

DAILY DEVOTIONAL

PURSUIT24

24 DAYS OF PRAYER + FASTING

DAY 1

Every Christian should be aware of the danger of leaving his first love for the Lord. Long ago, the church in Ephesus was busy doing many things for God, yet Jesus said, "I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love" Revelation 2:4

Does God care about our church? If you are tempted to doubt it, look more closely at these seven letters. The Lord of the universe knew each of these churches and its precise situation. In each letter, Jesus told John to write about specific people, places, and events. He praised believers for their successes and told them how to correct their failures. Just as Jesus cared for each of these churches, he cares for yours. He wants it to reach its greatest potential. The group of believers with whom you worship and serve with is God's vehicle for changing the world. Take it seriously – God does!

So, that is our prayer focus over the next seven days. That we will turn our hearts toward Jesus and rekindle our "First Love" for the Lord.

Many Christians fall away from this first love. Mathew 24:12 "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold." So, I think it is even more important to examine

our own hearts and see if there is any evidence that we have wandered from our first love.

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment” **Mark 12:30**

As you pray and examine your heart before the Lord, here are some questions you might ask yourself:

Do you delight in someone else more than you delight in the Lord? Your love for God should be foremost in your heart, exceeding the bond of any other relationship.

Does your soul long for times of rich fellowship in God’s Word or prayer?

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy...soul...”
Mark 12:30

When your mind, will, and emotions wander from devotion to God, watch out! Your relationship with God deepens as you spend time in His Word and commune with Him in prayer. If you forsake this fellowship, your understanding of your true condition before God will grow dull. As God’s children, His friends, and His bride, (see Matthew 5:44-45, James 2:23, Revelation 21:9) it is critical that we draw near to Him to engage in our relationship with Him. (See James 4:7-8.)

Your thoughts in leisure moments do they honor the Lord?

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy.... mind...”

Mark 12:30

The things that captivate your thoughts in leisure moments reveal much about the priorities of your heart. The Apostle Paul instructed us, “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” Philippians 4:8.

Do you make excuses for doing things that displease the Lord, claiming to be “only human”?

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy ...strength...”

Mark 12:30

God wants you to dedicate your life to Him as a “living sacrifice” (See Romans 12:1-2), discerning His will in all things and walking in obedience to Him. As your Good Shepherd, He will lead you “in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake” Psalm 23:3.

There is no excuse for disobeying the Lord. His grace is sufficient to rescue you from every temptation. Paul gave strong encouragement to the Corinthians about temptation. He said wrong desires and temptations happen to everyone, so don’t feel you’ve been singled out. Others have resisted temptation, and so can you. Because God will help you resist it. (See 1 Corinthians 10:13)

Your obedience to God demonstrates your love for Him. Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments" John 14:15. "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love" John 15:10.

As we look at the world we live in, we can see there needs to be a "RETURN" to our First Love. I want to encourage you to get quiet with the Lord. Let Him speak to you. This is God's desire for each one of us. The question is, what's your desire?

A prayer of Moses, gives us insight into the goal of keeping our FIRST Love: "Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, show me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight." Exodus 33:13. The longing of our hearts should be to know God, to know Him intimately. That is the reason for knowing His ways and His will: to know Him. And this is God's promise to His children: "Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found by you," declares the Lord. Jeremiah 29:13-14.

DAY 2

When a person receives Christ as his Savior, he experiences the delight of “first love” for the Lord. God’s Spirit witnesses with his spirit that he is a child of God, “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” Romans 8:16, and this newfound relationship brings great joy and freedom.

Unfortunately, scripture tells us many Christians fall away from this first love. When a believer does not depend on God to meet his daily needs, his love for God grows cold.

Jesus addressed this issue when He spoke to the church of Ephesus. Jesus said: “I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works...” Revelation 2:4-5.

The church of Ephesus was a busy church – the members did much to benefit themselves and the community, but they were acting out of wrong motives. Work for God must be motivated by love for God, or it will not last. “But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.” 2 Peter 1:9

Our faith must go beyond what we believe: it must become a dynamic part of all we do, resulting in good fruit and spiritual maturity. Salvation does not depend on good deeds. A person who claims to be saved while remaining unchanged does not understand faith or what God has done for him or her.

In the first steps of your Christian life, you may have had enthusiasm without knowledge. Do you now have knowledge without enthusiasm? Both are necessary if we are to keep love for God intense and untarnished. "Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering." Hebrews 10:32. Do you love God with the same fervor as when you were a new Christian?

Recalling your salvation experience and your first love for the Lord can help you recognize changes that have developed in your relationship with God since then. Do you have a greater or weaker sense of your need for God now? Are you cooler toward God and less passionate about spiritual things than you once were?

For those of us who received Christ as our personal Savior previously, we must remember what life was before we met Christ. The more Paul understood God's grace, the more he was aware of his own sinfulness. Humility and gratitude should mark the life of every Christian. Never forget that you too are a sinner saved by grace.

If you find yourself in this position, REPENT of your indifference towards God. Repentance involves a change of mind, heart, and direction. Forsake the thoughts, attitudes, and actions that have drawn your attention away from wholehearted love for God. Receive God's forgiveness and renew your commitment to do the "first works" of your faith.

If you have never received Christ as your personal Savior, I want to encourage you to accept his gift of salvation. Paul considered himself the worst of all Christians. Yet God forgave Paul and used Paul mightily for his Kingdom. No matter how shameful your past, God also can forgive and use you. Jesus didn't come merely to show us how to live a better life or challenge us to be better people. He came to offer us salvation that leads to eternal life. If you have never asked Him to forgive you of your sins and become the Lord of your life, I encourage you to do so now. "If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord", and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9

Our heavenly Father loves us and wants to be with us forever. Take a moment and think about His heart towards you. The only thing that can separate us from Him is a decision to reject His invitation. Once we receive His Son as Savior, we are God's, and no human action or character flaw can sever our eternal relationship with Him.

DAY 3

In Revelation 2:5, the word first means “foremost (in time, place, order of importance),” and the word works is defined as “toil (as an effort or occupation).” In other words, if you find that you have left your first love for the Lord, get your priorities back in order and do the most important things.

Obviously, from the definition of work, this involves effort; it is not something that happens without effort on your part or without grace on God’s part. First works could refer to many “important efforts,” and here we will discuss several of them: worship, prayer, Bible study, giving, fasting, and service to others. Each of these activities is designed to deepen your intimate relationship with God.

WORSHIP

One of the ways that we bring glory to God and cultivate our love for Him is by worshiping Him. Take time to ponder God. Consider His acts in creation and in the circumstances of your life. Adore Him. Kneel before Him. Sing praises to Him. Bless His holy name.

We were created to love God. Even before instructing His

people to love Him, God identified Himself by various names that revealed His character. Jehovah refers to His being a faithful covenant keeper, and Elohim speaks of infinite power. Through His names, God was drawing attention to His worthiness to be loved above anyone or anything else, and also to His willingness to love extravagantly. He makes unbreakable promises to us and has the power to keep every one.

Scripture doesn't exaggerate God's desire for His children to love with their entire being. When He calls Himself a jealous God "You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God" Exodus 20:5 and demands our devotion, He is pointing out our absolute need for Him. Anything that takes higher priority in our life is an idol and, therefore, a detriment. We are to love one another and ourselves, but nothing should be more important or more central to our existence than Jehovah.

"You shall have no other Gods before me." Exodus 20:3 God made this his first commandment and emphasized it more than the others. Today we can allow many things to become gods to us. Money, fame, work, or pleasure can become gods when we concentrate too much on them for personal identity, meaning, and security. No one sets out with the intention of worshiping these things. But by the amount of time, we devote to them, they can grow into gods that ultimately control our thoughts and energies. Letting God hold the central place in our lives keeps these things from turning into gods.

