

Northwest Baptist Church



**Growing Together:
Daily Devotions by
Disciples for Disciples**

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Week 1
Passionate
Worship

*The mission of Northwest is to help more and more people
become passionate worshipers and gifted servants of
Jesus Christ.*

Why Do We Worship God?

By Paul Springer

Read Psalm 99:2-3

Worship is a response to that which the heart treasures. Right worship is our response springing from a heart that treasures the triune God. Worship is expressed through singing, prayer, service, and as both joy and lament. We were created to worship, so we all worship something. But why do we worship God? The psalmist gives three reasons: God is great; God is holy; God is awesome.

Consider: God's greatness extends over not only every person who ever lived but also every single created thing. There is no one, no thing, neither naturally occurring or crafted by man, more deserving of praise than our God. He is holy - without sin, perfect and pure in everything. No one even begins to approach his goodness. And he is awesome. There is nothing that he wants to do that he cannot do. Our almighty Creator is powerful in himself. His incomprehensible, majestic qualities are praise worthy. He alone is worthy of our worship!

Questions for thought

- When did God's majesty last leave you feeling awed?
- When are you most likely to worship God?
- What would help you worship God more authentically and often?

Prayer

Sovereign, Holy, and Almighty God, thank you for creating us to worship. Thank you for being infinitely good, so that we will never run out of reasons to worship. Help me worship You for who You are. You are worthy! Amen.

A Community of Worship

By Aimee Frost

Read Revelation 7:9-10

When I was a Senior in college, I had a roommate from Taiwan. One night I started singing a praise chorus. She said, "I know that song in Mandarin!" She started singing along with me in her own language. I remember getting goosebumps as I experienced a taste of what heaven will be like. We were from two different continents, cultures and languages, but we lifted our voices together to worship God.

Some day people will be gathered from every nation, lifting praise to God. I am so thankful for the glimpses we get of this here on earth. As powerful as these moments are, they are just a taste of the magnificent time of worship to come as we gather around Jesus and together praise him for his gift of salvation.

Questions for thought

- Have you experienced a time of worship that gave you a glimpse of heaven? If so, share this experience with someone.
- What is one way that you can show thankfulness for your salvation through worship?
- How are we changed by worshiping our Lord?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for your gift of salvation. Thank you that we can join with our brothers and sisters in a community of worship. We look forward to gathering from all over the world to give you praise for eternity. Amen

The Joy of Gratitude

By Bill Gaethke

Read Psalm 105:1-2

God calls us to be a people of gratitude and thankfulness. As we humble ourselves before God and show true appreciation for all that our Lord has done for us and provided us with, several things happen. We experience happier, more productive, more Christ-centered, God-glorifying lives.

But we are also to “**make known his deeds among the peoples.**” In ancient Israel people did this by singing psalms, often used in connection with worship in the Temple in Jerusalem to show their thankfulness to God. In addition to singing praises, we are told to “**tell of all his wondrous works,**” making known his deeds so that others may join with us in praising him.

Questions for thought

- Have you ever stopped to reflect upon all the blessings that God has given you? Take a few moments to do just that now.
- The Psalms acknowledge God's hand in all of life. How is it possible to thank him even in the midst of life's challenges? Why is this important?
- Would those around you say you are a grateful person? Do they see joy or dissatisfaction in you?

Prayer

Blessed Lord, let me never forget all that you do for me each and every day. Strengthen me with the joy of my salvation. May I always be thankful for your incredible blessings, that your love may be known and experienced by all those you bring into my life. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Ignited by Divine Fire

By Don Rogers

Read Psalm 111:1-2

Worshiping God is one of the most important and powerful ways to connect directly to God. The walls between God and ourselves are torn down and our hearts become aware of God's nearness.

In Celebration of Discipline, Richard J. Foster writes:

Worship is our response to the overtures of love from the heart of the Father [...] Singing, praying, praising, all may lead to worship, but worship is more than any of them. Our Spirit must be ignited by divine fire.

Worship is a personal engagement and agreement with God. When I worship, I am reminded of how awesome God is. Songs like, *I Am a Friend of God*, *How Great is Our God*, *We Will Feast In the House of Zion*, and *I Really Love the Lord*, encourage me, providing spiritual strength for the week. Worshiping God is not limited to Sundays; it should be a daily response to God's goodness.

Questions for thought

- In what ways have you been renewed through your worship?
- What Scripture verses help you worship God during your daily time with him?
- Why is it important for us to worship God?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, allow me to enter into Your presence in worship. Help me to develop a lifestyle of worship, and be grateful in every situation. I believe that worship can break through barriers in every area of my life. I offer You the praise of my lips and a sacrifice of praise with thanksgiving right now. In Jesus' name. Amen.

His Gift, Our Gift

By Kathy Vogel

Read 1 Chronicles 16:23-25

We worship God because he deserves it, he commands it, and it is good for us as we acknowledge our place in relationship with our King. His inconceivable sacrifice paid for our sins though he was without sin. Christ's greatest, most spectacular, and truly undeserved gift to us is himself.

We struggle in our daily lives to live in full awareness of who Jesus is – our Savior. What is our response to the reality of this truly awesome gift? It is right for us to recognize him as the gift giver, thanking and praising him, and giving him the glory and honor.

When we willingly give our lives for him, ministering in his power, loving others as he loves us, that is our gift of worship back to him.

Questions for thought

- Do you express your feelings in your daily life at home, at work, or with family? Do others see your love of Christ and how you live daily?
- Self-examination can be painful and difficult. What do you think of as worthy to sing praises to?
- What changes in your life do you need to make to put the Lord above all else in your life?

Prayer

Lord, bring me to an understanding of the gifts you have given me that I will willingly use them for honoring you and your Kingdom. I pray my life reflects more each day my love for you and sharing that boldly. Amen.

