion abounds about this topic and how it relates to us today. Sometimes we use the word tithe to mean we are giving monetarily to our local church. However, we might be surprised to learn we may not be using that word correctly.

Let's wander back to the Old Testament to get a clearer picture of what a tithe is and why God commanded it. The word "tithe" (which means tenth) is used forty-one times in the Old Testament. The tithe was part of an economic system provided by God. Tithing was necessary for the healthy economic functioning of society, and all citizens of Israel were required to tithe. Three separate tithes were required: Levitical, celebratory, and welfare. The three of these tithes amounted to no less than 20 percent and no more than 30 percent of material earnings. Yes, you read that correctly—20 to 30 percent. To be precise, over the course of seven years, the pattern of giving was 20%, 20%, 30%, 20%, 20%, 30%, 0%. This averaged out to be 20 percent every year over a seven-year period. Hence, the word "tithe" has these amounts in view, not only 10 percent.

Why were the Israelites commanded to give these tithes? Well, the Levitical tithe was given to support the priests as they served in their duties. The celebratory tithe was for Israelite worshipers as they traveled to and resided in Jerusalem to participate in three mandatory annual religious celebrations at the temple. The welfare tithe was the poor tithe. Hence, the word "tithe" has these specific purposes in view.

Much of the confusion around tithing centers on whether modern day believers are to follow the OT tithe. In order to do that we would need to match not only the amount, but also the application of the tithe in order to be biblical. This is impossible because we no longer live in an economic system provided and commanded by God.

Questions to Consider: Do you see the biblical command to give as tithing 10 percent of your income? How can you become more informed about what Scripture instructs on giving?

Prayer Prompts:

- Pray for a heart that longs to give God a portion of your earnings that reflects Scripture's instruction.
- Read and meditate on 2 Cor 8:3–5. Pray through this asking God for a spirit of generosity in all that He has blessed you with.

Day 15: Principles Of New Testament Giving

1 Corinthians 16:1–2, Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.

Surprisingly, the New Testament does not prescribe a formal method or fixed amount for believer's giving at all. The New Testament does give several examples and principles to guide us in our giving. These principles are easy to remember: periodic, personal, planned, proportionate, plentiful.

The early church met weekly and so their giving was periodic (weekly). Nowadays, our earnings are paid weekly, bi-weekly, or even monthly. The interval is not the key to their example but rather that we give periodically. Personal giving is just that—a personal response to receiving God's grace through Jesus Christ. Our giving is an expression of love to One who gave us eternal life. Moreover, In 1 Cor 16:2 Paul instructs the believers to offer planned giving. Paul simply calls for intentional giving. We choose to give and make a conscious effort to do so. Proportionate giving should be in accordance to what the believer possesses. People with greater means can give more than those with less. Lastly, giving is to be plentiful. Genuine love for God and growth in the Christian life will result in a mature, giving heart that is generous toward God and His people.

As we consider our own giving practices, perhaps it is time to consider shifting our thoughts away from "tithe" as a 10 percent only and towards the principles listed above. More importantly, it is important to realize, percentages don't woo the heart of God. What God desires is that we love and adore Him (Deuteronomy 5:5) and, therefore, express that love in our thoughts, words, and deeds.

Questions to Consider:

Is your giving a fixed percent based on what you thought was the biblical instruction for today? Is there a hesitancy (or just plain unwillingness) to give periodically, personally, planned, proportionately, and plentifully? If so, why is that? Are you praying about your attitude towards giving? Are you praying about what you give to God?

Prayer Prompts:

- Ask God to reveal your heart's posture about giving to Him.
- Meditate on 2 Cor 9:7, "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." Ask God for a cheerful heart that gives freely out of gratitude for what He has done in Christ.