People were created to be loved by God and to love Him in return. Worshipping Him with anything less than our whole self, short-circuits His purpose for us. The faithful Covenant Keeper, who is infinite in power, made us for relationship so that we could know, serve, and honor Him.

Do you prepare for worship with your church family? How do you spend your Saturday night? How should we prepare for an encounter with the Holy God. Let me urge you to come to worship prepared to worship. Pray before you come, so you will be ready to pray when you arrive. Sleep before you come so you'll stay alert when you arrive. Read the Word before you come so your heart will be soft when you worship. Come hungry. Come willing. Come expecting God to speak. Come asking, even as you walk through the door.

The wonderful blessing about worship, is when we truly worship God, we enter His presence. When we lift Him up with our praises, He draws near. "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." John 12:32 When we are in His presence, that is when we are changed. "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

As our knowledge deepens, the Holy Spirit helps us to change. Becoming Christlike, it is a progressive experience. The more closely we follow Christ, the more we will be like him. Which is God's loving desire towards each one of us. Lead us Holy Spirit, teach us how to worship in spirit and in truth. As we return to our first love, come prepared to encounter the Spirit of the living God.

DAY 4

PRAYER

Each aspect of prayer is designed to remind you of your dependence on God:

Petitions bring to mind the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs that you face each day. Your resources cannot meet these needs – you need God’s intervention.

Requests reveal your motives. Are you seeking to advance God’s Kingdom, or are you attempting to build your own kingdom (i.e., satisfying selfish desires)?

Confession recognizes your unworthiness before a holy God and His immeasurable mercy and love for you, His child.

Thanksgiving reflects an understanding of your dependence on God as you thank Him for meeting specific needs.

Intercession is the means by which you share the needs of others before God’s throne.

Shortly before the crucifixion, Jesus told his followers to pray in His name – in other words, to make requests

according to His will. He pointed out that power is attached to prayer offered in this way: "The Father will give you whatever you ask in My name" John 15:16. Prayer in Christ's name means declaring our association with the Savior. Our Creator has become our heavenly Father. He hears our requests because we have been made family through the redemptive work of His Son. The presence of Christ's Spirit within us proves we are one of His own. Access to the Father, through Jesus's death opened the way for us to have immediate, unhindered admittance to the Father's presence. In the temple, a veil closed off the Holy of Holies from man. When Jesus finished His work of making the last priestly sacrifice, "because of one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy." Hebrews 10:14 meaning we have been made perfect, yet we are "bring made holy", that veil was torn in two "The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." Mark 15:38, symbolizing the spiritual truth that access to God was now open to all who believe. Through the Holy Spirit, we have the right to talk to God directly without a human intermediary.

Praying in Jesus' name states both our relationship with Christ and our right- through Him - to approach the Father directly. It also expresses our authority to petition God. The glorified Christ now sits at the right hand of God, where He intercedes for us and serves as our High Priest, "Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." Hebrews 7:25 He has instructed us to come and ask for what we need. These words give us the authorization

to enter the throne room of grace at any time and speak personally with the Father. To everyone who has received Jesus Christ as Savior, the Lord has granted the right to us His name.

Based on our kinship with Jesus, we have access to the Father and can come with Christ's authority to make requests. But to use the Savior's name, we must also agree with God's purposes. Praying in the name of Jesus means we're asking in agreement with His character and will. As servants of God, we are to make it our priority to obey Him and His will, not our own. By allowing God's Word to abide in us – to become part of our thinking and our standard for life – we will learn to pray in accordance with His plan.

We can have an assurance of an answer. "In Jesus name" is a phrase of confidence. It is a confession of certainty that our prayers will be heard and answered. God doesn't want prayer to become a rote exercise. So, when praying "in Jesus name," remember that those three words are not a formula. Instead, let them be a powerful reminder of whose you are and the privilege of being involved in His work. Prayer is a mighty prerogative of the children of God. Let's stop right now and give thanks to God for the incredible privilege of prayer!

Fasting is a biblical way to truly humble yourself in the sight of God. King David said, "Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting." Psalm 35:13. Fasting enables the Holy Spirit to reveal your true spiritual condition, resulting in brokenness, repentance, and

a transformed life. Fasting effectively demonstrates the reality that life does not consist of the things you possess and deepens your awareness of spiritual, mental, and emotional needs. Fasting requires total humility, repentance, transparency, and devotion. Fasting is a biblical principle that all believers are called to. When called to a biblical fast the primary purpose is to increase our intimacy with God by increasing our time in prayer.

“Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “Return to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.”

Joel 2:12

“Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” **Luke 12:15**

“He humbled you, causing you to hunger and feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every Word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”

Deuteronomy 8:4

“That your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” **Matthew 6:18**

DAY 5

GOD'S WORD

How do you listen to God's Word? "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear." Matthew 13:3-9

Scripture contains critical information for every human life, but people approach it very differently. We can see from the scripture above; it identifies four types of listeners: those with a....

Closed mind. This does not exclusively describe unbelievers. Christians, too, can listen passively, without intending to apply what they hear. The seed can't germinate because the soil's surface is too hard. Such believers remain shallow until they decide to pay attention to God and obey.

Clouded mind. Represented by rocky soil, the clouded mind will hear God's Word and get excited. But then the person doesn't take time to study, grow roots, and let the truth sink into his heart. With little doctrinal foundation or knowledge of God's promises, he has difficulty withstanding the harshness of life.

Cluttered mind. The worries of life are to the Christian heart what briars, thorns, and thickets are to a garden. A preoccupied mind has little or no room for God's Word to sprout and thrive.

Committed mind. God can do great things through someone whose mind is like fertile soil. The most intellectual person in the world, if not teachable, will miss the truth of the gospel, whereas even a young child who is willing to listen and learn will be transformed.

For this to be true of our life, we need to take an honest look to see if we approach biblical principles with a teachable spirit. As Jesus said, "He who has ears, let him hear."

Reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating on Scripture causes you to grow in grace and in knowledge of your Lord Jesus Christ. As "newborn babes" you are to "desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby." 1 Peter 2:2 The awareness of your need for God will fuel your desire for His Word. If you are spiritually healthy, you will yearn to grow. Once we see our need for God's Word and begin to find nourishment in Christ, our spiritual appetite will increase, and we will start to mature.

If you assessed how you listen to His instructions and determined there's room for improvement, be encouraged – that realization is the first step toward becoming more sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Now, commit to ...

Listen carefully. By an act of your will, choose to listen purposefully when you read the Bible or hear it preached. Decide to “pray without ceasing” as you go through your day. “Pray continually” 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Resist all outside clutter. One of Satan's strategies is to get our minds so occupied with peripheral concerns that we compromise our reliance upon Christ. So much of what we deem important plummets down the priority scale when held against the light of truth.

Evaluate your life against what you're hearing in Scripture. This means taking the initiative to hold up your life against the standard of God's truth – and agreeing to making any necessary changes.

Apply the truths that the Holy Spirit impresses upon your heart. This is a decision you make – one that indicates just how serious you are about walking with Jesus Christ. God will honor your stepping out in faith. Strive to obey Scripture and the Lord's leading every time. When you do, He takes responsibility for the results, and you will find Him trustworthy.