What Is “Good” Worship?

By Paul Springer

Read John 4:23-24

I can specifically recall times both alone and at church where worship has been amazing. When you think of an amazing time of worship in song, what do you think of? Is it the feeling, the lyrics, the style, the voices around you? God wants worship to be something we love to do. So, what does he desire our worship to be grounded in?

First, the Father desires worship to be “in spirit.” True worship goes beyond our senses. It is not limited to a place or to our physical activity. We were created as both spiritual and physical beings. Worship connects our spirit with God, who is spirit. Second, it is “in truth.” Jesus is the truth. If anything other than Jesus is the object of our devotion, even feelings or emotions, then we worship something other than God. That is idolatry. We are commanded not to worship “gods” of our own design.

Worship springs from the joy of truly knowing God. Praise God for the joy of good, true worship!

Questions for thought

- How do you keep worship from being merely an activity but instead a spiritual encounter with God?
- What truth about God brings you great joy? How do you express that in worship?

Prayer

Lord, thank you for revealing yourself to us so we can worship you in truth. Thank you for allowing us to connect with you through worship not just physically and emotionally but spiritually too. Amen.

Week 2

Gifted

Servants

*The mission of Northwest is to help more and more people
become passionate worshipers and gifted servants of
Jesus Christ.*

Members of One Body

By Dahkai Paasewe

Read Romans 12:4-8

In hospitals, if everyone was a nurse, who would operate or clean? In schools, if everyone was a principal, who would teach or serve lunch? In business, if everyone was a sales rep, who would lead the team to meet quarterly quotas? The Lord designed each of us for *his* glory by giving us spiritual gifts. Just as the body has different functions, we as members of his body also have different functions to contribute to his Great Commission plan. It's all about *him* and *his* kingdom-purpose!

Brother, perhaps, instead of teaching or preaching gifts, God gifted you with hospitality so that you radiate warmth to those visiting church. Sister, instead of leading a ministry, your gifts of mercy heal emotional wounds. Youth, while figuring out how your gifts fit into church life, you are blessing each friend you bring with you to youth group.

Questions for thought

- Are you dissatisfied with your spiritual gifts or ministry? Have you ever considered that perhaps that is how *he* wants to use *you*?
- Are you offering your body, gifts, and talents to the Lord for *his* good pleasure in order to accomplish *his* mission?

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, show me how I can use my gifts and talents to accomplish your kingdom-purpose. Help me not envy others' gifts or ministries but appreciate, value, and edify each gift and person in your body. You created each of us to accomplish your will. Amen.

Using Your Spiritual Gifts

By Bill Gaethke

Read 1 Peter 4:10-11

God graciously and supernaturally gives to every believer at least one spiritual gift at the moment of salvation. A spiritual gift cannot be earned, pursued, or worked up by human desire. It is a gift of God given by the Holy Spirit. But these gifts are not given to bolster our self-worth, and they are not given to us to sit idle within ourselves, for as Scripture commands, we are to exercise our gifts to minister to others (see also 1 Cor. 12:7 - 11).

No Christian is given every spiritual gift, but God expects us to use and develop the gifts he does give us in proportion to our faith. Peter states there are two categories of spiritual gifts. Speaking gifts such as preaching, teaching, prophesying, etc., and serving gifts, such as administration, giving, hospitality, etc. By faithfully using and developing our spiritual gifts, the Holy Spirit brings glory and praise to God through Jesus Christ.

Questions for thought

- How can you identify and encourage the spiritual gifts that others have been given?
- How are you using your gifts to minister to others? Are there ways you could use them better?
- Who receives the glory as you use your God-given gifts? What can you do to point to Christ, giving him all the credit?

Prayer

Dear Holy Spirit, I pray that you would show me clearly what my spiritual gifts are, and how you would have me use and develop them more, so that through them I, through you, will be able to minister to others and will bring glory to Jesus Christ. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Our Differences Keep Us Together

By Noah Frost

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Imagine a world where all of us are computer programmers or mechanics or PE teachers. While some needs would be covered by those skills, we would be lacking a lot.

The Apostle Paul makes the point to the church in Corinth that it is ignorant and shortsighted for everyone to desire the same spiritual gift. God loves variety and created it within the church body for a reason. Like the Corinthian believers, we might also miss a point that Paul makes. Spiritual gifts should not be our greatest desire. Our greatest desire should be the One who gives the gifts, not the gifts themselves.

It is important to know your gifting to help build up the church. But, if we seek fame or notoriety for our gifts, we are misguided. Jesus promised joy, peace, and, sometimes, persecution as we properly live for him. Let us seek to grow in our relationship with our Lord, our heavenly Father, and Christ's Holy Spirit, and learn how to bless others by using the gifts God has given us.

Questions for thought

- Do you know what your spiritual gifts are?
- How have you seen different gifts come together to bless the church?

Prayer

All good and perfect gifts come from you, giver of all gifts. Thank you for inviting us to be a part of your work and allowing us to work with our brothers and sisters to bring your kingdom here. Amen.

The Life of Servanthood

By Paul Springer

Read Philippians 2:5-8

Many of us have heroes in life. People who we strive to be like (or wish we could.) Spiritually, we have heroes of the faith. But heroes can let us down. Sometimes it is safer to have heroes who have died. But in Jesus, we have someone who always got it right. His earthly life, sacrificial death, and his resurrected life were all perfect.

His perfection was not only that he never sinned. Part of his perfection is *how* he lived. He lived as a servant. He did not flaunt his great divinity and mock our weak humanity. Instead, he humbly served. Often we feel like our gifts should be noticed, that our service should be honored. But Jesus shows us a better way. We live as servants because, as we serve our Lord, the world is blessed. Not always easy but so meaningful!