Day 16: How to be Generous? Gratitude & Attitude

1 Timothy 6:17–19, “Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.”

Throughout the Bible it is clear that God wants humans to experience His generosity. In fact, God chooses Abraham to lavish His goodness upon, if Abraham will simply believe. And Abraham does believe (Gen 15:6; James 2:23). However, most of his descendants do not. Therefore, many of the New Testament parables spoken by Jesus deal with money, with generosity. Jesus realizes we do not always rightly trust Him, so He calls us to live with trust in our Creator God to supply all our needs. 1 Timothy 6:17 reminds us that God “richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.” Paul instructs us also to “be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share.” We might not be rich in terms of money, but we can be rich in terms of what we do have to offer—our time, our resources, our talents. Think for a moment about using your time, perhaps spending some time with a senior saint listening to their life stories. Think about using your resources, perhaps recommending good books or passing down gently used clothing as your children outgrow them. Think about using your talents, perhaps playing piano for 4th & 5th graders or teaching a children’s life group. Remember, however, that even though God has given us talents to use, we must also give with our money—whether we have a little or a lot—to fund the Kingdom work of our local church.

When we receive the gospel of God through the generous grace He gives us, we should begin to look for ways to be generous toward others in the various means He has provided us. When we give, we give out of gratitude to God. Start each day with an attitude of gratitude, thanking your Savior for His generous gift of salvation.

Questions to Consider:

In times of crisis, focusing on what we don’t have can easily cause us to cling to worldly goods. Do you experience this? What would you and others around you gain by trusting God’s generous love instead?

Prayer Prompt:

- Pray for obedience to be a generous giver with the resources with which God has blessed you.

Day 17: A Biblical Case Study in Generosity—Corinthians

2 Corinthians 8:1–5, “We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, . . . they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.”

Paul, as an apostle, is going to encourage the believers in Corinth to give generously to the church. His method will be to share a testimony of the Macedonians—believers experiencing deep poverty and yet willing to give. Paul uses phrases like “grace of God,” “abundance of joy,” “wealth of generosity,” and “first to the Lord.” Paul acknowledges that all we have is due to God’s grace. The grace of God establishes faith in us to become children of God (John 1:12). “Abundance of joy” can come no matter what our season or status in life. Joy comes from God in spite of circumstances.

The example of the Macedonians makes us question: “If they were poor, how did they have a wealth of generosity?” They gave according to what they had and then even a little more. They were open-hearted with their money, as opposed to being self-seeking. And, finally, the Christians gave themselves to the Lord first and then to the offering for other believers. Matthew 6:33 states, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.”

Question to Consider:

The Macedonians are a positive example of a group that joyfully gave in the midst of trial and poverty. As a group, they made a huge impact. Will you join with RCCC to do something meaningful at this time?

Prayer Prompts:

- Pray for a heart that desires to give to others, even in the midst of trials surrounding us today.
- Pray for an understanding that God is a generous God and will grant to us “all we need for life and godliness in Christ Jesus” (2 Pet 1:3).

Day 18: To Whom Shall We Give?

Acts 20:35 “In all things, I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

Is there an order in which believers should give? How do we decide who to give to first?

Sacrificial giving should primarily be to the local church you attend. Simply stated, your local church should come first. In the early church, they didn’t give their money to specific projects they were interested in, but rather to the local church. As a result, believers accomplished all of the things God had called them to do. Just like the early church, today, when you give to the local church, you are helping to meet the needs of the body—caring for the poor, feeding the hungry, supporting your pastors, equipping people to minister in the community, and sending people out to the nations. We too get to participate in the mission of God and what He has called us to do through our local church!

However, sacrificial giving does not have to stop at the local church, though it should be your primary place of giving first. You can continue additional sacrificial giving to support your brothers and sisters in Christ globally around the world. We must remember that Christian organizations, called “parachurch” ministries, did not exist in the New Testament, so there isn’t necessarily a roadmap for this. However, that doesn’t mean we don’t exercise our giving with caution. When giving to such organizations, a great question to ask is what church oversees the organization I am giving to and what do they believe? It is very important to understand where your money is going and what you are supporting.

Questions to Consider:

Do you routinely pray over your sacrificial giving? Are you giving first to your local church, participating in the mission of God? If giving to other Christian ministries, have you taken the time to understand what your money is supporting?

