



6 WEEK DEVOTIONAL



### Dear Christ Community Church,

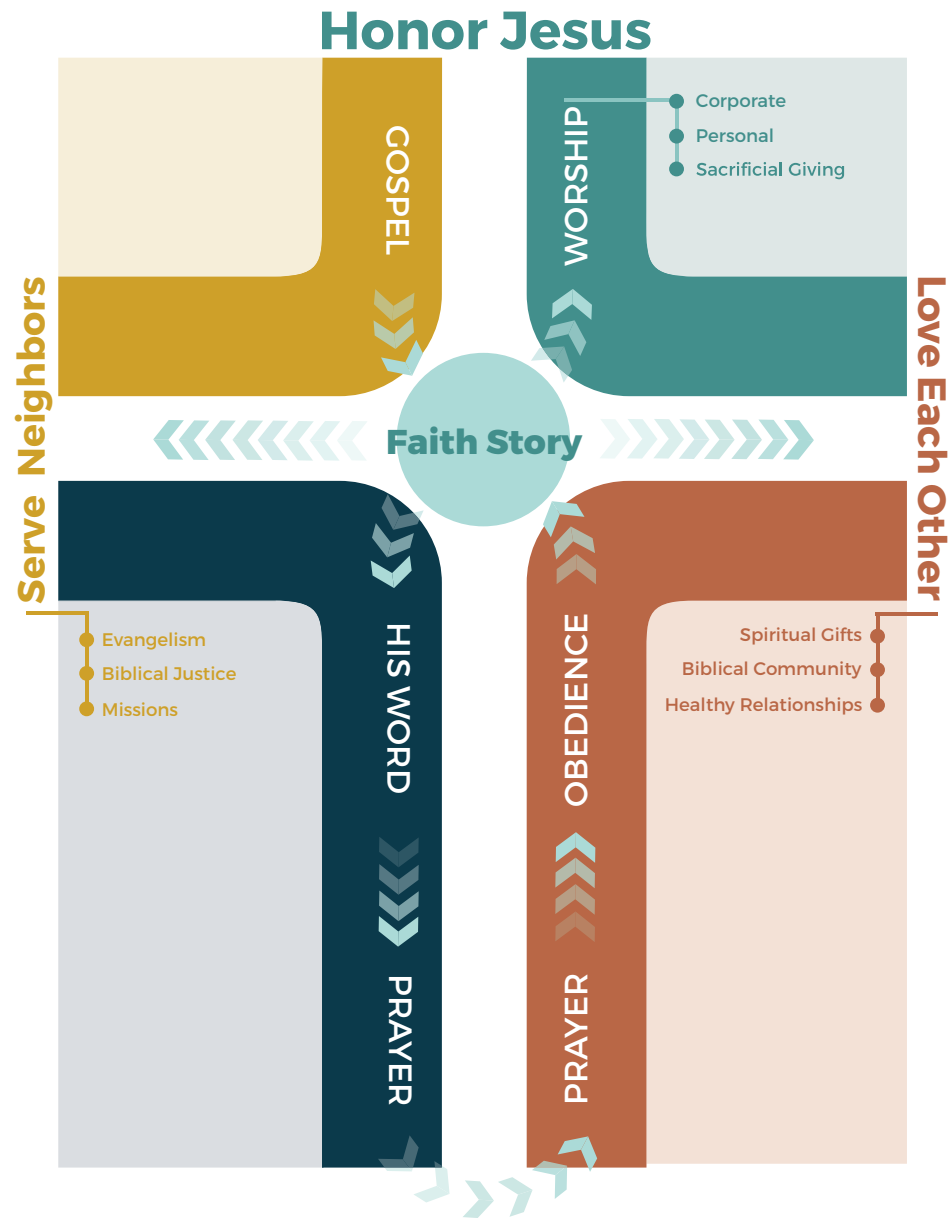
Thank you for coming on this “CrossWalk” journey with us. I believe this is going to be a life-changing 6 weeks for you and for our church. As Marie and I joined the CCC family a year and a half ago, we were drawn to your desire to have a deeper faith, more meaningful relationships, and a greater impact in our community. We want these things for ourselves and are so thankful to be pursuing these things with you!

What we are calling **CrossWalk** is actually a paradigm shift for CCC’s approach to spiritual growth and ministry. Over these next 6 weeks, we are going to be looking at our individual spiritual lives and the corporate life and ministry of our church from a different perspective. If some of this feels new or different to you, that’s because some of it is new and different to you. But you need to know that this approach is not novel or new... Christian people around the world for centuries have embraced this kind of approach and found it to be very helpful in gaining a deeper faith, more meaningful relationships, and a greater impact in their communities.

Finally, I have written these devotionals but I do not claim ownership of them. In my preaching and writing for our church, I lean on 2 wisdom statements from the Bible. First, Proverbs tells us “where words are many, sin is not absent.” My work requires a lot of words and sometimes I miscommunicate and sometimes my thinking on a subject is incomplete or just wrong. Thank you for giving me grace and the benefit of the doubt. Second, Ecclesiastes tells us “there is nothing new under the sun.” Nothing I say or write originates with me. My starting point is always the Bible, and I spend significant time in prayer and thought before I communicate. What I have written here comes from my mind and heart, but I also have a graduate degree in this subject and, since graduate school, have read hundreds of books by a plethora of authors and I have been influenced by many of their ideas. I have not intentionally taken anyone else’s work as my own, but I stand on the shoulders of many people who are great thinkers and communicators. It is my great privilege to pass on to you what I am learning and finding to be helpful. I pray it is helpful for you, too.

*With Love and Gratitude,*

*Darril*



# WEEK 1

## CROSSWALK INTRO

**God is always initiating with us.** He is always moving toward us. He is always offering us something more and something better, and He is always at work. We get to respond to what He is initiating. We get to receive what He is offering us, and we get to participate in the work that He is doing. This week, we are walking away from the idea that spiritual life, spiritual growth, and effective ministry are something we have to produce, and walking toward the Truth that God is initiating and offering beautiful things for us to enjoy and be part of, and our answer to Him is "Yes!"

# Hide and Seek

Genesis 3:1-9

## Questions for Reflection

### Read Genesis 3:1-9

History's first game of hide and seek wasn't a game. Adam and Eve, in eating the forbidden fruit, declared their independence from God and destroyed their relationship with Him. When they heard the sound of God walking in the garden, instead of coming close to walk with Him, they hid themselves from Him. And God sought them out. "Where are you?" He asked. He already knew where they were. He already knew what they had done. He asked this question because, even though they were hiding from Him, He was seeking them.