Questions for thought

- How do you view your life in the body of Christ? Is it centered around modeling the servanthood of Jesus?
- How do you handle the hard times in serving others? How quickly does your gaze go to Jesus for strength?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for your example of servanthood. Thank you for the power and privilege you give us to live as servants, too. Help me to look to you and not the praise of others to understand my worth. I am valuable to you. In your name, Amen.

Don't Put God in a Box

By Matt Lee

Read Exodus 35:30-35

A few years ago, I was at a Christian music festival. There were all types of musicians as well as other types of artists. One especially caught my attention – a mime. I thought, “How can a guy in white makeup who is just clowning around glorify God?” But I was intrigued. It was one of the most beautiful, moving, God-honoring pieces of performance art that I have ever seen still to this day. It was obvious that God had filled him with his Spirit.

Today's passage details the construction of the tabernacle. Moses points out all the many contributions from the gathered congregation, from the gold and silver to the many craftsmen to construct and embellish this Holy place. The Lord himself gifted Bezalel and Oholiab with masterful skills to serve him as engravers and designers for the tabernacle.

This is a beautiful image of the entire church using their God given gifts and talents to worship the God of all Creativity.

Questions for thought

- Some Christians doubt that God has given them at least one spiritual gift. Why?
- Have you ever tried to better understand what gifts God has given you?
- How do you encourage others when you see the obvious gifts in their life?

Prayer

God of Infinite Creativity, thank you for the many different gifts you have given all believers. Draw us to a better understanding of our own gifts and help us be encouraging to others. Amen.

Important to God; Important to Each Other

By Noah Frost

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-18

We've all been there. Maybe you were doing a DIY home improvement project. Or, maybe you were just having a really bad day. A hammered thumb, a jammed pinky. All of a sudden, your entire body focuses on that one little appendage.

Paul gives us an interesting and vivid image of what things would be like as he compares our bodies to the Church. He asks us to picture life if our bodies were just a giant eyeball. A lot of functionality would be missing. We see that every part of the body is important. In the same way, every single person in The Body of Christ is equally important.

While I know it's likely that none of us remember to thank the Facilities Team each week for cleaning the toilets, I wager you would go find them quickly if the toilets weren't cleaned. Despite how "behind the scenes" that job is, you're likely focused more on that than the sermon you just heard.

You need others. Others need you. Isn't it amazing that God gifts us in different ways?

Questions for thought

- Are you satisfied with your role in the body? If not, why not? Have you ever wanted a different role?

Prayer

Thank you, Creator God, for the gift of each other. Help me see my brothers and sisters, appreciating their gifts and mine. Let there be no division in the body. And let it start with me. Amen.

Why Are You A Member?

By Paul Springer

Read Ephesians 4:11-16

There are many reasons to be a member of any group, but this is even truer of the church. In this passage, we see one reason: we magnify Jesus by using our gifts within the body life of the church so that others are strengthened to be like him.

This is not just the job of a few. Pastors, teachers, and other leaders equip the members of the church body to do the work of ministry. This is vitally important work.

The imagery here is striking. A boat with no rudder is at the mercy of the wind and waves, as are brothers and sisters in the church who are not being built up in Christ. Our goal is for each of us to bring the best of how God has equipped us to our brothers and sisters so that each part supports, nurtures, and protects the body.

Questions for thought

- Who has invested in me to see that I am growing in Christ? What words describe their approach to church life?
- How can I use my gifts to invest in others' growth so they can be more like Jesus?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for those who have used their gifts to help me grow to be more like You. Thank you for leaders who help equip me now. Help me serve others with my gifts that they may grow to maturity in You. In your name, Amen.

Week 3
More and More
People

*The mission of Northwest is to help more and more people
become passionate worshipers and gifted servants of
Jesus Christ.*

Responding to the Holy Spirit

By Ron Duket

Read Acts 2:38-41

All people everywhere are born with a sin problem. Amazingly, God chose to open the door to salvation with Jesus Christ's death on Calvary. We walk through that door when we repent of our sins. Baptism shows others we've walked through salvation's doorway and stepped into new life.

Repentance means changing one's mind and direction. Like making a "U-Turn," repentance is a complete turn away from sin towards God's righteousness.

Peter warned his listeners to **"Save yourselves from this crooked generation."** When we sin, the Holy Spirit convicts us that we are on the wrong path. That should result in repentance and reconciliation with our God. That day in Acts, three thousand people turned from their sin to God. Throughout history, this promise has held true for all people, everywhere, for all time.

The Holy Spirit is active today. He is reconciling more and more people to himself.

Questions for thought

- How is the Holy Spirit at work in your life today?
- When the Holy Spirit convicts you of sin, do you agree with him by repenting?
- What part can you play in God's design to bring more and more people to himself?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending the Holy Spirit into my life to guide me and kept me focused on you. I pray that others will see you at work in my life and that I can bless others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Brought Back

By Lorie Hegwood

Read Isaiah 43:4-7

How far does God go to bring us back? How does sin, manifested as unbelief in our lives, separate us from God? For much of my life I feared not being perfect, not good enough. This fear led me to attempt suicide several times. I believed fear would always be with me. Was this too far for God to bring me back? No! **“Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?”** (Jeremiah 32:27)

What did God show me to bring me back?

- Who he is.
- Sin’s separating power but Jesus’ power over sin.
- Because of Jesus’s sacrifice, I need fear *nothing*.
- I’m precious and dearly loved (God formed me in my mother’s womb).

How did God bring me back?

- Exchanging Jesus Christ, his one and only son, for me.
- Opening my eyes to his truth and my heart to accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior.

Just as God drew me back, He is drawing people from around the world for his glory.