Prayer Prompt:

- Lord, help me to glorify you in my giving. May my heart’s desire be to serve my local church first and then to have wisdom with any additional giving to other organizations beyond that.

Day 19: A Plan For Generosity

1 Corinthians 6:12 “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.”

When considering a plan for giving, two questions should be used to filter our intentions and actions. “Does this bring God glory by advancing the gospel?” And, “Would this be beneficial for others?” Do you hear Matthew 22:37–39—love God and love others? These scriptural concepts are echoed throughout 1 Corinthians, though applied to differing situations.

As we use these overarching questions to think through generosity, we must first look inward. As a Christian, free to do many things, what is my heart attitude? Am I excited to be generous? Who or what is the focus of my spending? Am I in sin, reluctant, or possessive? Then, we need to assess our current situation. Where does my money actually go? Am I in so much debt, I’m unable to give? Finally, evaluate goals for what you would like to do with your money. How could I use everything God has graciously given me for another’s good?

After evaluation, make a specific plan. Bring all of the Scripture we have already looked at this month into action steps—that is, steps of obedience. Write down how you intend to bring God glory through living generously. Here are some ideas for what to include:

- First and foremost, give yourself to the Lord (Romans 12:1–2).
- Pray for a surrendered, thankful, generous heart and for specific ways to give—time, spiritual disciplines, forgiveness, and resources.
- Steward everything God has given. Get out of debt. Consider taking the Financial Peace University class through our church. Intentionally manage time and resources for the building up of others.
- Joyfully and regularly give financially to the church in order to advance God’s kingdom agenda (1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 9:7).

Questions to Consider:

In which areas am I selfish and view things as “mine”? Have I been mastered by idolatry? How am I living in a way that is beneficial to others?

Prayer Prompts:

- Confess areas of being mastered by money and things.
- Pray for the Spirit’s help to identify and develop a regular pattern of generous cheerful giving of time, treasure, and talents.
- Pray for individual and corporate steps of obedience.

Day 20: Given by God, For God

John 18:36, Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”

Jesus spoke these words to Pilate as he stood trial before him for charges of claiming to be king of the Jews. Jesus’s answer is so simple, yet profound and beautiful—“My kingdom is not of this world.”

Let me ask, where is your kingdom, truly? Can we say the same for ourselves if we were asked this question? Our society today has created a self-serving culture of “me” and “mine” where the emphasis is on a worldly kingdom—the here and now. We tend to think that everything we have is of our own doing, but that is unbiblical thinking. We must be very careful to not substitute “us” with God. Everything we have is given by God, for God, for His purpose—not given by us, for us. What a massive difference in those two statements! As believers, our focus should be eternal, not temporal, but this sometimes gets lost as we allow kingdom vision to be overshadowed by our earthly life and our flesh. We must be careful to not fall into the sin of greed with our resources. We can avoid this thinking through prayer and being in the Word, which will lead to a kingdom mindset. As Jesus said, our kingdom is not here, but kingdom work does start here! Church, I challenge you to remember that it is not our kingdom, but His. And for believers, this is just our temporary home. Reflect on all that the Lord has done for us. Rest in knowing that God’s kingdom is eternal.

Questions to Consider:

Where do you consider your kingdom to be? Eternal or earthly? How is your attitude towards your resources?

Prayer Prompt:

- Lord, thank you that this is not our permanent home, but help me to be focused on kingdom work here and now with my heart, my attitude, and my resources so that I may glorify you.

The Deeds of the Flesh

DAY 21: Introduction -The Deeds of the Flesh

Galatians 5:19-21 “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Last month we examined the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-24, and now we look at the other side of things with the Deeds of the Flesh. The Spirit versus the flesh battle rages in every believer, and it is beneficial to understand both components in this struggle. We are encouraged to “walk by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16; 25) and not the flesh. The term “walk” is present tense, or a continuous and habitual way of life. Walking in the flesh is another way of saying we want what we want, and we are the gods over our lives.