We are all born with Adam and Eve's desire to hide from God. Each of us hides from God in our own way. Hiding might look like apathy, anger, spiritual rule-following, or rebellion. We can hide from Him even though we go to church or participate in a small group or serve in our community. We are really good at hiding and He is really good at seeking and finding.

Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd (John 10:11) and told a story about His willingness to look for and find each of His sheep (Luke 15:1-7). Even though the sheep don't look for Him, Jesus looks for and finds His sheep.

1. If you heard God say, "Where are you?" how would you answer Him?

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2. Since God seeks hiding people, what are some things that must be true about Him?

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3. Do you think you would find God if He wasn't looking for you?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, thank you for seeking me and finding me. Please forgive me for hiding from You and help me know what You are like so that I want to be close to you. I pray this in Jesus' name, AMEN.*

# The Gift of God

Romans 6:23

## Questions for Reflection

### Read Romans 6:23

Do you remember your first paycheck? Did it come with a sense of accomplishment, a sense of satisfaction in knowing that you earned it? Sometimes it feels good to get what we deserve.

Do you remember your first traffic ticket? Did it come with a feeling of fear or dread or self-condemnation in knowing that you deserved it? Sometimes getting what we deserve is the last thing we want.

When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, their act of defiance toward God was something God calls “sin.” Sin is acting without regard for God’s law or falling short of what His law requires, and each one of us has sinned. What we deserve for our sin is eternal, spiritual death.

Unlike Adam (and us), Jesus lived His earthly life in perfect obedience to God the Father, including obediently dying on the cross. He was raised from death to eternal life not only for Himself but also for those who trust Him. Jesus willingly took what we deserved (death) and gladly offers us what He has earned (eternal life and victory). This is Good News – that Jesus died for our sins and rose again from the dead so that we can have eternal life.

1. How do you feel about eternal life being a gift you receive instead of a paycheck you earn?

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2. Do you see this as a “one-time” gift or an “everyday” gift that God offers us? Both? Why?

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3. Are you receiving this gift of eternal life or are you trying to deserve or earn it for yourself?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, thank you for this gift you are giving me. I'm saying yes to this eternal life that comes through Jesus. I know I haven't earned this, but Jesus has and I'm really grateful that He's willing to share it with me. Please show me where I am trusting in myself and what it looks like for me to trust Jesus instead. I pray this in Jesus' name, AMEN.*

# Freely You Have Received

## Matthew 10:7-8

### Read Matthew 10:7-8

God gives gifts to us, not for us to keep, but for us to share.

In the verses we read today, Jesus gave His first followers the ability to perform miracles – to do things that would set people free. At the same time, this gift allowed them to do things that people would have paid good money to see and even more money to receive; or, this gift could have made them stand out, stolen their privacy, and interfered with their ability to live relatively anonymous lives. So, He warned them against using these gifts to benefit themselves or hiding these gifts for their comfort or convenience. He gave them – and us – a principal to live by – freely you have received, freely give. God has given you gifts, not to keep, but to share.

The first gift God gives us is “eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (see Romans 6:23 and yesterday’s devotional). Even though we are unable to give eternal life to another person, we can share the life God has given us.

## Questions for Reflection

1. Do you agree that God’s gifts to us are given for us to share? Why or why not?

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2. Who first told you about God’s gift of eternal life through Jesus? What was it about that person that made you willing to listen to them?

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3. Are there ways you “freely give” to others this eternal life that God has given you?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, thank you for giving good gifts to me. I want to be the kind of person who freely gives what you are giving me. Please show me who needs what you are giving me and give me the compassion and courage to share it with them. I know some of this is going to be outside of my comfort zone, but I’m willing to go there with You. I pray this in Jesus’ name, AMEN.*

# A Bridge to Nowhere

John 15:1-5

**Read John 15:1-5**

A bridge to nowhere is a bridge where one or both ends do not meet up with a road. Getting on that bridge will, literally, take you nowhere.

There are spiritual bridges to nowhere. Sometimes others build them for us. Sometimes we build them ourselves. We get serious about and busy doing the things we think a good Christian does, hoping to make spiritual progress, only to find ourselves spiritually “nowhere.” Jesus doesn’t want His followers to experience the disappointment, frustration, and emptiness of this, so He offers a different way.

Instead of “doing” things to be a good Christian, Jesus invites us to be with Him and to receive from Him what He wants to give us, and to join Him in what He is doing. Being this kind of Christian might not look any different than being a “bridge to nowhere” Christian to someone watching, but for those who practice it, it is radically different. There is joy, fulfillment, and a God-given realization that we are making a lasting difference.

## Questions for Reflection

1. Have you experienced “bridge to nowhere” Christianity?

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2. Jesus says that if we remain in Him, we can bear much fruit. What do you think it means to remain in Him? What do you think it means to bear much fruit?

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3. How do you feel about Jesus saying that apart from Him we can do nothing?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, I want my life to make a lasting difference. I want to experience “much fruit.” I’m willing to remain in Jesus. I’m willing to receive from Him. I want to do the things that You are already doing. Please keep me off those bridges to nowhere and on the path that You have laid for me. I pray this in Jesus’ name, AMEN.*

# The Gift of Faith

Ephesians 2:1-9 and Hebrews 11:6

## **Read Ephesians 2:1-9 and Hebrews 11:6**

If you watch sports, it is common to see athletes, in a moment of success, touch their chest to celebrate how their “heart” has brought them to this moment, then point to heaven to acknowledge their success as something given to them by God. It is human nature, when we have made the effort, to see “our part” in any accomplishment.

The Bible tells us that “our part” in salvation, spiritual growth, having our prayers answered, experiencing divine healing, and honoring God with our lives is “faith.” But faith is not something that comes from us. Faith is a gift from God. We don’t have to create it or find it – we get to receive it and exercise it. In moments of spiritual success, we don’t touch our chest as if faith comes from our heart, and in moments of spiritual struggle, we don’t hang our heads or make excuses as if we don’t have what it takes for faithful living. God has given each one of us as much faith as we need (Romans 12:3). We don’t have to manufacture faith, we get to receive it and exercise it.

## Questions for Reflection

1. How would you describe or define “faith?”

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2. Have you experienced circumstances where you wondered if you had enough faith? How did you respond?

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3. Is there something God is asking of you right now that is stretching your faith?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, thank you for giving faith to me. I receive this gift and I want to exercise it so that I can please You and have the kind of life You want to give me. Remind me and show me that You are always initiating with me and always giving me what I need to respond to You. I want to receive from You so that You can grow me in my faith and use me to be a blessing to those around me. I pray this in Jesus’ name, AMEN.*



# WEEK 2

HEARING GOD THROUGH HIS WORD

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**God always goes first.** He wants us to know Him, to know what He is offering us, to know what He desires our response to Him to be, and He has made all of this known to us in His Word – the Bible. This week we are acknowledging our inability to know God and walk in His ways apart from His Word, and we are committing ourselves to greater engagement with Him so that we can experience the life and freedom He wants to give us.