Questions for thought

- How can we share with others how precious and loved by God they are?
- What is your story of being brought back?
- Is God asking you to share your story with others, especially nonbelievers?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, open my eyes to opportunities and help me to share with others who you are and how you brought me back. In your name I pray, Amen.

Growing Through Loving

By Paul Springer

Read Acts 6:1-7

Do you remember the plant experiment in science class? You put one plant on the window sill and one in a cupboard. And surprise! The one with sunlight grew and the other one did not. As plants need air, water, and sun to grow, churches require a few things to grow. Love is one of those things.

The early church grew as Christ's followers loved those in need, making sure that, regardless of background, if you were in God's family, you were loved and cared for. They showed love by stepping up so the apostles could spend time focused on what God had called them to do. As others saw this culture-crossing love in the church, people flocked to learn why and how Christ's followers express love differently from the world around them. And the church grew. People came to trust Jesus and joined the church because they saw God's love lived out.

Questions for thought

- How could you love someone today in a way that shows them Christ?
- What are some other things a church needs to be able to grow?
- How could showing love through ministering to others expand God's kingdom (see v.7)

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for loving us. Thank you for allowing us to love others. Help me to love so that others see Christ. Grow your church through my love. Amen.

A Sacrifice for All People

By Ron Duket

Read Revelation 5:6-10

The Apostle John wrote about hearing a lion but seeing a lamb. Jesus is both the conqueror and the sacrifice. Jesus conquered Satan's grip on us by taking our place to satisfy our debt. He's the only one who could restore us to God. Why? as God *and* man, he satisfied the debt, once and for all, that had to be paid but that we could not.

When Jesus took the scroll from the hand of God, the heavenly creatures offered their king worship and praise. They sang two truths: 1) Jesus transforms all who believe in him into his kingdom and his priests, and 2) his blood ransoms all his people everywhere for all time.

Questions for thought

- Why is it significant that John heard a lion but saw a lamb?
- How does knowing that our Lord sacrificed himself to save "every tribe and language and people and nation" affect the way you look at sharing the Good News with others?
- What does it mean to me to be a priest in the kingdom of God?

Prayer

Heavenly Father; thank you for being the Lion of Judah, but thank you more for being the Lamb of God. Because of your sacrifice on the cross, I too can "sing a new song". As a priest in Your kingdom, help me to live my life on earth ministering to others, bringing glory to Your name. In Jesus' name, Amen.

God Brings Good out of Adversity

By Joe Saccaro

Read Acts 11: 19-26

After Jesus ascended into heaven, Christ's followers experienced a brief “honeymoon period” during which they were still allowed to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem. Following the stoning of Stephen, the believers scattered to other parts of the Roman empire due to persecution.

But God brought good out of their adversity: Wherever Christians went, they preached the Gospel of reconciliation to God through Jesus. And for the first time in history, that Gospel was being preached to Gentiles as well as Jews.

Imagine, though, the disruption and emotional trauma involved in leaving your family, property, and job behind, and fleeing for your life to a new city. Not only was God with his people through this trial but he was working for his glory and greater kingdom purpose.

Questions for thought

- If sharing your faith necessitated the kind of sacrifices that New Testament Christians experienced, would you share your faith?
- When you are experiencing adversity, do you keep in mind that God is able to bring good out of bad circumstances?
- Christian Jews and Christian Gentiles associated with each other because their common faith trumped their culture. Does your faith lead you to associate with people of other cultures?

Prayer

Holy Father, may I say “Jesus first” today and live it out. May I remember that every good thing in my life is a gift from you. May I remember that I am a steward, not an owner, of my talents and possessions. Amen.

Called to Fish

By Paul Springer

Read Mark 1:16-20

My brother-in-law lives on a lake, and the fishing from his pier is great. My boys' first fishing experience was pretty much just throwing in the line and instantly catching a sunfish. True anglers know it doesn't usually work that way. It often takes a lot of work and patience to reel in a catch.

When Jesus calls us to be fishers of men as he did for Simon and Andrew, it often requires hard work and patience. But that is the most common way God brings people to himself. The way he grows his Church is by his people patiently doing the hard work of evangelism. It is you and me reaching out to others we know with the good news of Jesus Christ's freedom, healing, and reconciliation. The kingdom spreads to people through people.

Questions for thought

- What is the hardest part for you about sharing the gospel with others?
- Much like a fisherman needs certain equipment to fish, what do you think you need to become a good fisher of men? How can Northwest help to equip you with those things?

Prayer

Lord, thank you for calling me to be a part of your work in the world. Please give me the strength and courage to live out that calling by sharing the good news about Jesus with those who need to hear it. In his name, I pray, Amen.

No Room for People Worship

By Dick Adam

Read 1 Corinthians 3:5-9

The church in Corinth was stuck. Instead of focusing on the grace of God and kingdom matters, they had become internally competitive to the point of quarreling and divisions. Groups were pridefully pitting themselves against one another on the basis of which teachers they preferred. They had devolved into a cult of personalities.

The tendency to take our eyes off Christ and instead fall in love with personalities reflects our fleshly nature. As a new Christian, I was influenced by strong, dynamic personalities with great speaking ability. I compared all others unfavorably to them and could not learn from others. I was proud, thinking myself superior to anyone who listened to other teachers.

Such an attitude actually diminishes the power of God. In today's text, the names of Apollos and Paul are mentioned twice each while the name of the "LORD/God" appears *six times*. We see that men and women in the church are properly viewed as fellow-servants of the great God who gives growth and provides results.

Notice that God rewards His servants not on the basis of the *results* of their labor, but on their *faithfulness* to their tasks (v8, 4:2 ,5).

Questions for thought

- What are some warning signs that we are elevating teachers over God?
- How can we combat that tendency?