GIVING

Jesus instructed His disciples, “Freely ye have received, freely give.” Matthew 10:8 Generosity offsets the compulsion to be “rich, and increased with goods” (Revelation 3:17), a state of life that can cool your love for God. Laodicea was a wealthy city, and the church was also wealthy. But what the Laodiceans could see, and buy had become more valuable to them than what is unseen and eternal. Wealth, luxury, and ease can make people feel confident, satisfied, and complacent. But no matter how much you possess or how much money you make, you have nothing if you don’t have a vital relationship with Christ. How does your current level of wealth affect your spiritual desire? Instead of centering your life primarily on comfort and luxury, find your true riches in Christ. Giving a tithe (ten percent of your income) or more is not simply a way to financially support the Church – it is a regular reminder that all you have belongs to God. “Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.” 1 Timothy 6:17-19

DAY 6

“A new command I give you, Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” **John 13:34**

“Love one another” is not a suggestion; it is a command that we are enabled to fulfill by the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Do you find that you are quick to judge and condemn others? Consider God’s love for you and His command that you love others with His love. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.” | John 4:10-11

Everyone believes that love is important, but love is usually thought of as a feeling. In reality, love is a choice and an action. “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” | Corinthians 13:4-7

God is the source of our love: he loved us enough to sacrifice his Son for us. Jesus is our example of what it means to love; everything he did in life and death was

supremely loving. The Holy Spirit gives us the power to love; he lives in our hearts and makes us more and more like Christ. God's love always involves a choice and an action, and our love should be like his. How well do you display your love for God in the choices you make and the actions you take?

John says, "God is love." Not "Love is God." Our world, with its shallow and selfish view of love, has turned these words around and contaminated our understanding of love. The world thinks that love is what makes a person feel good and that it is all right to sacrifice moral principles and others' rights in order to obtain such "love." But that isn't real love. "Real love is like God, who is holy, just, and perfect. If we truly know God, we will love as he does.

Real love is an action, not a feeling. It produces selfless sacrificial giving. The greatest act of love is giving oneself for others. How can we lay down our lives? By serving others with no thought of receiving anything in return. Sometimes it is easier to say we'll die for others than to truly live for them – this involves putting others' desires first. Jesus taught this same principle of love. "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13

Scripture tells us "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:35 Love is more than simply warm feelings: it is an attitude that reveals itself in action. How can we love others as Jesus loves us? By helping when it's not convenient, by giving when it hurts, by devoting energy to others' welfare rather than our own, by

absorbing hurts from others without complaining or fighting back. This kind of loving is hard to do. That is why people notice when you do it and know you are empowered by a supernatural source.

To love others was not a new commandment (see Leviticus 19:18) but to love others as much as Christ loved others was revolutionary. Now, we are to love others based on Jesus' sacrificial love for us. Such love will not only bring unbelievers to Christ; it will also keep believers strong and united in a world hostile to God. Jesus was a living example of God's love, as we are to be living examples of Jesus' love.

When returning to your "first love": remember, repent, and return to the first works of your faith. May God rekindle your love for Him

DAY 7

God calls humanity to be consecrated to Him. “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is-his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Romans 12:1-2 This means making a conscious, willing decision to dedicate your soul, mind, heart, and body to God. This is what returning to your “first love” looks like.

After the Lord rescued the people of Israel from brutal slavery in Egypt and delivered them from the powerful hand of Pharaoh, He called them to consecrate their lives. The consecration was not a prerequisite of Israel’s salvation, but a commanded response to God’s faithful love for His people. The Lord commands the nation of Israel to “be My holy people” in Exodus 22:31, to set themselves apart for worship and devotion to God. The command has not changed now that we are under the blood of Christ. Our salvation is still a work of total grace, based on the perfect righteousness of Jesus and not our own. At the same time, Jesus has commanded those who have been purchased by His grace to “obey all that He has commanded us” and “to be holy as

His Father is holy.” In other words, we are still directed to consecrate ourselves before the Lord, not as a means of earning His favor, but as the appropriate response to His favor. What does this process of consecration look like?

First, we need to remember God’s grace in our lives. One of the most common commands in the Bible is to “remember” all that God has done for us. The festivals in the OT and the sacraments in the NT are means of remembering the gracious work of God on our behalf. A drift in our commitment to holiness is usually connected to a lack of awe and wonder at all that God has done for us. Start the process of consecration by writing down all the good gifts that God has given to you that you do not deserve.

Second, we need to remove our idols and distractions. As the people of Israel moved into the promised land, they found it full of other nations who worshipped other gods. This is a helpful picture of the church’s position in the world today – surrounded by people who worship everything and everyone else other than the one true God. And because our hearts are naturally bent away from devotion to God, we will drift naturally toward idolatry. This is why Jesus commands us to “seek first” the Kingdom of God ahead of everything else, and why God warned His people to not adopt the gods of the peoples around them. To consecrate ourselves before God, we need to recognize where we have adopted the idols of our surrounding culture and remove them from our lives. Continue your consecration by writing down the distractions that keep you from loving God first and most in your life.

Third, we need to repent of sinful attitudes and actions. When we turn from our idols to seek the Lord, we must confess the sins that have become second nature to us. We must be mindful of the sins that we most easily excuse – the selfish attitudes, evil thoughts, and harsh words. We need to agree with God that our laziness and spite and lust and greed and apathy are sins against His holiness. We need to repent of our flippant attitude toward our own sin and recognize the damage that our sin causes to our relationship with God and with others. As you consecrate yourself before the Lord, ask Him to show you the sinful attitudes and actions that are offensive to Him, especially those that you cannot see. And turn from those sins back to the Lord.

Fourth, we need to recommit our hearts to God. Consecration is not ultimately about clean living. It is about worship. We consecrate ourselves before the Lord not to prove ourselves to our neighbor or feel good about ourselves. We consecrate ourselves before the Lord for the Lord. We pursue holiness as an act of worship, out of a deep love and awe for the worthiness of God. In this way, true consecration seeks to bring the Lord the glory and honor that He is due. Finish your consecration process by declaring your love and devotion to God as your highest and greatest pursuit. This is how we Return to our “First Love.”

DAY 8

The journey continues with my First Love & I, and HE says to me, "I love you just the way you are, but I refuse to leave you that way. I want to Restore the hearts & minds of my people. I want to heal the broken places." It is important to understand, not to confuse God's love with the love of people. The love of people can change depending on increases with performance or decreases with mistakes. Or for no reason at all. Not so with God's love. He loves you right where you are!

Over the next seven days we will focus on God's desire to RESTORE our minds and our hearts. Our lives can look very different when we see them from God's perspective. If we look at our lives through our circumstances, we will get a distorted view of God. If we sit with Christ and look at our lives as God sees them, from an eternal perspective, all is different!

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”

Ephesians 2:4-7

Even the most difficult and bewildering even discouraging times are then seen as vital aspects of God’s purposes and activities to develop our character and our intimate relationship with Him if we allow it. When we see our lives as God sees them, we are strengthened, encouraged, motivated, and at peace.

When a child of God comes to this understanding by faith, there is an immediate yielding of his life totally to Him. We begin to see we were not created just for time but for eternity. In Jeremiah 29:11, “For I know the plans I have for you, ‘declares the Lord’, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” We’re all encouraged by a leader who stirs us to move ahead, someone who believes we can do the task he has given and who will be with us all the way. God is that kind of leader. He knows the future, and his plans for us are good and full of hope. If God, who knows the future, provides our agenda and goes with us as we fulfill his mission, we can have boundless hope. This does not mean that we will be spared pain, suffering, or hardship, but that God will see us through to a glorious conclusion, if we trust Him with our lives.

To understand and believe that God did know you and chose you from eternity will give you a tremendous sense of purpose. For the God of the universe to have thoughts and purposes for us also means the He will be at work in us and through us to bring them to pass. Let our lives be motivated by God. We only have one life to live, and it will soon be past, and only what is done with God will last. This can, if one believes this truth bring to all of life a desire to live meaningfully and to live well.

Are you living your life with God's eternal perspective? Solomon said that when we live "under the sun," everything is meaningless, toil is exhausting, and striving is endless. His exact words go like this, "All is vanity." Ecclesiastes is twelve chapters woven with this same thread. Solomon wanted us to get it. If you are living without a God-perspective and a God-focus, then really, life is just meaningless.