# Special Revelation

## Psalm 19

### Read Psalm 19

On social media, we “post” what we want everyone to see, but we “direct message” when we want to share the most personal things or communicate with the people closest to our hearts.

While God does not have social media, He “posts” and “direct messages,” too. Theologians call these things “general” and “special” revelation. God makes Himself known to everyone everywhere through His creation. By looking at the world around us, everyone everywhere can discern that the creator is pre-existent, powerful, wise, creative, and good. What we see in creation should lead us to be thankful and honoring toward our creator (see Romans 1:18-23).

Special revelation is when God communicates with us in special, specific, and miraculous ways. He reveals the most detail about Himself, about us, and about how we can well live in relationship with Him and each other through special revelation. God has “direct messaged” us through His Word, the Bible, and through the person of Jesus, whose life and teachings are recorded for us in the New Testament.

We see God in His creation, but we know Him through His Word.

## Questions for Reflection

1. What have you noticed about God by enjoying His creation?

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2. When you read the descriptions of God’s Word in Psalm 19, which ones resonate most with you?

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3. How might knowing God through His Word increase your enjoyment of Him through what He has made?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, thank you for making Yourself known to me. I see you in Your creation and I want to know You more and better through Your Word. As I engage with Your general and special revelation, I pray what the psalmist prayed - "let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in Your sight." Help me think and speak rightly about You. I pray this in Jesus' name, AMEN.*

# Inspiration

2 Timothy 3:16-17

## Questions for Reflection

**Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17**

God always initiates with us. Our role is to respond to Him. He has started a conversation with us through His Word, the Bible, and we get to enter into that conversation by engaging with His Word. The Bible declares itself to be inspired by God. The word "inspired" means "breathed out." God breathed His word out to us, for us, over us. We respond by breathing His Word in to our minds, hearts, and lives.

In the story of creation, we read that the Lord formed Adam from the dust, then breathed into him the breath of life so that Adam became a living person (Genesis 2:7). The first breath God breathed out for us made us living beings. His next breath for us, His breathed-out Word, as we breathe it in, helps us participate in His eternal, abundant Life.

While the Bible is not the only way that God speaks to us, it is the primary way and the most objective way He speaks. People who know the Lord and know what He is saying to them are people who stay engaged with God's Word.

1. Should the image of God breathing His Word out and us breathing it in influence how we engage with the Bible? If yes, in what ways?

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2. The verse for today claims that the Bible is profitable. Are there ways that you have found the Bible to be profitable in your life?

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3. When you think about your current level of engagement with God's Word, would you say you are "mostly engaged," "kind of engaged," or "barely engaged?" What do you think your next steps should be?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, thank you for breathing Your eternal, abundant life out for me. I want to breathe in what You have breathed out. Thank you for being a God who communicates with Your people. I'm praying for myself what the prophet, Samuel, prayed so long ago: "Speak Lord, your servant is listening." I'm praying this in Jesus' name, AMEN.*

# Illumination

Psalm 119:18

## Questions for Reflection

“Gobbledygook” is language that sounds important but is hard to understand (Cambridge Dictionary). Using this word in a sentence... “I’ve tried to read the Bible, but it is gobbledygook to me.”

People who read the Bible have “gobbledygook” moments. If you struggle to understand the Bible, you are not alone because it is not a “normal” book. The Bible is a spiritual book breathed out by God to lead people into eternal, abundant life. When we read our Bible, we see words on a page or screen, but it is God the Holy Spirit’s job to make those words come alive in our hearts and lives. So, instead of giving up when the Bible is gobbledygook to us, we keep reading in prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit and He eventually gives us “aha” moments. Those “aha” moments are His work of turning on the lights, or opening our spiritual eyes so we can see what God is communicating to us through His word.

Jesus promised His followers that the Holy Spirit would lead them into His Truth (John 14:26). The Apostle Paul prayed for Christian people that the Holy Spirit would give light to the eyes of our hearts (Ephesians 1:17,18). In Psalm 119 alone, 15 different times the psalmist asks God to teach him or give him understanding of God’s Word. If you struggle to understand the Bible, you are in good company. Keep struggling! God will honor your struggle by giving you understanding. The “aha” moments are worth it!

1. Why do you think God breathed out to us a book that can be hard to understand?

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2. When you are reading part of the Bible that is hard to understand, are you more likely to put your Bible down and move on to something else or dig in until you get some level of understanding? Why?

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3. List a few Biblical Truths that used to be confusing for you but now you are growing in your understanding of them. How did the Holy Spirit “open your eyes” so that you could learn these things?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, please open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in Your Word. Give me patience and perseverance as I wait for You to teach me and show me and give me understanding. And please remind me that the work and the waiting is worth it. I’m praying this in Jesus’ name, AMEN.*

# Hear and Do

Psalm 1 and James 1:22-25

## Questions for Reflection

### Read Psalm 1 and James 1:22-25

God has breathed out His Word to us, for us, and over us. In the Bible, God offers His best, His blessing, His freedom, and His life. We receive what God is offering us by hearing and, after we have heard, doing what He says.

If we see ourselves standing above the Bible, where our word is final over God’s Word, we will miss His best for us. If we see ourselves standing alongside the Bible, where we listen to what it says but consider it one of many “words” that we might embrace, we will not find the freedom that God gives. If we see ourselves standing under the Bible, submitted, giving God the first and last word in our lives, hearing and doing, He will bless us.<sup>1</sup>

1. Looking at the general course of your life, where do you stand in relation to God’s Word – over, beside, or under it?

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2. The Psalmist talks about delighting in the law of the Lord. What does it look like to take delight in God’s Word?

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3. What do you think happens when someone hears and understands God’s Word, but refuses to do it?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, thank you for giving me Your Word. I want to hear and do what You say. Please increase my delight in, and desire for, You and Your Word. Help me see where You have blessed my obedience so that I am encouraged to keep hearing You and doing what You say. I pray this in Jesus’ name, AMEN.*

<sup>1</sup> I first heard this image of “over, beside, under” God’s Word from Will Davis, Lead Pastor at Austin Christian Fellowship in Austin, Texas.