The deeds listed in 5:19-21 are divided into three general areas: sex, religion, and human relationships. Immorality, impurity, and sensuality are sexual sins. The desire of the flesh is for illicit sexual activity driven by the lust of our own hearts. This includes all things pornographic, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, and prostitution. Idolatry and sorcery are considered religion. Idolatry is the worship of false gods or anything we love more than Jesus. Sorcery is speaking toward witchcraft and pharmaceuticals. The remainder focus on human relationships, which will be individually addressed in days 22-30 of this guide. These are the bad fruit that can manifest visibly in our lives.

Today ask God to reveal to you any fleshy desires that may be keeping you separated from Him, or that are hindering your growth in discipleship. Review Galatians 5 on your own, with your spouse, or with your family.

Questions to Consider:

Am I walking in the flesh or in the Spirit? Is there anything I love more than Jesus? Do I need accountability and help with sexual, religious, or human relational sin?

Prayer Prompts:

- If you haven't already done so, pray to God for salvation from sin and death through faith in the completed work of Jesus Christ.
- Confess to God and repent of sexual, religious, or human relational sin.
- Pray that God would strengthen you in areas of temptation.

Galatians 5:25 “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”

DAY 22: Deeds of the Flesh – Enmities

Genesis 3:15 “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.”

Enmity can be described as perpetual opposition with an enemy. It can also mean intense hostility, going well beyond dislike or animosity. It is a deep seated, long-lasting hatred that sours the soul and directs paths of evil. This concept is famously illustrated in Shakespeare’s “Romeo & Juliet” and the feuding story of the Hatfields and McCoys. In both cases, each side perpetually and historically hated one another. They were permanent enemies. This type of thinking and acting toward others is antithetical to God’s Word.

God sent Jesus to reconcile us to Himself, ending our own enmity with Him (Romans 5:10).

In Genesis 3:15 God makes it very clear that Satan has enmity with Him and with us. That also implies that we have enmity with him. He is against the things of God, and if we are walking with God, then Satan is also against us. There is enough evil in the world without us having enmity toward one another. If we love God, we will also love people. As we grow in our discipleship it should become virtually impossible to have enmity with others.

Today ask God to reveal to you any enmity you are harboring. If so, prayerfully seek reconciliation with that person or those people. Review Genesis 3 and Romans 5 on your own, with your spouse, or with your family.

Questions to Consider:

Do I have enmity with another person, or group of people? Is there anyone that I need to prayerfully reconcile with in order to grow closer to God?

Prayer Prompts:

- Confess to God and repent of any enmity towards others.
- Pray for patience, wisdom, and understanding in my relationships with others.
- Prayerfully forgive anyone who has enmity against me.

Romans 5:10 “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

DAY 23: Deeds of the Flesh – Strife

Proverbs 17:14 “The beginning of strife is like letting out water; So abandon the quarrel before it breaks out.”

Strife can be defined as a bitter conflict or quarrel. Another meaning is discord. It is often used interchangeably with the word “contention.” This is describing a person who regularly seems ready to argue. There is a consuming bitterness of heart that shows itself through quarrels, complaining, and gossip. The intent is to stir things up, frequently just to be heard or to get their own way. It is easy to see how this Deed of the Flesh can cause damage to all involved.

The imagery in Proverbs 17:14 is effective in illustrating the impact of strife. Think of a dam holding back a river. A small hole may appear, causing a tiny bit of water to begin leaking out. This could go on for a long period of time and not seem to compromise the integrity of the dam. Then the hole gets a little bigger and more water starts to leak out. The hole continues to grow, and the amount of water escaping increases until the pressure is more than it can endure, causing the dam to rupture. The ensuing flood destroys everything in its path before subsiding. This can be the impact of strife in our lives, as well as in the lives of those around us. The bitter quarrels, complaints, and gossip will become more than can be endured, and the resulting flood will bring destruction.

Today ask God to reveal to you any bitterness in your heart, mind, and actions. If you have hurt others through strife, prayerfully ask for forgiveness. Review Proverbs 17 and James 3:1-12 on your own, with your spouse, or with your family.