What if we learned to live "above the sun" seeing as God sees, thinking more like He thinks. Doing what God has called us to do. Viewing this life in the light of eternity.

Remember He wants to Restore you.

DAY 9

“Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” **Matthew 11:28**

“I am worn out!” Ever heard those words before. Maybe you feel the same. Maybe you are exhausted, and some of your worn out is physical exhaustion. But for many of us, the heart is numb, and the spirit is tired. It’s interesting, when we’re just plain tired, like how you feel after a full day of yard work, most of us know what to do with that. Take a good hot shower or bath. Have a little something to eat. Then go to bed early. That’s what we call a good tired. But when the spirit and mind are worn out, that unscriptural exhaustion that comes from anxious toil, (on edge, worried, striving, fearful) it’s so much more difficult to know what to do.

Grief exhausts the body and soul. Almost everyone has experienced the pure exhaustion that comes to us from grief. We can know great sorrow over our losses, our circumstances, and even our own choices. The soul grieves for many reasons, but the Bible is clear: Grief empties us of strength. It will completely wear us out. Grief makes you tired. Robs you of strength. Wearies your heart, soul, and mind.

Sin makes you tired. Scripture says “They weary themselves with sinning” Jeremiah 9:5. If you have ever watched people choosing blatant sin, you know it’s true – they wear themselves out. Maybe you keep living around your sin and trying to hide it. That would be exhausting. If you are weary and worn out and you can’t exactly figure out why, here is the first place I would look. Is there sin in your life you’ve been trying to live with? Are there sin patterns you’ve been meaning to deal with? Take a moment, close your eyes, and sit with the question in front of God. “Am I clean?” God always prompts us towards purity with gentleness and love. Sit and listen to God’s voice. He can tell you if there is sin that makes you tired.

Matthew 11:28 the first three words are key “Come to me.” Is that our first reaction when we are weary? We turn to that carton of ice cream, that bottle of wine, drugs, the gym, shopping, gossip, even look for someone’s shoulder to cry on, just something that will make us feel better. But Jesus clearly tells us turn to God first. We need a rest that only God can give.

“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; BUT those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not faint.” **Isaiah 40:28-31**

Do you believe it? I hope you begin to hear the Lord respond to your heart, “Do you know I am your God who does not grow weary?” God is almighty and all powerful; but even so, He cares for each of us personally. We describe God as best we can with our limited knowledge and language, but we only limit our understanding of Him and His power when we compare Him to what we experience on earth. Don’t limit His work in your life by underestimating Him.

In the scripture above, did you find the transfer of God’s strength? The transfer happens right after the word “but.” The holy transfer of God’s character happens when we come into His presence and put our “Hope in the Lord.” Right there. There’s your answer. Where do we run with our weary? The Scriptures tell us to run to God and put our hope in His promises. He is the only One who can transfer the strength of His character into our bodies and souls. A hope centered on the Lord renews our strength. In this passage, the word “renew” means “to exchange,” like taking off old clothes and putting on new ones. When we put our hope in God, He is able to exchange our weakness for His power.

It is important to remember that God knows our propensity to become weary. It’s built into the very fabric of our humanity. But God has made a way for us to know fresh strength. He has provided a means to make a holy and mysterious transfer of His character to our souls when we come into His presence and place our hope in the truth of who He is.

DAY 10

The apostle Paul wrote this about his thorn: “To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’” 2 Corinthians 12:7-9

The pain of a thorn. Ever reached out to look at or smell a beautiful rose? Then, “ouch!” you were pricked by a thorn. That’s the problem with thorns they hide unseen, and no one ever wants to feel the jab of their pain.

We don’t know what Paul’s thorn in the flesh was because he doesn’t tell us. Theologians have long speculated about the nature of Paul’s thorn; most seem to agree it was some kind of physical affliction. Whatever the case, it was a chronic and debilitating problem, which at times kept him from working.

You may be thinking: 1. I have no idea what you’re talking about. 2. I have known the pain of a thorn, but thankfully it is now removed. 3. I am currently suffering with a thorn. 4. I love someone who is suffering, and my heart breaks for

them. Whether you are called to bear a thorn, called to love someone who does, or both, the power of God's Word can do a transforming work in your soul.

When we talk about the apostle Paul suffering a thorn, it seems "apostle-like" and noble. He was a great Christ follower. His life and teachings have guided all the Christ followers who came after him. But you may be feeling I'm not an apostle. My thorn is not noble. Even so, it may be a thorn you have been called to bear.

Do you ever just feel like shouting, "Why?" God said to Paul, and He says to us today: I AM sufficient. That means without my understanding all the whys and even without my cooperation, God's grace for my thorn is sufficient. His grace is enough for my circumstances, and HE continues to be enough whether or not I choose to believe Him. Your comfort will come when you finally believe and settle it in your soul...God is enough.

Where are you with believing God's grace is sufficient? Sometimes the thorn is so evil and hurtful that it takes a while for us to get to God's grace. Has it been that way with you? Do you have peace that comes from believing God's grace is sufficient, or do you still need to get there?

You may be asking God to remove your thorn. HE does that. In His time, according to His will, God can and does remove thorns. However, a thorn cannot be removed by your own power. God decides when to remove a thorn. Paul said, "I pleaded with the Lord three times to take it away from me."

Three times Paul asked God to remove his thorn, and three times the thorn remained.

A lot of people get nervous when you mention the devil. And not every bad thing or every inconvenience is necessarily the work of a demon. We certainly bring enough heartache on ourselves, but the Bible says Satan is the author of evil. He thinks he is a rival to God, and everything he does do works against the kingdom of God. He wants people to miss the truth of eternity, and he is the giver of thorns. What you need to know about Satan as the originator of your thorn is that he has purposed the thorn for evil in your life. He wants to hurt you, discourage you, tell you lies. A thorn weaves discouragement into your heart, and the piercing of a thorn produces weakness.

Yet, Paul did write that the thorn he suffered was sent by Satan to torment him and a thorn torments the soul with pain and doubt. We begin to wonder: Do I deserve this somehow? Have I caused this pain? Is this a consequence of some mistake I made or sin I committed? Even the solidly grounded believer can give in to the pain and begin doubting their worth because of a thorn. Know this about God. HE may allow a thorn, but Scripture teaches that “what Satan means for evil; God can use for good.” Genesis 50:20 You need to know that God does not give a thorn as punishment.

Because the thorn is from Satan, its purpose is for evil. Ultimately, Satan wants you to doubt God’s love for you. We need to remind ourselves that God gave Paul the answer.

He gives the same answer to every thorn-bearer today. His grace is sufficient. When we are weak, allowing God to fill us with His power, then we are stronger than we could ever be on our own.

DAY 11

Paul said that he had been given a thorn, “To keep me from becoming conceited” 2 Corinthians 12:7. The thorn gave him humility, maybe even a humility he had never thought to desire for himself. Thorns do that. They burst your bubble. Put a limp in your walk. Bring you down to size. Keep you from thinking you’re a big shot. We see in The Message 2 Corinthians 12:7, “Because of the extravagance of those revelations, and so I wouldn’t get a big head, I was given the gift of a handicap to keep me in constant touch with my limitations. Satan’s angel did his best to get me down; what he in fact did was push me to my knees. No danger then of walking around high and mighty!”

The importance of this virtue comes from the fact that it is found as part of the character of God. Upon reading Psalm 113 it clearly states the Lord is to be praised. The Lord is exalted over all the nations. The Lord sits enthroned on high. The psalmist wanted us to see that God is incomparably high and great. And yet look at verse 6 “WHO STOOPS down to look on the heavens and the earth?” What does our great and high God do? He stoops. Our God, who is the great I AM, who is above all things and Lord of all things, humbles Himself to come to His created with love, concern, and mercy.