# Only Truth Sets You Free

John 8:31-32 and John 17:17

### Read John 8:31-32 and John 17:17

There is a difference between “truth” and Truth. “truth” is the best answer we humans have for the questions and struggles we face. Truth is God’s answer to the same questions and problems, and He makes His Truth known to us in the Bible. “truth” sounds good, makes sense to us, usually earns favor with our friends and neighbors, and is often short-term helpful. “truth” has a lot going for it, but in the long run, our best thinking and our best answers are inadequate. The wise man wrote, “There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end, it leads to death” (Proverbs 16:25).

Truth, which is breathed out by God, is harder to discover, harder to learn, and harder to live. It might seem a little suspect to us and maybe even silly to our friends. Jesus, acknowledging that Truth is less attractive than “truth,” called it the narrow road with a narrow gate (Matthew 7:13-14). But Truth leads to life. Truth, and only Truth, sets you free.

## Questions for Reflection

1. Are you more likely to look to “truth” or Truth for your answers or solutions? Why?

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2. Have you experienced Truth setting you free when “truth” had failed to do so?

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3. Do you have questions or problems that cause you to feel trapped? What is “truth’s” answer or solution? (If you don’t know Truth, who could you ask to help you discover it?)

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, I agree with Jesus - Your Word is Truth. Help me know and live in Your Truth so that I can experience the freedom You want to give me. Please put me in situations where I can share Truth with others who are needing to find the freedom You offer us. I pray this in Jesus’ name, AMEN.*

# WEEK 3

## TALKING WITH YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER THROUGH PRAYER

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**Prayer is “talking with my Heavenly Father.”** In prayer, we both listen to and speak with Him. God has given us access to Him – His heart and His abundant resources – through prayer. This week, we are taking steps forward as people who pray. When Jesus’ first disciples asked Him to teach them to pray, He responded with, “When you pray...” The way we learn to pray is by praying. The format of several devotionals this week is designed to help us practice listening to the Lord by prayerfully reading scripture, then responding to Him using scripture as the starting place for what we want to say.

# First of All, Pray

1 Timothy 2:1-6

## Read 1 Timothy 2:1-6

God desires that prayer be a first thing for us. Prayer is the thing our Heavenly Father encourages us to do before we do anything else because He cares for us and wants to intervene on our behalf. “Prayer moves the hand that moves the world” (E.M. Bounds, *Prayer, It’s Possibilities*). Our natural tendency is for prayer to be one of our last things – “all we can do now is pray.” But God has invited us to approach Him as our Heavenly Father and invite Him to speak over and step in to the things that have our attention before we do anything else.

Making prayer a first thing includes, but is more than, scheduling morning prayers. It means we prioritize prayer in our planning process, celebrate and express gratitude in prayer over success, mourn in prayer through seasons of loss, and process in prayer when we are frustrated or confused. We know that prayer is becoming a first thing for us when it becomes our “go to” no matter what is happening in our lives.

## Questions for Reflection

1. What is your first feeling or thought when the subject of prayer comes up? Why do you think that is?

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2. Do you have questions about prayer (i.e. Does it really change anything? If God already knows, why do I need to ask?, etc.)? Have you ever prayed about your questions?

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3. As you consider the place that prayer has in your life, what are some ways you can make it more of a first thing?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, thank you for calling me to my next steps as a person of prayer. Help me know what prayer being a first thing in my life looks like. Please remind me to pray - call me to prayer. I want to grow in this most important thing. I pray this in Jesus' name, AMEN.*



# Adoration

## Psalm 145

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### *A Guide for Adoring God Using Psalm 145*

Adoration, or praise to God, is an important part of prayer. Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name" (Matthew 6:9). "Hallow" is an old word that means "to keep holy" and we keep God's name holy in prayer through praise or adoration.

**Read verses 1 and 2.** Express your desire to be a person who recognizes and expresses God's greatness.

**Read verses 3-7.** Tell God why you think He is great. Tell Him what you have heard or read about Him and also the ways you have seen His greatness in your life.

**Read verses 8-16.** Tell God which promises He's made that mean the most to you. Tell Him how you have experienced Him being faithful to those promises.

**Read verses 17-20.** Tell God about the desires you have had that He has fulfilled. Then, tell Him about desires you still have and express your trust in Him to fulfill them.

**Read verse 21.** End your prayer by committing to God that you will be a person who praises Him.

### *Notes*

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# Confession

1 John 1:8-2:2

## Read 1 John 1:8-2:2

Confession is expressing our agreement with God about our sin so that we can receive His forgiveness. Jesus taught us to pray, “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matthew 6:12). In the Bible, confession is the only condition we have to meet for forgiveness. God, through Jesus’ death on the cross, has done everything else for us. When we ignore our sin or refuse to acknowledge what it is, we push God away from us and place ourselves outside the stream of His blessing. When we confess our sins, God forgives us and restores us.

God makes us aware of our sin as we engage with His Word and by His Holy Spirit. A great prayer that invites Him to make you aware of your sin is found in Psalm 139:23-24, “Search me, God, and know my heart... See if there is any offensive way in me...”

As God makes you aware of your sin, Psalm 51 offers a pattern for praying for forgiveness:

- confess your specific sin (v. 1-2)
- acknowledge that your sin is against God (v. 3-6)
- request forgiveness from God (v. 7-9)
- request restoration from God (v. 10-12)
- thank God for His forgiveness (v. 13-17)
- pray for those your sin has affected (v. 18-20)

This pattern may seem like a lot of “trouble” to go to, but, if you are willing, it can lead you to a heart-level agreement with God about your sin, which results in His forgiveness, restoration, and blessing.

## Questions for Reflection

1. How aware are you of your sin? Is confession a normal part of your spiritual life?

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2. How would you differentiate between confession and self-condemnation?

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3. How good are you at receiving God’s forgiveness and restoration? Are you more likely to accept forgiveness and move on or do you get stuck in condemnation and doubt?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, I’m so grateful that, with You, there is forgiveness for sin. Since you love me and want what is best for me, please show me my sin so that I can confess it and receive Your forgiveness. I’m listening for Your voice because I don’t wallow in my sin after You have forgiven me, but I don’t want to take my sin too lightly, either. Jesus, thank you for shedding Your blood so that my sins could be forgiven. I pray these things in Your name, AMEN.*

# Gratitude

## Psalm 107

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Prayers of gratitude acknowledge God's character and His work on our behalf. As we recognize His intervention, favor, and blessings in our lives, it is right and good to respond by saying "thank you" to Him. We don't read very far in the New Testament, and especially in the letters written by the Apostle Paul, before we encounter encouragement to be grateful (i.e. Colossians 3:15 and 1 Thessalonians 5:18) and prayers expressing gratitude (i.e. Romans 6:17, 7:25; 1 Corinthians 15:57; 2 Corinthians 2:14, 9:15).