Prayer

Lord, forgive us when we elevate people above You. Help each of us to fulfill our kingdom roles for Your glory alone. Amen.

Week 4

Disciples

Intentionally growing to be made more like Jesus.

The Challenge of Being a Disciple

By Paul Springer

Read Matthew 10:23-25

Jesus does not call us to the easy life. He warned his disciples that they would be persecuted and maligned. If we want to be disciples of Jesus, we must be willing to walk the hard road with him. If we never experience any opposition because we are a disciple of Jesus, we may need to ask ourselves if we really are following our teacher.

The problem is we all struggle with the desire for comfort. When the hard times come, we often ask, “Why me?”

But Jesus reminds us that the disciple is not above his teacher. Jesus was perfect, yet his detractors called him Beelzebul, the prince of demons. We are imperfect but we often expect better treatment than our Lord. O, how we need Jesus, even to help us humbly follow him.

Questions for thought

- How do Jesus Christ’s followers share in his sufferings and participate in his glory?
- Is being like Christ “enough” for you?
- How can you prepare so that when the hard times come you will continue to follow him?
- Can the people around you see Jesus clearly enough in your life that they know you are his disciple?

Prayer

Dear Jesus, please teach me today to be a disciple. Even if the day is hard, help me follow you. Help me make it clear to others that I am yours. In your name, I pray. Amen.

Straight from the Top

By Matt & Bonnie Lee

Read Matthew 28:18-20

Have you ever seen a movie where an ordinary person tries to break into an important meeting with an urgent message? But the security guards stop them saying, "You can't go in there." The messenger's next words open doors, "I must deliver this message! It comes straight from the President of the United States of America."

What made the difference? The messenger did not appeal to his or her own authority. It was the authority of the one who sent them that made the message important. Jesus Christ commands his followers to go to all nations with his message. We go on *his* authority and deliver *his* message.

What is this important message? God's ultimate purpose is to save people, from every nation, tribe, and tongue for his glory. We are saved as we trust that Jesus Christ graciously died in our place to reconcile us to him. Now we are free to live for him, growing in him as we walk by his Spirit and tell others what he's shown us so they too can live in freedom. That *is* Good News!

Questions for thought

- Do you feel inadequate to deliver the Good News? Whose authority do you appeal to?
- Are you experiencing Christ's freedom?

Prayer

Almighty Savior, no message is more worthy to proclaim than your healing, reconciling, liberating message. Help us trust your authority and presence as we lovingly share with others what you have shown us. Amen.

Looking for Love

By Aimee Frost

Read John 13:34-35

God commands us to love each other in the same way that he loves us. This is an unconditional love. As we love and care for each other, despite our faults and failures, we show something rare to the world.

This concept of unconditional love has been a revolutionary thought for many of my students, as I tell them that God loves them, despite their sin. As I continue to care for and love them, whether they behave or not, they are able to get a taste of what God's unconditional love can be like when they come to know him. They also see the way that the teachers love and care for each other. As they continue to see the love we show to each other, they will prayerfully come to know this unconditional love, personally in their hearts and lives.

Questions for thought

- What is one way you show love to those around you?
- How do we continue to show love even when others fail us?
- Why is the kind of love Christ commanded his followers to show each other so impactful?

Prayer

Lord, please help us to show your genuine, unconditional love to the world through our words and actions. As we minister in your name, help others to realize your love pouring into their lives through our actions. Amen.

Sanctify - Sanctified - Sanctification

By Don Soderberg

Read John 17:18-23

Sanctify - *To set apart for a special use or purpose. To make holy or sacred.*

I was very blessed to have a Christian mother who understood the importance of a church home for her children. Being raised in the church from an early age was a wonderful thing. The problem for me at times was “church words.” Propitiation. Sanctification. Righteousness. Transgressions. They were words that I heard regularly but never fully comprehended.

It’s a wonderful thing to grow studying the Bible, to understand the beauty of these verses more and more. Christ died for each of us and set us apart, individually, for his special purpose. He died to make us holy and to restore our relationship with the Father, the creator of everything.

Truth - *The word of God, lived out as we read, hear, understand, and apply it to our lives.*

We do not make ourselves holy. Only through Jesus’ sacrifice, can we be sanctified. We draw closer to God by reading his word, hearing his word, and understanding and applying his word. It is only his revealed truth that has the power to change each of us.

Questions for thought

- How are you acting on something God has shown you recently in his word?
- If we don’t save ourselves, what is our part in becoming more like our Lord?

Prayer

Giver of Truth, change us daily to be more and more like you. Give us an unquenchable desire for your truth that will change us! Amen.

Whatever the Cost

by Paul Springer

Read Luke 9:57-62

My wife and I were given gift cards to a very fancy steak house. It was the kind of place that has no prices on the menu because if you have to ask the price, you don't have enough money to eat there. It is the only time I have gone out to eat, and had no idea what my final cost would be until the end. But the meal itself - fantastic!

Being a disciple of Jesus is similar. There is a high cost to following Jesus. In some parts of the world, it will cost you your life. It may require us to leave family as missionaries or give up comforts for the sake of others. Jesus calls us not to look back and question the cost. Why? Because He is worth it. No earthly cost outweighs the eternal joy of following Jesus. So press on, you may not know the cost ahead of time, but the wedding feast of the lamb will be fantastic!

Questions for thought

- What does being a Christian cost you?
- What joys offset the costs of following Christ?

Prayer

Jesus, I want to follow you regardless of the cost. But sometimes, it is hard not to know what it will cost to obey your call to follow you. Help me remember the joy both now and for eternity that makes anything you ask of me worth it all. In your name, I pray, Amen.

Why All the Suffering?