Wherever the quality of humility is found in the Old Testament, it is praised, and God frequently pours His blessing on those who possess it. Take a minute to read these three proverbs for a glimpse about how God feels toward the humble.

“The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor.” **Proverbs 15:33**

“Before his downfall a man’s heart is proud, but humility comes before honor.” **Proverbs 18:12**

“A man’s pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honor.” **Proverbs 29:23**

We find the New Testament uses the same word for humility to express a spirit of lowliness that enables God to bring His blessing. In Philippians Paul, our fellow thorn-bearer, taught about the humility of Christ and the humility of his affliction, but I want you to see something in Chapter 4:12-13:

“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.”

Paul was giving us a key here. He taught us that the virtue of humility comes from accepting the humbling experience. Accepting our thorns leads us toward true humility. A condition from without can teach us a corresponding

attitude from within. But how many of us have learned the secret of contentment in any and every situation?

In the Bible, the quality called humility is closely connected with affliction, which is sometimes brought upon men by their fellows and sometimes attributed directly to the purpose of God, but always calculated to produce humility of spirit. No matter what kind of humbling experience you have or thorn you may suffer, the character-building question is, "Have you allowed it to shape the virtue of humility in your spirit?" If the answer is "Not yet," what keeps you from receiving the secret of contentment?

Our thorns can teach us a great deal about humility. If we learn the lesson of Paul, we can receive into our spirits this valued character trait. Our thorns can make us humble. Humility finds its origin in the character of God. God adds blessings to the humble. Acceptance of our circumstances gives us humility. We are to put on this valuable attribute and wear our humility to bring glory to God (see Col. 3:12; Eph. 4:2). You see, humility isn't something you learn from afar, hoping it becomes a part of your character. That is not how we acquire humility. Many times, it comes to us in the thorns. May we learn the secret of contentment and acceptance of what we cannot change. May the humility of our thorns become a beautiful coat to be worn for the glory of God, for humility is not thinking less of yourself; it's thinking of yourself less. Those who have humility: Isaiah 66:2; Isaiah 57:15; Job 22:29; James 4:10; Luke 14:11; Matthew 18:4; Proverbs 3:34; Proverbs 18:12.

DAY 12

Today, we're asking the Lord, "Do you know I'm trembling inside?" I will be going along just fine and a phone call or an email can cause a fear reaction in me. I can feel anxious. A little agitated. Distracted. Nervous in my mind. Then of course the bigger fears leave us paralyzed with anxiety and worry.

I am sure you know life just keeps coming with its little and big fears all along the journey. Some things bring a surprise fear, like test results. Other things happen that can ignite an inner fear, like watching the nightly news, having a difficult conversation with a friend, or loved one, or imagining harm coming to one of my children. I'm sure you already know this, no one gets a free pass in this world. Evil is present. Sin is inside of us and all around us. Not one of Jesus' disciples escaped this lifetime without suffering. They didn't model an insulated life for us. Jesus reminded his disciples, and He reminds us today. "In this world you will have trouble" John 16:33

We are called to live alongside of trouble, the kind of trouble that causes fear, worry, and trembling on the inside. The Son of God suffered an unimaginable death, even though He lived a flawless life. Who am I to think that somehow, I

just might skip past adversity? In this world trouble is certain, but we also have the promise of Jesus as He concluded His upper-room message to the disciples: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." John 16:33

With these words he told his disciples to take courage. In spite of the inevitable struggles they would face, they would not be alone. Jesus does not abandon us to our struggles either. If we remember that the ultimate victory has already been won, we can claim the peace of Christ in the most troublesome times.

According to John 16:33, we are saved from being swallowed up by this world's trouble and the rest of the scripture testifies that because of Jesus, we are saved from suffering the eternal penalty of our sins.

Never was a Conqueror in this world like Jesus. He conquered Satan. He conquered sin. He conquered the cross and the grave. Our Conqueror is the only One who can deliver us from our fears. He is the only One who will give us victory over what makes us tremble inside. Christ has overcome the world and all the troubles in this world. For all of us in Christ, we have nothing left to do but pursue the victory! "We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." Romans 8:37

We must trust God completely. We must remind ourselves in times of trouble, what we believe and to whom we belong.

Most importantly, we need to remember who God is. He is I AM. He is Creator, Redeemer, Comforter, and Healer. Paul wrote: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort" 2 Corinthians 1:3.

Let's focus on these aspects of God's character: He is the Father of Jesus, your Savior; He is the God of compassion; and He is the God of all comfort. No matter your trouble. No matter your disease. No matter your hardship or problem or disappointment. No matter what makes you tremble inside. Only God can give a divine and powerful comfort that comes to us from the depths of His character.

"The God of all comfort" 2 Cor. 1:3 means that God is able to bring ease and freedom from the pain, even in our sufferings. Let's look at verse 4 as well: "Praise be to the God of All comfort, who comforts us in All our troubles." What does it mean to you that God promises to comfort us "in All our troubles"? "All comfort" means receiving completely what you need. But to receive all that we need from God means that we must remain consistently connected to the One who gives all that we need.

"I have been there too." Ever heard those words before. Let's look further at 2 Corinthians 1:4-5, "Who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the same comfort we ourselves have received from God." Paul said God uses our inward suffering to turn us outward toward others. Amazing, when you stop to think about it. As much as pain makes us want to retreat and

hide, Paul said we're supposed to receive the mercy of God's comfort and then turn toward a hurting world with all that has been given to us – a selflessness right in the middle of great suffering. It's like our Father says to us "Use your suffering to help someone else. Take the truth of My character to those who are hurting." Then He gives us the grace to make it happen. Paul said that he prayed that his comfort to others would give them a "patient endurance" in their trials. Receiving comfort from God when you have been so afraid is exactly the kind of comfort that will minister to others.

In verses 8: "We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death." Paul was honest with his real troubles, feelings, and fears. He was vulnerable and plain-spoken, not trying to make himself sound spiritual and unattainable. He thought they were going to die.

In the same way, God is not asking us to hide our real emotions or fears. We just can't help how our humanity responds to heartache and suffering. The physical body gasps for air when we can't breathe just as the spiritual body gasps for grace when we are in need. Paul showed us how to be honest with our struggles and how to run to the God of all comfort with our fears.

Now look at Paul's understanding of his despair in verse 9: "But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God." The Lord is so very compassionately teaching us to

rely on Him and not on ourselves.

Maybe today is a day you are to receive the comfort of God, and maybe today is a day you give it away. Listen as the Lord tells you what to do.

DAY 13

In the middle of Psalm 22, feeling abandoned by God, David chose to exercise his faith. Pay attention here because someday, somewhere, God will seem far away, and we too will be required to exercise our faith.

Some days God rushes in with the power of His presence. You can feel Him in the room. You know He's speaking to your heart, and nothing is more beautiful than your relationship with our high and holy God. You can bring Him your troubles and receive His comfort, and everything about the goodness of God fits inside your understanding.

Other times you find yourself trembling inside, longing for peace, a word from God, or the assurance of His presence, and God seems silent. Maybe heaven seems far away. Maybe you feel God isn't speaking to you. Maybe you even think He's turned His back on you.

We've all been there at one time or another. Many days we want God to paint a message across the wall, send an e-mail, or speak out loud with a voice like thunder. Anything to tell you what to do, where to go, whom to trust. On some of those days you may have searched with all my heart and received nothing. God was quiet. No answers came.

We're not alone wondering where God is sometimes. Let's look at Psalm 22 closer. Feeling abandoned by God, David, the man after God's own heart, questioned where God was and why. Many get stuck here when God seems silent. How about you? Do you anticipate His renewed presence, or do you give up and walk away? If that is you, I am going to ask you to put your full trust in the Lord for complete healing in the broken places, even those places that have been broken for years.