Questions to Consider:

Do I have a bitter and contentious spirit? Do I need accountability and help in “taming my tongue” (James 3)?

Prayer Prompts:

- Confess to God and repent of strife and bitterness.
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide my heart, mind, and actions.
- Prayerfully forgive those who have stirred up strife in my life.

James 3:5 “So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!”

DAY 24: Deeds of the Flesh – Jealousy

James 3:16 “For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.”

Jealousy can be defined as a hateful resentment for what others have. It is contentious rivalry based on another’s position or possessions. The Greek word *zelos*, translated as jealousy in Galatians 5:20, has the same root (*ze-*) used to get the word “zeal.” This root can literally mean “hot enough to boil.” To be zealous can mean a burning love or ardor toward others for who they are. On the other hand, to be jealous can be a burning hatred toward others for what they have.

One place we see a biblical example of jealousy is with Haman, the villain in the Book of Esther. In Esther 6, the king remembers how Mordecai saved his life and how Mordecai was never properly acknowledged for this feat. The king asks Haman, his right-hand man, “What is to be done for the man whom the king desires to honor?” Of course, Haman thinks the king must be talking about him, not Mordecai or anyone else, so he concocts an elaborate public display of the king’s honor. The king agrees and orders Haman to personally do just what he suggested to Mordecai, his enemy and the cause of Haman’s plot to eradicate the Jews. Esther 6:12 tells of Haman’s hatred and jealousy toward Mordecai as afterward he “hurried home, mourning, with his head covered.” Haman’s hatred had boiled over, and would soon seal his own demise.

Jealousy can quickly overtake our hearts, coloring our words, attitudes, and actions toward others in a most damaging way. Today ask God to reveal to you any jealousy that you may maintain. Review Esther 6 (and the entire Book if possible) on your own, with your spouse, or with your family.

Questions to Consider:

Do I have jealousy toward anyone? Do I focus more on what God has done for me, or on what other people have?

Prayer Prompts:

- Confess to God and repent of jealousy.
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to help me to be zealous for the Lord.
- Prayerfully ask forgiveness of those my jealousy has hurt.

1 Peter 3:13 “Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?”

DAY 25: Deeds of the Flesh – Outbursts of Anger

James 1:19-20 “This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.”

Outbursts of anger are unrestrained expressions of hostility toward others. This is so much more than being annoyed, perturbed, or bothered by someone. These are out of control, over the top explosions. It is acting out in extreme ways based on extreme emotions. All of us can experience times when we are upset at someone and our emotions are high. This is never the time to speak, act, or make decisions. Anger can cloud our judgment to the point of blindness, leading to devastating results that cannot be taken back.

Let's go back again into the Book of Esther to examine an extreme example of this kind of rage, once again with the villain Haman. As chapter 3 begins, Haman is promoted to be “second in command” to the king. All of the king's servants at the gates would bow down and pay homage to Haman, which fed his pride. However, Mordecai would not do these things for Haman. Verse 5 tells us that Haman “was filled with rage” because of this. But Haman did not deal with this directly and quickly. Instead, he developed a wicked plan to have not only Mordecai killed, but all of the other Jewish people as well. Haman's intense rage led him to a disproportionately aggressive and destructive response. It also blinded him to much of the truth regarding Mordecai and Esther that may have spared his own life.

Our outbursts of anger are never righteous and do not glorify God. Today ask God to help you to control your anger and remind you of His peace. Review Esther 3 (and the entire Book if possible) on your own, with your spouse, or with your family.

Questions to Consider:

How has my anger impacted my relationship with God and people? Do I sometimes speak, act, or make decisions based on high emotions of anger?

Prayer Prompts:

- Confess to God and repent of anger outbursts.
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to help me recognize my anger before it turns to rage.
- Prayerfully ask forgiveness of those my anger has hurt.

Ephesians 4:26 “Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.”

Day 26: The Deeds of the Flesh – Disputes

Philippians 2:3 “Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”

Definition of Disputes – Actions or attitudes driven by selfish ambition that often create rivalries.