By Rick Scaggs

Read 1 Peter 2:20-23

We suffer for different reasons. Sometimes it's our own fault, sometimes it's a spiritual attack, sometimes from living in a fallen world. Yet other times, we suffer because we follow Christ. Years ago, my wife and I were convicted by Jesus to truly live for him. When we stopped all the partying, we lost our two best friends. They didn't want "Jesus people" in their lives.

We can expect to be punished for doing wrong, to "pay our dues." But we say something powerful when we do God's will, suffer for it, and endure it. Our faith pleases God (see Matt. 5:11-12).

When Christ was spat on and cursed he did not do the same. He didn't threaten to "pay back" but he left judgment to his Father, the one who judges justly. Because of our love for Christ, we Christians can choose to accept the unfairness and unjust suffering we endure. What a tiny price to pay for being followers of Jesus.

Questions for thought

- What does suffering for Christ mean to you? What does that look like in your own life?
- What does doing God's will and enduring suffering tell others?
- Why is God pleased by that response?

Prayer

Dear Father God, I pray that if I am scorned, persecuted or rejected by others for loving Jesus, that I will endure it. I pray that my response causes others to wonder who you are. Help me endure until the end. Amen.

Summer Camp Every Day

By Matt Lee

Read Acts 2:42-47

For many summers as a teenager, I spent a solid week at baseball camp. I loved it! We got up in the morning and put on our uniforms and cleats before we even went to breakfast. We did drills and played games to improve our skills. The older kids would help the younger kids learn the game through drills and teaching. We had coaches who had played in the major leagues. And at night after dinner we would watch old world series games together. We were immersed in baseball! At the end of the week we were all much better players, and we wished it would never end.

Acts 2:42-47 captures a glimpse of the Early Church and the believers living their lives together. I can picture them getting up in the morning excited about the day. Eating together and being together. Older ones taught new converts to live this new way of life. The Apostles had even been in the big leagues – they'd walked with Jesus! I imagine at night they would gather to tell stories, encouraging and praying for each other. Nothing else compared to living out the gospel with each other!

Questions for thought

- What would you say is the best part of living the Christian life?
- Do you think others would identify you as a Christ-follower?
- Why are our habits important?

Prayer

Lord, thank you for surrounding me with other believers. Make us joy-filled Christians who want nothing more than you. Amen.

Week 5
Intentionally
Growing

Intentionally growing to be made more like Jesus.

Flee to Fight, Pursuit of Godly Perseverance

By Lorie Hegwood

Read 1 Timothy 6:11-12

Sometimes we must flee to fight. "What?!", you might ask. Yes! Once we accept the LORD Jesus Christ as our personal savior we have everything we need to pursue and take hold of godly behavior and perseverance. 2 Peter 1:3 says, **"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence."** As we grow in Christ, he teaches us when to flee and when to fight.

Growing up I learned to flee interacting with people when it appeared that there would be a conflict. Not good behavior to build relationships. Flight and avoidance were our family theme. Friendships and family relationships were superficial at best. I never learned to persevere in anything. God has and is changing me. The Lord is teaching me to persevere by fleeing the things that are not of him and to fight the good fight of Faith by pursuing him and his righteousness. Matthew 6:33 says, **"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you."**

Questions for thought

- What are you facing today that is keeping you from pursuing Christ and persevering in him?
- Are you fleeing or fighting in your own strength?

Prayer

LORD, help me to flee the things in my life that are not of you. Help me to pursue Your good fight of faith. Amen.

Seeking Peace Through Godly Speech

By Joe Saccaro

Read Psalm 34:11-14

The writers of scripture did not emphasize ideas by using colored ink, or **bold**, *italicized* print. They emphasized God's imparted truths by repeating them. The words we speak are powerful so scripture is filled with commands to harness them for peace.

In today's passage we read, "*Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit.*" Other inspired writers wrote,

- *Whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God...* (1 Peter 4:11)
- *The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice.* (James 3:9)
- *By the mouth of a fool comes a rod for his back, but the lips of the wise will preserve them.* (Proverbs 14:3)

Dozens of times per day, we choose to indulge in the devilish pleasure of sarcasm or contempt, or the godly joy of speaking the truth in love. Today, choose peace, truth and love.

Questions for thought

- Why does ungodly speech give us pleasure? What does this say of our values?
- Has anyone ever rescued you from a bad decision or an emotional crisis by speaking the truth in love?
- Who can you bless today by speaking the truth in love?

Prayer

Holy Father, even unbelievers understand that "with great power comes great responsibility." May I use the power of speech today to express your love and further your kingdom. In your Son's name I pray. Amen.

Growth Is a Community Effort

By Paul Springer

Read Hebrews 12:14-17

The Marines have a motto “Until they are home, no man left behind.” Each Marine is considered critical to the success of the mission. The mission of the church is even more critical. This passage points out that we strive together so that we arrive together.

But it is easy to see how this could be very challenging. Striving for holiness sometimes means confronting each other’s sins. Helping each other kill the roots of bitterness can make us defensive. Confronting sexual immorality is intensely personal and outside our comfort zone.

The stakes - life separated from Christ - are too high to avoid the challenge. We need each other to see the Lord, to obtain God’s grace, to inherit his blessing. Confronting sin must be done with Christ’s compassion, wisdom, and courage. May we, as a church, leave no one behind!

Questions for thought

Which is harder for you - helping others with their sin or having them help you with yours?

What are some key character qualities you need to grow in to both strive for peace (the unity of the church) and be willing to work together to confront each other’s sin?

Prayer

Most Holy God, I acknowledge I need your help in my life. Thank you for establishing your Church to be a key way to help me. Help me to love my fellow members so much that I could not stand to see them left behind. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

Growing for Life

By Kathy Vogel

Read Philippians 3:12-16

Having read this passage many times, I realize how patient the Lord is with each of us. I can see how far he has brought me and how far I have to go. Scripture speaks to me one truth today and tomorrow that same passage speaks his truth about another matter.