In this passage David did six things we need to remember. He reminded himself who God is, how faithful He is, and who David was. Then he encouraged himself to look at his options, to hold on patiently, and to anticipate God's renewed presence. Let's look at each of those steps:

1. Remind yourself of who God is. In verse 3, "Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One" David remembered God was the Holy One. Verse 9, "Yet you brought me out of the womb" he remembered God is his Creator and gave him life. Verse 19, "But you, O Lord, be not far off" he called God LORD.

2. Review God's faithfulness. In verses 4-5 David reviewed God's faithfulness to the generations before him. If you took a minute to review God's faithfulness, what would you say? How has God been faithful to you? Do you believe God is working, even when He is silent?

3. Recall who you are. In verse 6 David recalled what others had said about him. He said that according

to others he was a worm. When others despise us, when we feel the sting of rejection, we like David, could begin to feel like worms. But in verses 9-10 he remembered who he was because of God. He recalled that God had his eye on him before he was born. Do you remember who God says you are today? Or do you focus on what you believe others think of you? I know which one is easier, but don't forget: Exercising your faith is a choice. You have to choose to recall who you are because of God or all you will think about is what others believe.

4. Evaluate other options. David looked around to see what others were doing. He thought life seemed easier for everyone else (see Psalm 73). Maybe you look around and somehow life seems easier for everyone else too. Maybe you've tried everything else and found only dead-end streets apart from God. David concluded that no help would be coming from people (Ps. 22:11). God was his only help. As you look at the other options in your own life, maybe you have realized that God is your only help. Even when God is silent, and you can't hear Him speak. He is still your only answer.

5. Wait. Hold on. By verse 19 David was waiting on God. He was holding on until God came to help him. "O my Strength, come quickly to help me." Sometimes our faith must choose to hold on. We have to remember who God is, who He has been, and whose we are. Then we must hold on. Maybe today exercising your faith means you make the choice to hold on too.

6. Anticipate God's renewed presence. At the end of Psalm 22 nothing about David's circumstances had changed. He was still surrounded by trouble, but David had changed. His faith had made a way for hope. In verses 27-31 he was anticipating God's renewed presence and God's future goodness to him. He said in verse 31, "They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn – for he has done it." While God was still silent, David exercised his faith and decided, that one day people yet unborn would know that God came through.

Where was Jesus when He felt abandoned by God? While on the cross what passage did Jesus quote regarding God's silence? "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Matthew 27:46 Jesus was not questioning God; he was quoting the first line of Psalm 22 – deep expression of the anguish he felt when he took on the sins of the world, which caused him to be separated from his Father. This was what Jesus dreaded as he prayed to God in the garden to take the cup from him. The physical agony was horrible, but even worse was the period of spiritual separation from God. Jesus suffered this double death so that we would never have to experience eternal separation from God.

Did you connect the dots? From the cross Jesus quoted the words of David. A couple of things we must never forget, even in the darkest, most quiet times are: If God were going to abandon you, He never would have sent His Son. If God were going to abandon you, Jesus never would have gone to the cross.

We can trust God loves us. The future for every believer is greater things from God. When we anticipate the future with God, we can always count on the blessings of His character. We can be certain of that not merely because of David's example but because of Jesus.

Remember God wants nothing more than to Restore His people. Will you trust Him today for complete healing?

DAY 14

Have you ever had Kung Pao Chicken? It can be hot, next thing you know; tears start running and you are wiping your nose. Most of us were just moseying along, ordering a medium spicy, very safe kind of life, then along came much more pao than anyone could swallow. Maybe this isn't the life you ordered either.

Have you ever been that person surrounded by others and felt invisible? Next thing you find yourself unconsciously striving. Talking too much? Giving your manuscript to anyone who would stand still or who couldn't get away? Yep, striving comes from fear – the fear of being invisible.

How about running away? Do you see yourself in the story about a downcast woman named Hagar. In Genesis 16, God promised Abram he would have a son and that his descendants would outnumber the stars in the heavens. The Bible says that Abram believed God. But Abram's wife, Sarai, decided to take matters into her own hands and offered him Hagar, her Egyptian maidservant. In that ancient culture a barren wife could give a slave to her husband, but this act wasn't what God intended. Sarai was trying to get ahead of the Lord. Like so many of us, she misinterpreted God's delay as a denial and took matters into her own hands. Ever been

disappointed with God's timing? Have you tried to get ahead of God? How about misinterpreted God at times?

The story continues, and Hagar conceived a child with Abram, only to find Sarai horribly jealous during her pregnancy. The Scripture says: "Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her" Genesis 16:6. Hagar's name means flight, so in the face of abuse and humiliation, she did exactly as her name implied. Hagar ran away, out into the wilderness. Hagar was in despair, hopeless, weary, alone, a woman in a male-dominated culture, pregnant, rejected, cast out after being used, surely feeling no one cared for her. No one understood. I don't know if your circumstances ever made you want to run into a desert, but I am sure many have. Maybe you have endured a judgement that made you want to evaporate. Just ask anyone who has suffered through a divorce, or the woman who had an abortion, the man who had an affair or the one with an addiction. They know that the heat of the desert seems mild compared to the heat of scandal, disgrace, and gossip.

Maybe you've never packed a bag, but you've run away in your heart. You have disconnected from your wife or husband, your children, and your church. Maybe you have decided to endure those who have hurt you, but for all intents and purposes, you have run away, you and your hardened heart, and put up a tent in the desert that is called your life.

Just like Hagar, it takes a lot of pain to make a desert become the better option. So much hurt upon hurt can

begin to convince you that no one cares, not even God. The hurt and disappointment lie to you and call you invisible. Can you understand how very real hurt will tell you lies until you believe them? What lies have you heard and believed from your pain?

Today, God tells you the truth. The glory of God stepped into the desert that day with Hagar. Right to Hagar's side God sent an "angel of the Lord." Genesis 16:7 God saw Hagar hiding in the desert that day. God sees you and me. We are not invisible to Him.

Remember God loves you right where you are, but he wants to Restore all the broken places. He sees our heartache and our pain, and He desires to intervene in our lives with mercy, instruction, and promise. According to Genesis 16:9-10, the angel of the Lord gave Hagar a deep comfort by telling her that He saw her plight. God saw her loneliness and heard her cries. God is a personal God. He is your personal God. After the angel of the Lord had compassionately spoken to Hagar, the Bible says, "She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: 'You are the God who sees me; for she said, 'I have now seen the One who sees me'" Genesis 16:13.

He is where you are right now. He is powerfully present and delivers His instruction and promises for those who will listen. Close your eyes and meditate on God's presence. Jeremiah 23:23-24 "Am I only a God nearby," declares the Lord, "and not a God far away? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?" declares the Lord. "Do not I fill the heaven and earth?" declares the Lord. How does your

soul respond to this truth?

Since we are living in His sight. We who are seen by God can live with our hearts wrapped around these principles. God is glorified when we live every day aware and changed by His presence.

1. Because God sees, let us live in obedience.
2. Because God sees, let us live with hearts set on God.
3. Because God sees, let us live with expectancy and hope.
4. Because God sees, let us live gratefully.

Choosing to live for the glory of God is a choice you make in your heart and your mind. God loves to wrap His glory around the redeemed. He gets all the praise. His name is lifted high.

When it seems everything is falling apart, God's hidden work always remains. Remember that in the unseen, God is plotting for your joy. He is planning the redemption of your brokenness. The Bible is clear about this. When you believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior, then you are saved – saved from living forever in brokenness. Our brokenness is temporary. Earthly. We will not live for eternity disappointed, rejected, and worn out.

Ephesians 1: 13-14 says “You also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession – to the praise of his glory.”