## *A Guide for Expressing Gratitude to God Using Psalm 107*

**Read verse 1.** Speak this verse back to God – "I thank you, Lord, because You are good and because Your love for me never ends."

**Read verses 2-9.** Thank God for how He has provided for your needs.

**Read verses 10-16.** Thank God for the ways in which He has rescued you and set you free.

**Read verses 17-22.** Thank God for how He has forgiven you and restored you.

**Read verses 23-32.** Thank God for His protection over you from physical harm.

**Read verses 33-38.** Thank God for the abundance He has given you.

**Read verses 39-42.** Thank God for His discipline in your life, and that He is always working for your good.

**Read verse 43.** As you "ponder the loving deeds of the Lord," be grateful for His loving deeds toward you.

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# Request

Matthew 7:7-11 & Psalm 18:6-19

**Read Matthew 7:7-11 and Psalm 18:6-19**

Our Heavenly Father wants us to ask Him for what we want and need. Making requests of God is not selfish or weak. It is right and good. He is a good Father who takes pleasure in giving good things to His children. He enjoys it when we acknowledge our needs before Him. He celebrates our desire to receive what He wants to give us. Our asking moves Him to act.

In the Bible, we read of people asking God for huge things like systemic justice and bringing a dead person back to life; and, for seemingly small things like finding a lost item or filling wine glasses at a wedding party. There is nothing too big or too small for God. If it is important to us, it is important to Him. He has the resources to answer each person's prayers. No one else is missing out when God says, "Yes!" to you.

The Bible gives 3 reasons we will not receive from God: 1) We do not ask Him; 2) We ask for selfish reasons; 3) We ask for things that would not be good for us. If we will ask (and keep asking), God will work with us to shape our asks. If we do not ask, we miss out on both God's shaping and the good things He wants to give to us.

Our asking moves God to act.

## Questions for Reflection

1. How does the statement that God is a Father who takes pleasure in giving good things to His children make you feel? Do you agree? Why or why not?

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2. Are you good at asking God for what you want and need? Are there things that encourage you in your asking? Are there barriers you face?

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3. Make a list of things you want and need that you are ready to ask God to give you.

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, I'm grateful that you see me as Your child. I want to receive the good things You want to give me. Help me be bold in my asking from You. Please encourage me as I take next steps in this important part of our relationship. I ask this in Jesus' name, AMEN.*

# WEEK 4

BEING A WORSHIPER THROUGH GIVING

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**God is always moving toward us.** As we engage with Him through His Word and in prayer, He makes Himself known to us, meets us at our point of need, encourages us, calls us forward, and blesses us. The proper first response to this God who is above us as “The Lord God Almighty” and with us as our “Heavenly Father” is worship. This week we are going walk away from our natural tendency to hesitate and hold back in worship toward giving the joyful response that He deserves from His people.

# About Worship

Revelation 5:12-14

## Questions for Reflection

### **Read Revelation 5:12-14**

Worship is about giving and receiving. True worship happens when the one who is lesser gives the One who is greater what they are worthy of receiving. The songs of heaven recorded in Revelation declare that King Jesus is worthy to receive power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and praise from every created being – whether angelic or human – for all eternity.

We are right when we call our church gathering a “worship service,” and we are right when we call the singing portion of those services “worship.” But we are wrong if we reduce worship to just these things. Jesus is worth us giving Him our attention for an hour on the weekend, and He is worth us giving Him honor and praise through singing. He is also worth us giving our influence to be used for His purposes, giving our money to advance His agenda, and giving our physical and mental acumen to make His name known. While He is worthy of what we give Him on the weekends, He is worthy of receiving from us everything else.

We grow as worshipers of Jesus when we grow in our willingness and joy in giving to Jesus all that He deserves.

1. How would you define worship?

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2. Do you consider yourself a worshiper of Jesus?

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3. Are you engaging in any kind of false worship by giving someone or something more than they are worth?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, I agree with the songs of heaven - Jesus is worthy of all that I have and all that I am. I want to grow as a worshiper. Please show me where I am keeping for myself things that Jesus deserves, or, where I am giving to someone or something else what rightfully belongs to Jesus. I pray this in Jesus' name, AMEN.*

# Worship is...

Luke 7:36-50

## Questions for Reflection

### Read Luke 7:36-50

Worship is our joyful response to who God is and what He has done. He has spoken His "Yes" to and over us, and worship is our physical, emotional, and spiritual "yes" back to Him. His "Yes" is personal to you, meeting you where you are, offering you what you need – forgiveness, acceptance, rescue, and peace. Your "yes" back to Him is also personal. It is your joyful response to who you know God to be and what you know about what He has done for you.

It is our natural tendency to hesitate and hold back in worship (not just singing at church, but in giving to God what He is worth). We hold back emotionally, we hold back physically, we hold back spiritually. We have our reasons for holding back, but holding back in worship holds back our spiritual growth and our experience of God's blessing in our lives, which then holds back the way He will bless others through us. We are called forward in our response as we get to know God better and grow deeper in our awareness of what He has done for us.

1. What are some ways that God has met you where you are and offered you what you need?

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2. From the reading, are there ways in which you identify with Simon? With the woman?

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3. Where are you hesitant or holding back as a worshiper? How do you hear God speaking in to that?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, You aren't holding back from me. Thank you for that. I don't want to hold back from You, either. Please teach me to worship you. Lead me into my joyful response to who You are and what You are doing for me. You are worthy of my worship. I pray this in Jesus' name, AMEN.*

# Giving as Worship

Genesis 14:18-20

## Questions for Reflection

### Read Genesis 14:18-20

Christian giving is an act of worship. We talk about giving as a way to help meet others' needs, as a way to participate in God's work, and as a way to faithfully steward the resources God has given us, and all these things are true about giving, but Christian giving is also an act of worship.

In the reading for today, Abraham, who the Bible calls the father of people of faith, meets Melchizedek (his name means "king of righteousness"), king over Salem (which means "peace"), and is also priest of God Most High, who ministers communion (bread and wine) to Abraham and speaks a blessing over him... and the father of our faith responds to this "type" or "foreshadow" of Jesus by giving him a tenth of all he had. In that moment, overwhelmed by the glory and goodness of God, Abraham did not sing a song or bow to pray. He wrote a big check.

Giving is God's love language. "For God so loved the world that He gave..." (John 3:16). Giving is also one of the main ways that we say, "I love you" back to Him. God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:6) because the giving is done out of love, as an act of worship.