Life happens, big and small events happen. I find myself asking him to help me understand things through his eyes, not mine. What he is teaching me about himself, about myself. Learning how to navigate life by his will and not my will. Especially now with navigating my cancer. So I keep holding on to him and running towards him to win the prize which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Our goal is to keep living in faith and running towards Jesus, growing in his words for his glory and honor. Our Lord is full of grace, truth, and love for those who trust and believe, and seek him.

Questions for thought

- What has the Lord recently revealed to you from his word?
- What does pressing on toward the goal look like in your life?
- Do you find it hard to experience the freedom Christ intends for you?

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for your patience and grace as we navigate through this time on earth. That we intentionally allow you to grow us – that we never stop seeking your face, sunrise to sunset, teach us as only you can do. Amen.

For the Bible Tells Me So

By Don Soderberg

Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17

I have been blessed to travel around our world. Among these travels were places where the Apostle Paul preached and wrote his letters. The first place was Greece where Paul addressed the Athenians. He talked about the statues to their gods, noting there was one to an “unknown god.” How incredible to stand where Paul taught and preached!

Next, I was able to go into the Roman prison cell where Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy. He was physically abused and hurting and knew that his time on earth would end soon.

Many of his friends had abandoned him. Most of us would have been full of self-pity. Yet, Paul was still full of love for Christ’s church and followers. He wrote these beautiful words about the Bible and how it proves itself to be true. He explained how the New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old Testament and how all of these truths can lift us up in the most trying of times. Amazing!

Questions for thought

- When you are looking for “practical” answers, do you look to scripture?
- Scripture was written to communities of people. Are you in groups that help you work out what scripture means?

Prayer

Author of Life, we confess that your Holy Word should have more impact on our lives. Help us see your scripture like Paul did, that we might be “complete, equipped for every good work.”

Try It. You'll Like It!

By Dick Adam

Read Hebrews 5:11-6:1

All of us who are in Christ have been “born again into a living hope” (1 Peter 1:3). Just as a new baby is born into a world full of things to discover, so we are born spiritually into a whole new realm – the kingdom of God! Children love to learn new things, and baby Christians are hungry to learn about their new life and the God who has saved them.

Unfortunately, for some Christians this hunger for spiritual growth can begin to wane. The recipients of this letter had become “dull of hearing” and needed their appetite revved-up.

The writer tells us the way to ensure spiritual growth is to digest the “elementary doctrine of Christ.” This passage points out two ways to do this. First, feed on the solid food found only in the word of God. Take advantage of opportunities to participate in group bible studies to supplement individual time in scripture. Second, practice discernment in everyday life by applying the truths learned from God’s word.

Questions for thought

- Babies don’t always transition easily from milk to solid foods. Have you had hard times giving up milk?
- Just as mothers introduce their children to new foods, do you have someone helping you experience *solid food*?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, encourage me to grow to greater maturity as your disciple. And challenge me to use my gifts to encourage my brothers and sisters to spiritual maturity. Amen.

Because He Lives

By Don Soderberg

Read Philippians 1:6-11

One of my favorite hymns is "Because He Lives." For me, the best part is the second verse:

How sweet to hold a newborn baby, and feel the pride and joy he gives.

But greater still the calm assurance, this child can face uncertain times because He lives.

I still tear up when I hear this song. Paul, when he wrote his letters to the churches, considered them to be newborn babies in their faith. He was proud and joyful in their newfound faith but wanted to be sure that they had proper spiritual nourishment to grow into strong disciples of Christ. He wanted them to understand the truths of God's love; and through those truths and lessons, they, and we, can face uncertain times because He lives!

Questions for thought

- In verse 7, Paul talks about being imprisoned. He literally was in chains. What kind of chains are you dealing with?
- What "good works" is God doing in your life as you grow to reflect him more and more?
- Are you confident that God is actively at work in your life? If yes, share this with someone today. If no, pray to see him at work.

Prayer

Lord, I pray that sin's chains will no longer defeat me. Let your words lift me up and carry me through difficult times. Thank you that we can be "confident that he who began a good work in [us] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ." Amen.

Week 6
Be More Like
Jesus

Intentionally growing to be made more like Jesus.

A Call to Imitate

By Rick Scaggs

Read 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1

As Christ's disciples, our first priority is to bring glory to God our Father. When we imitate Christ, we reveal our God to those around us. The Apostle Paul set an example for us to follow. As he imitated Christ, so we can imitate Paul.

Paul encouraged disciples to consider their actions, to ask ourselves, "Will this action hurt my testimony? Will I offend other believers? Will I make a brother or sister stumble?" We do not want to cause anyone to close their ears to God's words on our account. Our words and actions can harm our testimony or point others to our Lord. Disciples consider the eternal consequences of their actions.

Questions for thought

- Are you keeping our Lord in mind before you act, or react, to life's circumstances? What's facing you today that you need to ask for his guidance to approach?
- Do you consider the impact your words will have on a certain person, group of people, or those from backgrounds different from your own?
- What are some motives that cause people to talk about God? What motivates you?

Prayer

Dear Father God, creator of all: I pray that these words I have read will help me serve you and bring you glory. Help me not cause anyone to stumble, or doubt, because of my words or actions. Dear Holy Spirit, I pray that I always seek your help. In Christ's name, Amen.

Copycats

By Matt Lee

Read Ephesians 5:1-2

My neighbors have three kids. It is a joy to see them interact with their parents as they work and play outside together. Yesterday, the dad was mowing the grass on the riding lawn mower. and the 5 year old daughter was on his lap. She was so happy to be doing what dad was doing. Both boys are also frequently doing whatever the dad is doing. All three children want to imitate their dad. Learning as they watch. Doing what he does. Acting how he acts.