We face heartache on earth, but brokenness does not win. We have a Redeemer. Because by the power of the Holy Spirit, God will make us whole. We who have been broken will be the praise of His glory!

DAY 15

Our Pursuit 21 has been written, to encourage us to Return to our First love, to allow God to Restore and heal our hearts and minds and ultimately Revive us. For the final seven days of our Pursuit 21 Fast we will seek God for revival.

Have you been praying for revival? Have you prayed for things that God has not yet answered? One unanswered prayer that every committed Christian should be praying is that God would send revival to our country. It is as yet unanswered because nothing that is being described as revival today even comes close to the many examples of true revival that God has sent in times past. True revival is not a matter of hanging a banner in front of the church that announces, "Revival this week, 7 pm." True revival is not a superficial, emotional response that results in a temporary experience, but no long-term fruit of righteousness.

True revival is when the living God sovereignly and powerfully breaks into human history with the good news of His salvation. It begins with His people coming under deep conviction of sin and turning from that sin in genuine repentance. It always involves a recovery to biblical truth, especially the truth about how sinners are reconciled to a holy God. As a result, it also involves a recovery of

understanding and accepting the authority of God's Word over all of life. The renewed sense of God's presence, power, holiness, and truth then inevitably spills out of the church and into the world, resulting in many genuine conversions.

The Bible records God breaking into history with the greatest revival ever since it involved the coming of the Savior into the world. If our nation is to be spared God's awful judgement for our many sins, we desperately need true revival.

Have you heard it said, revival starts in the heart of man? If revival is confined to living men, then it must result from the proclamation and the receiving of living truth. John 16:13 says "But when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come."

The truth into which the Holy Spirit guides us is the truth about Christ. Jesus said the Holy Spirit would tell them "What is yet to come" – the nature of their mission, the opposition they would face, and the final outcome of their efforts.

While a true revival in its essence belongs only to God's people, it always brings with it a blessing for the other sheep who are not yet in the fold. If you drop a stone into a lake the ring widens continually, till the farthest corner of the lake feels the influence. Let the Lord revive a believer and very soon his marriage, family, friends, his neighbors,

receive a share of the benefit; for when a Christian is revived, he prays more fervently for sinners. Longing, loving prayer for sinners, is one of the marks of a revival in the renewed heart. Since the blessing is asked for sinners, the blessing comes from Him who hears the prayers of his people, and the world gains by revival. Soon the revived Christian speaks concerning Jesus and the gospel; he sows good seed, and God's good seed is never lost, for He has said, "It shall not return unto me void." Isaiah 55:11 The good seed is sown in the furrows, and in some sinner's hearts God prepares the soil, so that the seed springs up in a glorious harvest. Then, by the zealous conversation of believers another door of mercy opens to men.

When Christians are revived, they live more consistently, they make their homes more holy and happier, and this leads the ungodly to envy them, and to enquire after their secret. Sinners by God's grace long to be like such cheerful happy saints; their mouths water to feast with them upon their hidden manna, and this is another blessing, for it leads men to seek the Savior. If an ungodly man steps into a congregation where all the saints are revived, he does not go to sleep under the message. The minister will not let him do that, for the hearer perceives that the preacher feels what he is preaching and has a right to be heard. This is a clear gain, for now the man listens with deep emotion; and above all, the Holy Spirit's power, which the preacher has received in answer to prayer comes upon the hearer's mind; he is convinced of sin, of unrighteousness, and of judgement to come, and Christians who are on the watch around him hasten to tell him of the Savior, and point him

to the redeeming blood, so that through the revival, strictly speaking, is with the people of God, yet the result of it no man can limit.

Do you have a heart for your lost brother or sister? Are you praying that God would give you a heart for the lost? Because we know that Christ is coming, we must live in such a way that our faith and our daily practice will please Him when He arrives. What are you doing with the gospel of Jesus Christ?

DAY 16

God has been shaping the man He would call “His friend.” It is one thing to know and have God as “our friend”! It is quite another matter for God to call someone “His friend”!

A friend is one who knows another so thoroughly that he is literally willing to lay down one’s life for his friends. “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13

In Abraham’s entire life there is not even a hint of resistance to God or His will in his life. His heart for God was pure in its love and trust. A friend trusts! A friend responds to requests! A friend loves! A friend risks everything for another! A friend knows the Voice of His Lord! A friend is available and responsive! A friend never hesitates even when he does not know all the facts! It is enough that his friend has spoken!

When God is the One who calls you to Himself and offers a Covenant of love, there is no doubt, no hesitation, no rebellion, no fear, and no holding back of anything from Him.

Is there anything that you have held back from God? Take

an inventory and ask God to search your heart. If He shows you something you have held back, ask God to help you surrender it to Him.

God knows what sin has done to our nature. Sin leads us to resist God, to even rebel against God. Sin leads to self-centeredness and self-interest. So, God gave to Abraham His Presence to help him at every point of weakness or need. Since the heart was right in Abraham, he constantly appropriated God's resources. So, God revealed to him and through him to others. Abraham's family and friends and even his enemies knew God was with him and God was blessing him.

Above his own desires, his own inclinations, and his own reasoning, Abraham believed God, and God accounted (credited) that kind of life and trust for righteousness! God placed His righteousness over "His friend" Abraham, and nothing then hindered Abraham from experiencing God's full capacity to bless him. The scripture records that "the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things" Genesis 24:1. Further, in all God's relationship with Abraham He kept telling him what probably he could not grasp, but Abraham believed God when He said, "In you (and your seed) all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18. God's eternal purpose was to invite Abraham to believe Him, love Him, and obey Him so He could, in the centuries to come, build special people for Himself and through them bring the Messiah, the Savior. Through the Savior, His Own Son, God would provide eternal life to all who would obey Him (Hebrews 5:7-10) "During the days

of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designed by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek." and thus bless all the nations of the earth.

So, you can see God truly shapes the man He calls "His friend"! Now, we can see life as God sees it, each of us can be alert to and expectant of God working in us, and we can take our lives much more seriously. The Bible says that through faith, like Abraham we, too are heirs of the promises made to Abraham: "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" Galatians 3:29. Do you know that you are now living your life as an heir of God and joint heir with Christ? Let me share further.

First, an heir is so by relationship. If one is a son, then one is an heir. All that is part of the Father is now a vital part of the son. There is full access to the Father Himself. For instance, I respond to the voices of my children immediately. I respond to them differently from other children. I respond to my children's requests. They are my children.

My children can come in and out of my home without knocking or asking. They belong to me and live in my home. They can partake of what is in the cupboards and refrigerator. They can have the use of my car and my

tools. Everything that is mine is theirs. How my children experience much of what is mine is limited only by their choice.

An heir can also carry and use my name. When my children tell others they are my children, people respond to them as to me. And for others to receive them is to receive me. They are treated according to their relationship to me.

Because of our relationship to Jesus Christ, we have access to the Father. So anxious is God that we know and receive and experience all that is ours as heirs of His, He has given us His Holy Spirit to make certain we do not neglect or lose or not know to appropriate what is ours in Jesus Christ.

“He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.” John 16:14-15

All that is the Father’s is Christ’s. We are joint heirs with Him. The Holy Spirit hears all the Father wants us to know about being His children and immediately communicates it to us. We can then appropriate into our lives all He is and all He has to bless us with – just like Abraham.

Take time to pray, asking God to adjust your life to how He has spoken to you today.

DAY 17

To be a Friend of God. This is available to you, by faith and obedience! You, too, can be a “friend of God.” And you, too, can be on mission with God so through you the nations of the earth can be blessed – not exactly the same way but with Christ in a new way touch the nations of the world. It is a choice we make when God invites us into a Covenant relationship with Him through His Son.