1. Have you ever been so overwhelmed by the glory and goodness of God that you just had to make a donation?

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2. If you were to order your reasons for giving, which would come first - meeting needs, participating in God's work, being a faithful steward, worship, or something else?

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3. Do you think you can be a worshiper of God without giving financially? Why or why not?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, You are generous by nature and you have been generous to me. Thank you! Will You please grow me in this area of giving as an act of worship? I want to give because I am experiencing Your goodness and Your glory. I want to help meet people's needs, fund Your work, and be a faithful steward, too, and have all of that wrapped up in giving as an act of worship to You. I pray this in Jesus' name, AMEN.*



# Dethroning Money

Matthew 6:19-24

## Questions for Reflection

### Read Matthew 6:19-24

Jesus talked about money more than any other subject. He warned us about looking to our bank balance for security, about the spiritual darkness that comes from being tightfisted with money, and about money taking God's place as the chief pursuit of our life. He warned us about money becoming an idol, and He told us that money has the power to direct, and re-direct our passions (Matthew 6).

Money is one of the few things that can be either a servant or a master to us. When money is our master, we worry over getting or having what we think we need for today and being anxious about having enough for the future. In short, we never have enough. When money is our servant and the Lord is our master, we are satisfied, aware of abundance, willing to share, and confident as we look to the future.

If you look at the role money plays in your life and see a master more than a servant, you will find freedom through giving to the Lord as an act of worship. Giving is a quick reversal of who/what has authority over you. When you give to the Lord, you are placing the thing that controlled you at the feet of the Lord, who sets you free!

1. Do you agree that money can be a servant or a master? Why or why not?

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2. Have you experienced what Jesus said, "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also?" What did that look like for you?

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3. How has your relationship with money changed as you have grown in being a giver?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, I want to find freedom and stay free from the control money exercises over me. You alone are my God. You alone set me free. Please help me be, more and more, a cheerful giver, and grant me contentment for today and confidence for my future. I pray this in Jesus' name, AMEN.*

# God Wants to be Worshiped

John 4:21-24

### Read John 4:21-24

What would you call a person who pursues the attention and adoration of others? What would you think about a person who said, "I want you to worship me." Whether your answer comes from a place of pity, concern, hurt, or disgust, your answer will include the things that are wrong with this person, why it is wrong that they want worship from you, and the harm that will come to you if you give them what they ask.

God desires worship and seeks worshipers, and it is right and good for Him to do so. God Himself is the highest good. If He were to place anyone or anything above Himself, it would be idolatry. At the same time, God desires His best for us. If we put anyone or anything above God, it is to our detriment. There is nothing and no one who can fill God's place in our lives. So, He seeks worshipers because He alone is worthy of worship; and, He wants us to worship Him so that we can experience His best in our lives.

## Questions for Reflection

1. Are you comfortable with God's desire to be worshiped? Why or why not?

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2. The reading for today says that we must worship God in spirit and in truth. What do you understand that to mean?

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3. Blaise Pascal observed that there is a God-shaped empty space in every human heart and it can only be filled by God as He has made Himself known through Jesus. Does this observation ring true with your experience? In what ways?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, You are worthy of my worship. I want to worship You in spirit and in truth. I want to be the kind of worshiper that You seek. And, I want Your best in my life. As I exalt You, will You please bless me? I want the blessing of knowing You, of being with You, of being Fathered by You, and I want to live in the blessings that You give to Your children. I pray this in Jesus' name, AMEN.*

# WEEK 5

LOVING OTHERS WELL

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**Weeks 1-4 of this devotional are about our relationship with God – how He initiates with us in Jesus and through His Word and how we respond to Him in prayer, worship, and obedience. As we say “yes” to God, He blesses us so that we can be a blessing to others.** This week, we are considering our relationships with other Christian people and how we can have more meaningful relationships with each other. Don't miss the sequence of these subjects. The kind of relationships we are considering this week are only enjoyed amongst people who are growing in their relationship with God.

# Qualities of a Christian Friendship, Part 1

Philippians 1:1-11

**Read Philippians 1:1-11**

God made us to be in relationship with other people. We each have different desires and capacities for relationship and some of us need to be by ourselves sometimes, but none of us were made to be alone. God’s best for us always involves being in relationship with other people.

Christian people need Christian friendships. Most of us know people who are Christians – maybe someone who works out at your gym and you’ve seen them at church, or another parent you chat with at your kid’s band concert and they wear Christian t-shirts. But a Christian friendship has qualities that go beyond being involved in the same things and knowing you each have faith. God uses Christian friendships to give us spiritual strength, energy, and stability, and through these relationships, His purposes in and for our lives move forward.

The first quality of a Christian friendship is that the gospel is foundational in the friendship. Other friendships are built on common interests or hobbies – we became friends because we are history buffs or enjoy riding bikes. There is nothing wrong with “common interest” friends. But the foundation of a Christian friendship is our shared confidence in Jesus as our Savior and our common desire to follow Him. If you are going to experience and live out God’s best for you, you need friendships that have a gospel foundation.

## Questions for Reflection

1. Do you agree that we need relationships? Why or why not?

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2. Do you see a difference between a Christian friendship and having friends who are Christians? If so, how would you describe this difference?

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3. In the Bible reading for today, the author calls people “partners in the gospel.” What do you think that kind of friendship looks like?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, thank you for the friendships I have. You have brought good people into my life, and I want to be a good friend to them. Help me be the kind of friend who brings Your best into the lives of my friends. I’m praying this in Jesus’ name, AMEN.*

# Qualities of a Christian Friendship, Part 2

Luke 10:1

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**Read Luke 10:1**

Growing in your faith and living it out well is, by God’s design, a group project. He has made it so that we need others and they need us, and He has made it so that we need specific things from each other.

We need friends who will expect us to grow spiritually. They refuse to let us stay the same, to live in our comfort zone, to coast. Instead, they care about, encourage, and cheer us on in living out our commitment to Jesus.

We need friends who are faithful to pray for us and to pray with us, who will not let us settle for a life lived in our own strength, with our own wisdom. Instead, they seek for and with us the blessing and power of God for our lives.

We need friends who show us grace. We all struggle. We all fail. And our world is full of people who are quick to criticize us, point at our mistakes, and make us face the consequences. We need friends who will point us to God’s grace, pick us up, dust us off, and get us going in a good direction again.

## Questions for Reflection

1. From the Bible reading for today, why do you think Jesus sent His disciples out two by two?

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2. Are there qualities of a Christian friend that you would add to this list? Why are those qualities important to you?