This is the picture Paul was trying to give the Church at Ephesus. Paul is not pointing us to himself, but rather he is pointing to Jesus. He is saying to love others as Christ loved us. Be like him. Learn from him. Do what he does. Act like him.

As a parent, it can be terrifying to know we have that much influence on our children. How amazing, then, that in Jesus we have the perfect model to imitate!

Questions for thought

- Do children often imitate parents that they don't spend time with?
- What other influences, other than parents, do children start imitating? What influences, other than Christ, do you start imitating?
- How often do we ask ourselves, "What Would Jesus Do?"

Prayer

Perfect Creator and Holy Example, give us that childlike desire to be close to you, to speak with your words, to do what you do, and to act like you. We can only humbly do this through your power. Amen.

Hold Nothing Back

By Paul Springer

Read Romans 12:1-2

I am highly competitive. I remember one particular hockey game, I *really* wanted to beat the opposing team. When the game was over, I was exhausted, and my legs were so sore I could barely stand. As the saying goes, I “left it all on the ice.”

Christ calls us to that type of commitment in our desire to be like him. Sacrifices placed on the altar could not quit being a sacrifice. Even though we are *living* sacrifices, our sacrifice is to be no less permanent. Our worship is not to be half-hearted or temporary. God makes the impossible possible, transforming us completely to his original design. We should hold nothing back in our pursuit of him. He holds nothing back from us. Everything we need to be changed from the inside out, he has provided. He gave his only Son, and to his followers, he gives his Holy Spirit.

Questions for thought

- As the Lord has worked in your life, what has changed most? How has your mind been renewed?
- Are there areas you have become half-hearted about in your walk with Christ?

Prayer

Jesus, I know that you are good. I want to be like you. I know that you can change me completely. Lord, it is hard sometimes to truly give all of myself to you and not try to fix things on my own. Help me trust your transforming work completely. In your name, Amen.

Keeping Our Eyes on the Prize

By Dahkai Paasewe

Read Hebrews 12:1-3

Believe me when I tell you that you're NOT the only one going through STUFF. Nor the only one that's wondering how you are going to get through the present storm. *Only* God has the power to turn your storm into a story. Consider the cloud of witnesses in today's reading. Each experienced "storms" in life that became a "story" that has encouraged the saints - all believers - for over two thousand years. The storms you face today will be stories tomorrow for you to encourage others.

“For the joy set before him he endured the cross...” The unimaginable, incomprehensible, unfathomable pain that Christ endured was possible because his eyes were set on YOU! So those tears you cry...God sees them. Those groans you make...God hears them. Those concerns you have...God cares. We have a cloud of witnesses that have been where we are and have faced the challenges we face. Keep your eyes on Jesus, the real prize!

Questions for thought

- Do you face storms alone or with brothers and sisters in Christ?
- Has another believer's testimony encouraged you in your storms?
- What stories can you share to encourage other believers?

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your gentle reminders to keep our eyes fixed on you. It is only in you that we are able to endure the tests and trials of this life. Strengthen us Lord. Turn our storms into stories through your power. Amen.

See one. Do one. Teach one.

By Matt Lee

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:4-7

During my clinical practice, one of my duties was to train residents to become OBGYN specialists through an apprenticeship model. Over four years, they learned by imitating OBGYNs like me. We called it: See one/Do one/Teach one. They'd watch me, I'd watch them, they'd show someone else.

They learned to deal with frustration, like not performing as well as they wanted as soon as they wanted, and with true heartache, as in the tragic loss of a baby's life. By the end of residency, each was teaching and mentoring younger residents themselves.

There's a similar model to growing in Christ. Paul, Silas and Timothy lived their lives humbly before the believers in Thessalonica, sharing how they dealt with the good and bad. These newer Christians then modeled Christ to other believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

In my experience, the master/apprentice relationship is not a one-way street. I felt I learned as much, if not more, from those I taught. May it be so for you as well.

Questions for thought

- Do you have someone mentoring you in the faith?
- Are you mentoring someone in the faith? If so, what are you learning from them?

Prayer

Almighty God, thank you for the gospel and your Holy Spirit. We remember those who showed us how to follow Jesus. We pray that through your power, we can humbly be an example to other believers. Thank you for growing us as we mentor others. Amen.

Connected to the Vine

By Bonnie Lee

Read John 15:4-11

Growing up in the South, I suspect no one appreciates Spring and Summer like a Midwesterner. After a long dreary winter, nature wakes up. The grass greens, vines grow, branches bud, and birds return. Life abounds!

Jesus masterfully sprinkled his teaching with farming images. When he calls himself the vine and his followers the branches, we understand immediately what happens when the two are severed from one another. What was meant to thrive and bear fruit now withers, awaiting a pruning and, eventually, the fire. Healthy branches don't typically wither overnight, though. Similarly, disconnecting from our Lord is dangerous. When lesser things attract us, when knowing and doing God's will seems unimportant, when his daily presence no longer fills us with joy, the vinedresser may need to prune us for our good.

What's the antidote? As we abide in Christ, he abides in us. We thrive, producing healthy fruit. His desires become our own. Deeply rooted in our Creator's heart, we know true love and joy.

Questions

- What *fruit* are you producing?
- What sustains you? What can you not imagine living without?
- What impact does knowing that, as the Father loves the Son, so he loves us?

Prayer

Precious Lord, thank you for calling me to your side and feeding me soul by your Spirit. Remind me daily to seek you above all others. Connected to you, abiding in you, I can live abundantly and purposefully. May you be glorified in me. Amen.

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