We all have an agenda. We think things should be a certain way—namely, the way that makes the most sense to us, or that with which we are the most comfortable. Maybe we hold a particular position or desire a specific thing because of how it makes us feel or appear to others. When our agenda clashes with that of another person there will be an opportunity to seek a compromise or a dispute.

Disputes are often created by how we handle change. Someone advocates a change that we don't agree with; how we deal with the conflicting ideas reflects much on our maturity as Christ-followers. For example, it's time to replace the worn, tired and dirty carpet in the church. Red carpet was very popular in churches 30 years ago, not so much anymore. You like the idea of new carpet in a lighter, more neutral color, but there is also a group of long-time members who cling to tradition and resist change. How do you reflect a Christ-like attitude as the discussion over the color of the new carpet begins to heat up?

The Gospels don't record that Jesus ever spoke to the issue of carpet color in the synagogue, but He did say a great deal about handling disputes. Jesus' teaching in Matthew chapters 5-7 (The Sermon on the Mount) beautifully contrasts the kingdom of God with our present life and ambitions. Jesus says in Matthew 6:12, “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do so also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” In other words, set aside our agenda and consider others before oneself. What a great way to neutralize a dispute!

Questions to Consider:

When I interact with others, how much of my conversation is about my desires or agenda? When I pray am I seeking God's will or asking Him to fulfill my desires? When was the last time I treated someone I had a dispute with like I would want to be treated?

Prayer Prompts:

- Father, create in me a clean heart, a heart that seeks Your will above my own.
- Help me to be a peace maker rather than a source of conflict.

Day 27: The Deeds of the Flesh – Dissensions

James 3:16 “For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.”

Definition of Dissensions – To cause partisan and contentious quarreling.

Very similar to yesterday’s topic, dissension involves a difference of opinion—a dispute—only with greater passion, energy, and purpose on the part of one or both parties to the argument. The phrase “dissension in the ranks” describes a situation where the unity of a group is being undermined from within by a deliberate effort to subvert authority.

In other words, you and I can have a dispute, work it out, and move on with our relationship. If I was creating dissension between us, I would behave and communicate in a manner that would highlight our dispute while also harming any authority or respect others have for your position.

Dissension is destructive to groups and organizations, like a church. Continuing the example from yesterday of a church in need of new carpet, dissension takes the dispute over the color of the carpet and makes it personal. Traditionalists who favor replacing the old red carpet with new red carpet might say things like, “All real Christians know that church carpet should be red!” The other group, who only want something new and fresh might begin to speak of the other group as “Carpet Pharisees” and being close minded. At this point, the enemy is in control and successfully destroyed any unity within the congregation.

As with dealing with disputes, Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:12 are powerful, “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do so also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” Treating others with the same consideration and sacrifice you would like to receive from others will prevent dissension from even starting when a difference of opinion occurs.

Questions to Consider:

We have all had disputes with other people but have you ever experienced dissension? If so, how did it start? How did it end? What was the result of the dissension?

Prayer Prompts:

- Father, create in me a clean heart, a heart that seeks Your will above my own.
- Help me to recognize how I am being perceived by others.
- Help me to seek to be more like Christ, even when I feel passionately about a point of dispute.

Day 28: The Deeds of the Flesh – Divisions

Romans 16:17 “I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.”

Definition of Divisions – To split people into groups of right or wrong based on opinion.

In the logical sequence that is our list of the deeds of the flesh, we have gone from bad—disputes, to worse—divisions. The word is used in the Old Testament almost exclusively to describe armies and soldiers; large groups of men divided into smaller units to enable effective leadership and command. The many units make up the whole, which is unified in its goal to protect and defend a nation.

This is not unlike the church. Unity of the body under the headship of Christ is the goal. And while there are many denominations, sects, and churches, each with its own leadership, the many parts make up the whole of the universal church. It is within each church where divisions are to be avoided.

The past couple days we have examined the problems of disputes and dissension within the church. A church plagued with dispute and dissension will be divided, fractured into small groups, each at odds with the other factions seeking their own ambitions. Few things are more effective at destroying the unity, mission, and life of a church. In Ephesians 4:11-13, Paul writes, “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Such growth and unity cannot happen where there is division.