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3. Do you have friends like this? To whom are you a friend like this?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, thank you for having more and better for me than living life alone. I want to have and be a Christian friend. Some of my friends are reading and praying the same thing as I am today. May this little devotional spur conversation and next steps in us helping each other grow in and live out our faith. I pray this in Jesus’ name, AMEN.*

# Love Each Other Deeply

1 Peter 4:7-11

## Read 1 Peter 4:7-11

We all have shallow friendships where all involved engage when it is easy, convenient, and comfortable. But if we only have shallow friendships, we are missing out. God offers us a better, deeper kind of friendship that takes more from us, but also gives more to us.

Richard Groves, paraphrasing and explaining part of our Bible reading for today said, "If you are to survive as individuals and as a body, you are going to have to stick together. You are going to have to love one another and take care of one another. The reason that is important is because when we hurt each other, even when we hurt each other very badly, love provides a way to restore the relationship to the way it was."<sup>1</sup>

Our reward for the hard work of loving each other deeply is getting to participate in relationships where we do not give or receive what we deserve, instead we give and receive from others what we most need, what is best for us.

<sup>1</sup> From a sermon preached at Wake Forest Baptist Church, April 20, 2008

## Questions for Reflection

1. Can you think of a time where a friend gave you what you needed, not what you deserved? What was that like for you?

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2. What are some attitudes or qualities we must have for our relationships to be restored after one of us has hurt the other?

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3. In the Bible reading for today, we are told to make loving each other deeply the highest priority. Why do you think that is?

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## Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for loving me deeply. You do not give me what I deserve, You give me what I need. I want to be the kind of person who loves others deeply. I want to have healthy relationships that honor You. I don't want my friendships stuck being shallow. Please give me and my friends what we need to love each other deeply. I pray this in Jesus' name, **AMEN.**

# Spurring Each Other On

## Hebrews 10:24-25

### **Read Hebrews 10:24-25**

Just as a fire dies down when you separate the embers, so faith dies down when we separate ourselves from other Christians.

We all want to love others well and be a blessing to the people around us, but living out these priorities is not natural to us. We are naturally inclined to put ourselves first and to pursue what is easy and comfortable for us. Left to ourselves, we will drift from our Christian priority of others toward our natural priority of self.

Christian friends keep us moving toward our Christian priority. When we gather, worship, and pray, we remind each other of what is most important; and, in our authenticity, vulnerability, and transparency with one another, we are mutually encouraged to walk away from self toward others.

## Questions for Reflection

1. What have you learned about the importance of gathering and being together with other Christians during the pandemic?

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2. Would you describe yourself right now as more drifting toward self or more being spurred on to love and do good deeds?

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3. Why do some Christian friendships spur us on more than others? What elements are present in the friendships that have helped you most?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, thank you for my Christian friends. Thank you for their encouragement in living out Your priorities for my life. Help me see the ways that I can encourage them and spur them on to love and good deeds. Together, we want to show your love to our community so that people know You better. I pray this in Jesus' name, AMEN.*

# Serving Each Other in Love

1 Peter 4:10,11

**Read 1 Peter 4:10,11**

One version of the 80/20 rule says that, in any organization, 20% of the people are doing 80% of the work. If you surveyed pastors, they would tell you that the 80/20 rule is a pretty accurate description of their church. 20% of the people are doing 80% of the ministry the church is accomplishing. If you surveyed the people of the church who are not involved in ministry, a low percentage would confess laziness, another small percentage would admit to being part of the church only for what they get out of it, but the large majority of the uninvolved would say they do not believe they have much to offer.

God has given you a “spiritual gift” that you can use to serve others. You might think you have little to offer, but that is not true. You might need to do some work to figure out what your gift is, fine tune it, and find the place you feel most effective, but you have a gift from God that contributes to the spiritual well-being of others. When you are putting this gift to good use, our church is better, our community benefits, and you have spiritual satisfaction that comes from being faithful with the gift God has given you.

## Questions for Reflection

1. How do you feel about “ministry” being for regular people, not just pastors?

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2. Do you know what your spiritual gift might be?

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3. How is our church benefitting from you being part of it?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, You give good gifts to your children. Thank you for the spiritual gifts that you have given to me. Help me fine-tune them and find ways to use them that benefit our church and bless our community. Give me a heart to serve, and please let me see some ways that my service is helping other people see You and know You better. I pray this in Jesus' name, AMEN.*



# WEEK 6

LOOKING OUT FOR YOUR NEIGHBOR

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**Every gift God gives to us, He gives to us to both enjoy and to share.** These past 5 weeks, we've embraced His gifts of the gospel, the Bible, prayer, worship, and Christian friendships. God has given us these things to enjoy, but also to share. If our enjoyment of His gifts stays within the walls of our church and the circles of our small groups, we are missing out on the greatest and highest enjoyment of God's gifts – sharing them with our neighbors, both near and far! This week we are going to walk out of our Christian comfort zone toward our friends and neighbors, being very intentional to show and share what God is offering them – the same things He has already given to us in Jesus.

# Who is My Neighbor?

Acts 17:24-27

**Read Acts 17:24-27**

Who is my neighbor? It depends on why we ask. If we ask this question hoping to limit our spiritual responsibility or narrow our interactions so that we engage only with people we like, people we are comfortable with, etc. – then Jesus’ answer to the question is, “every person in need is your neighbor” (See Luke 10:25-37).

If we ask this as a practical question – “of all the people in need, which ones am I supposed to serve, to help, to love?” – then Jesus’ answer is “look around, who do you see?” (John 4:35) We cannot see everyone in need, but if we will look around, we will see someone in need.

You are alive at this particular time in history, living in this part of the world, as a part of your particular family, doing life in this community, not by chance, but, by Divine appointment. God has placed you here, now, so that you will seek Him, and, having found Him, be part of your neighbors seeking and finding Him, too. So, look around. Who is your neighbor? It is the person in need that you can see.

## Questions for Reflection

1. How do you feel about God intentionally putting you in this place at this time?

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2. Who do you see? When you look around our community, is there a particular person or group of people that you notice (refugees, single moms, vulnerable children, etc.)?

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3. What does it mean to be a neighbor to someone?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, I am amazed at Your ability to orchestrate the time and place each person lives. I'm grateful that You make things so that I would seek and find You. Today, I am asking You, "Who is my neighbor?" As I look around our community, please help me see the people that I can help seek and find You. Please show me how to be a neighbor to them. I pray this in Jesus' name, AMEN.*

# Prayer

2 Corinthians 4:4-7

**Read 2 Corinthians 4:4-7**

We show the love of Jesus to our neighbors, but, those who are spiritually blind are unable to see His love. Until God heals their spiritual eyes, all they can see in our acts of love is people being nice. Our world is full of people doing nice things for others, spiritually blind people cannot see the difference between Jesus’ love flowing through His people and human love expressed through human kindness.

Supernatural problems require supernatural solutions. Since Satan has blinded our neighbors to God’s love for them, the only way they are going to be able to see is for God to heal them. Prayer is our part in the healing God brings to our neighbors.

Prayer is the first work of God’s people. Prayer moves the Lord to work on behalf of those we are praying for (1 Timothy 2:1-5). Our prayers move Him to declare “let there be light” into the spiritual blindness and darkness of our neighbors’ eyes so that they can see. And as their spiritual eyes come open, they can see the love of Jesus shining through us and are drawn to the warmth of His light and life.

## Questions for Reflection

1. Do you agree that all good deeds look the same to spiritually blind people? Why or why not?

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2. Respond to this statement: “Prayer is the first work of God’s people.”

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3. Who are you hoping sees the love of Jesus through you? Whose spiritual eyes are you asking God to heal?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, thank you for making Your light shine into my heart and life. I’m grateful that you have healed me so that I can see You. I have friends and neighbors who need this same healing. Please call me to pray for them. Help me know and take my next steps in prayer being my first spiritual work on behalf of my neighbors. In Jesus’ name, AMEN.*

# Serve

Mark 10:45 and Luke 22:27

**Read Mark 10:45 and Luke 22:27**

The Good News about Jesus flows along the lines of service and humility. There is a strong connection between serving and effectively sharing God’s salvation. If we want our friends, near and far, to experience salvation, we must become their servants.

Jesus refused titles, rejected the pedestals others would put Him on, and said “no” to positions of power. Instead, He interacted with social outcasts, fed those who were hungry, and touched those who were contagious. He willingly served us so that we could find forgiveness and salvation. And, He frequently pointed us to His own willingness to serve because He wants us to follow His lead.

We cannot push the gospel on people. We can (maybe) push religion on them. We might be able to make them conform to a set of moral rules for a little while... but we cannot push the gospel on people. Jesus never told His followers to grab position or power and then use your position and power to share the gospel. He told us to serve because the gospel flows freely along the lines of service and humility.

## Questions for Reflection

1. Would you rather be served by someone or serve someone? Why do you think that is?

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2. What connections do you see between being a servant and accurately and effectively sharing the Good News about Jesus?

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3. Who served you in such a way that you found God’s forgiveness and rescue that He offers in Jesus?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, I'm really grateful for the salvation You have given me, and I want other people to receive this, too. I would like You to use me to share Your salvation with my neighbors. Please help me follow Jesus into being a servant, and help me see how I can serve them in ways that show Your love for them. Jesus, thank you for serving me. I pray these things in Your name, AMEN.*

# Do Biblical Justice

Zechariah 7:9-10, Micah 6:8, and James 2:14-17

### Read Zechariah 7:9-10, Micah 6:8, and James 2:14-17

God calls and commands His people to do Biblical justice. Biblical justice is very different from and superior to the “social justice” being called for in our culture today. Biblical justice is rooted in the character of God, who is just, loves justice, and commands His people to do justice. Biblical justice is also rooted in the inherent dignity of each human being because we are all created in God’s image and called to honor His image in each other.

As God’s people, we get the privilege of “doing Biblical justice.” We get to help establish and restore people who have been wronged – whether by individuals or systems. We get to intervene – helping feed the hungry and clothe the naked, stepping in when people have less than what they deserve as Divine image-bearers. We have the privilege of preventing injustice – getting ahead of issues that result in injustice – things like helping other people’s kids catch up and keep up at school, or helping refugee neighbors learn how to navigate public transportation. We get to speak into systems that exploit vulnerable image-bearers and speak up for people who cannot speak for themselves.<sup>1</sup>

We are God’s people. We get to be His voice and His help, doing what is right and just for those who are vulnerable and unprotected in our unjust world.

<sup>1</sup> CCC’s understanding of Biblical justice has been heavily influenced by the works of Dr. Eric Mason, Dr. Tony Evans, and Dr. Tim Keller. The content of today’s devotional leans heavily on ideas they have presented in multiple books, articles, and podcasts.

## Questions for Reflection

1. What comes to mind when you think about doing justice?

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2. Have you experienced someone doing Biblical justice for you? If so, what was that like for you?

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3. Is there a vulnerable person or group of people that come to mind when you think about doing Biblical justice? If so, why do you think they come to your mind?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, I honor You as the God who is just. You delight in what is fair, right, and good for all of us as people made in Your image. I am saddened by the injustice in our world, and I am sorry for any part I might play in that even unknowingly. We want Your kind of justice. We pray what Jesus taught us, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Please help me see where I can do Your kind of justice in our community and grant me the courage to do it. I pray this in Jesus’ name, AMEN.*

# Share Good News

Matthew 28:18-20 and 1 Corinthians 15:1-4

**Read Matthew 28:18-20 and 1 Corinthians 15:1-4**

“The talk without the walk is hypocrisy, but the walk without the talk is a mystery” (Author Unknown).

Christian people who live out their faith – who “see” their neighbors, pray for them, serve them, pursue justice for them – without speaking about Jesus leave a really big question unanswered: Why? Why do you care about me? Why do you help me? Why are you good to me?

If we don’t answer those questions for our neighbors, they’ll answer the questions for themselves, and their answer will give credit to us. We are not looking for credit and we know we do not deserve credit, but we’ll end up getting the credit if we do not point them to the One who truly sees them, knows them, and loves them. Not only will we get credit we don’t want, but we will also miss out. We’ll miss out on the joy of talking about Jesus, our Savior. We’ll miss out on the strengthening of our faith that comes from talking about what we believe. Our neighbors will miss out. They’ll miss out on this opportunity to thank to the Lord for His care, to honor Him for His love, to trust Him for forgiveness and rescue. They’ll miss out on this opportunity to live out their new-found faith in Christ by seeing their neighbors, praying for them, serving them, and seeking justice for them.

We get to show Jesus’ love to our neighbors and we get to share it with them, too!

## Questions for Reflection

1. Do you agree with the statement that “the walk without the talk is a mystery?” Why or why not?

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2. From the verses we read today, what would you say is the “Good News?”

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3. Is there someone you have shown Jesus’ love to and are now feeling the need to share it, too?

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## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, thank you for this incredible privilege of being able to tell my neighbors about Jesus. I want them to know what He has done for me. I want them to have this same kind of life that I’m receiving. Help me overcome my fears, my hesitations, and my doubts. Help me see openings in conversations to share Your Good News with people I love. I’m praying this in Jesus’ name, AMEN.*

# NOTES

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