Questions to Consider:

When I look around my church, do I see unity or division? If there is unity, what can I do to encourage and support it? If there is division, what can I do to bring resolution and unity?

Prayer Prompts:

- Father, create in me a clean heart, a heart that seeks Your will above my own.
- Help me to use my words and actions to maintain unity within the Body of Christ.
- Allow me to recognize division that I may work with church leadership to restore the unity given us by the Holy Spirit.

Day 29: The Deeds of the Flesh – Envy

Proverbs 14:30 “A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.”

Definition of Envy – Having ill will toward others for who they are or for what they represent.

Growing up I loved playing sports. It was so much fun being on a team and participating in the practices and games, learning new skills, and developing friendships with other guys. Several of my friends were superb athletes; I mean boys with great speed, coordination, and the ability to make plays and win games. My problem was that I was a little runt of a kid with absolutely no coordination or ability to make a positive contribution to the team other than keeping the bench warm.

Watching them play game after game from my seat on the bench created in me something that started as admiration, evolved into jealousy, and later fully-flowered envy. My teammates became a source of pain and self-loathing. I no longer cheered their great plays and victories but secretly wished they would suffer an injury so they might know how I felt. Envy had sucked the joy and life out of sports for me, taking what I once loved and turning it into a pit of personal contempt and anger. My bones were rotting.

Envy is one of those emotions that we can keep hidden from others, until it manifests itself in harsh and critical language, anger, or outbursts of rage. By the time it is revealed to others, it has done its destructive work on your soul. If you are struggling with envy in your life, cry out to the Lord for His grace, mercy and forgiveness. In Philippians 4:8-9, Paul gives us a prescription for envy, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

Questions to Consider: Am I struggling with envy in my life? If so, who or what am I envious of? How can I put into practice the things Philippians 4:8-9 is encouraging me to do?

Prayer Prompts:

- Father, create in me a clean heart, a heart that seeks Your will above my own.
- Lord, please show me if there is any envy within my heart.
- Father, help me to be an instrument of peace in your hands to bring encouragement, comfort, and compassion to those you have placed in my life.

Day 30: The Deeds of the Flesh – Drunkenness and Carousing

Luke 21:34 “But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.”

Definition of Drunkenness and Carousing – To seek fellowship with sinners at wild parties with little regard for moral righteousness.

We all enjoy having a time filled with fellowship, laughter, good food, and fun. Many adults choose to consume alcoholic beverages that will lighten their mood when consumed in modest amounts. Drinking to excess causes one’s mental state to be altered, resulting in a lack of judgment and poor decision making, putting the person, and those around him, at risk of danger, injury, or even death. The Bible doesn’t give a prohibition against alcohol, but it does warn of excess.

Aside from the practical warnings against drunkenness, wild parties and such, there is an important theological component to this discussion that is not often addressed. Genesis 1:27 says, *“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”* We are created in the image of God. That’s a big deal. Nothing else in all of creation bears God’s image. As image bearers, we are to treat ourselves and each other with respect and care. God’s Law, given to Moses, emphasizes this truth by the command in Leviticus 24:17, *“Whoever take a human life shall surely be put to death.”* Drunken and unrestrained behavior dishonors our Creator.

The church at Corinth struggled with drunkenness and carousing, at the Lord’s Supper no less! In 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, Paul addresses the issue in this way, *“Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.”*

Questions to Consider:

In Luke 21:34, what is Jesus referring to when he says, “... and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap”? Are you honoring God through the care and keeping of your body? How could you improve in this area of your life?

Prayer Prompts:

- Father, create in me a clean heart, a heart that seeks Your will above my own.
- Help me to discipline myself to care for my body and mind so that I am able to honor and serve you with all of my strength and ability.
- Allow me to show grace to my brothers and sisters who may struggle with this sin.

Thank You

We praise the Lord for all those who contributed to make this prayer guide possible. To God be the glory!

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

“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.”

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