The disciples heard just such a call from Jesus to “follow Me.” They heard the call, not knowing where that would lead in their lives. In that relationship they were shaped carefully by Jesus for three and one-half years – at the Father’s command. So they, too, entered into a relationship with God where their lives would touch the nations of the world, as Jesus gave them their Covenant invitation:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen. Matthew 28:19-20

And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the

gospel to every creature.” Mark 16:15

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

Acts 1:8

God gave Jesus authority over heaven and earth. On the basis of that authority, Jesus told his disciples to make more disciples as they preached, baptized, and taught. With this same authority, Jesus still commands us to tell others the Good News and make them disciples for the kingdom.

When someone is dying or leaving us, his or her last words are very important. Jesus left the disciples with these last words of instruction. We are to go – whether it is next door or to another country and make disciples. It is not an option, but a command to all who call Jesus “Lord.” We are not all evangelists in the formal sense, but we have all received gifts that we can use to help fulfill the Great Commission. As we obey, we have comfort in the knowledge that Jesus is always with us.

DAY 18

Are you God's friend? Jesus put it clearly to His disciples – and therefore to each of us:

“You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.”
John 15:14

Almost every word of this verse is filled with a Covenant Promise:

“You” – makes it so very personal. But the reality of this becoming real in your life lies with the same response in you as in Abraham – faith that brings immediate and thorough obedience. This is an obedience that enters a relationship with Him and that yields everything in your life to Him – now! It is a choice, clear and simple. Too many right now will say, “If He shows me when to go, I’ll go.” God says, “Follow Me! I’ll take you where I want you to go!” This fellowship comes after the commitment, as it did with Abraham. Right now, say to God, “I have heard Your Voice through Your Word in this Pursuit 21 Fast. I now say, ‘Yes Lord!’” Do it with all your heart and soul. “I know You will be shaping me, so You can use me. I am ready to respond. I choose this kind of Covenant of love with You – now!”

“My” – not just any relationship but a personal, real relationship with Him. Stop and remember who it is who is speaking. It is God! Abraham knew this, and you and I must also. It is so personal, He assures you that He Himself is personally involved with you. Stand in awe of this!

“Friends” – the unsearchable riches in this word, when spoken by our Lord. Who can measure such an invitation from the mouth and Heart of our Lord? He knew ahead of time that if anyone became “His friend,” he would receive everything He had in love to share. So He gave this word of invitation to His disciples, as His Father did to Abraham. Have you made this personal in your life? Do you hear in this verse your name? Have you said “Yes, Lord! I would be Your friend”?

“If”- here is the heart of God’s Covenant of love! “If” means there is a clear condition of response on our part. Here the response required is from the heart! Here stands the moment of truth. If He is God to me, the response will be, “Yes, Lord!” to every command He gives me! Only the heart will make this kind of response to God at all times and whatever the cost. To say from the heart, at all times, “Not my will but Yours be done!” takes a special understanding of God and relationship to God. It may not be only in the big decisions, but in the little ones where the heart is revealed. When circumstances change (like a famine) and we must alter our plans, do we instinctively turn to God for counsel and do it completely? It may come in our finances, or in our choice of vocations, or when our health changes. If we are servants of Christ, we will seek and obey His will alone. “If”

we respond to Him, then we are “His friends.” If we do not, we still have a ways to go in our relationship.

“You do” – it is not the one who says “Lord, Lord” who enters the kingdom of heaven. That is, who shares in the full experience of God’s rule and reign in life, like Abraham who God Sovereignly work in Egypt, and in the battle with the kings. Only the one “who does the will of My Father in heaven” Matthew 7:21 experiences God working Sovereignly in and around his life and family. Faith, without works, is dead. For Abraham to say he believes God and not gather in his family and move to where God would show him is not faith at all. It is rebellion and disbelief. A “friend of God” would never fail to obey Him when He spoke in a command to him. If this element was the only standard God gave, doing what He commanded, would He consider you “His friend” by the way you have been responding to Him in your life?

“Whatever” – the servant does not tell the master what he will or will not do. The servant says an immediate, “Yes, Lord!” A friend does not hesitate regardless of the request, even if it costs his life. John put it this way: “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us” 1 John 3:16.

In another place John recorded Jesus saying about His relationship to His disciples as a “good shepherd”: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep” John 10:11.

God’s required “whatever” with Abraham was for him to lay

down the life of his son. And this he did freely! A friend of God responds completely – whatever is asked.

Have you placed limitations on your love to God? Do you have some areas of your life that are “out of bounds” for God to touch? Is there definitely no “whatever You ask” in your relationship with your Lord? If so, then Jesus says you are not “His friend.” He may faithfully be your Friend, but you are not “His friend”. No exceptions.

“I command you” – because He is God, He never makes “suggestions” – only commands! He is perfect love by nature, so He never speaks except from perfect love. Perfect love knows what is best and His commands are always best! Perfect love will withhold from us that for which we are not ready or able to receive. “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.” John 16:12 But “no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly” Psalms 84:11.

Perfect knowledge will always command what is right. So every command from God is right, and the one who knows how to be this way will always obey. This is how you can know a “friend of God.” He always does what his Lord commands!

Are you, by this standard, a “friend of God”? You can be! It is a choice!

DAY 19

The growing intimacy of the “friend” of God with the Heart of God is seen clearly when God seems to be conversing in heaven and says, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.” Genesis 18:17-18

The Potter was continuing to shape the clay into a strong person of faith. But his faith would be expanded and tested in new and significant ways. He would be given the opportunity to be an intercessor before God. God always looked for someone “who would make a wall and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land that I should not destroy it” Ezekiel 22:30. But now God was to reveal what He was seeing and planning to do against Sodom and Gomorrah. So, God revealed to Abraham the imminent danger of these two cities. “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know” Genesis 18:20-21.

Now the “shaping” continued! What would Abraham do with this new information that had been given to him? To be a “friend” of God means to share His Heart especially at the

moments of His judgement.

The men turned and went toward Sodom, “but Abraham still stood before the Lord. And Abraham came near and said, ‘Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?’” Genesis 18:22-23 Only a “friend of God” would approach Him with such boldness and openness! But God had been shaping him for such a time as this! What would Abraham, “His friend,” do when he heard God in this matter? Abraham began to intensely intercede! This is the kind of faith that God had purposed from eternity. It was now real and personal in Abraham. God wanted someone with heart to stand before Him and intercede!

It is a moment of trembling to realize the Heart of God, but this comes to the one who chooses to let God draw him closer to Himself. Often this will occur in one, while others around him do not know anything at all about the seriousness of the moment with God. But God desires such a relationship, where He can share His Heart. This is the “friend” He is looking for. This is the kind of relationship He is shaping in the one He calls. This one will see further, see clearer, and see more than others around him. This, too, will often separate him from those around him, especially because of the intensity with God this revelation creates. It is sometimes lonely being a “friend of God”.

To walk faithfully with God will always bring a person to experience God’s laying His Heart over his. This moment had now come to Abraham. This moment came to Moses when God was about to deliver His people out of Egypt’s

agonizing bondage. From that crucial moment until later, Moses would experience many, many times the Heart of God. God's Heart was laid bare to both Abraham and Moses, and it always deeply affected them. Much later the disciples of Jesus would share His Heart especially Peter, James, and John in Gethsemane (See Matthew 26:36-46). But here for the first time, Abraham was exposed, by God's Sovereign choice, to what was on God's Heart and God's agenda.

The closer one comes in his relationship with God, the more immediate is the intercession when the Heart of God is revealed to him. This is a sure test of one's intimacy with God! Delay can be fatal!

It has been eternally true that "the Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." 2 Peter 3:9 So anyone close to God will by that relationship become an intercessor before God. This is what happened to Abraham; he immediately pleaded before God for the city. "What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Genesis 18:24-25

He was especially concerned about his family. Lot and his family were in immediate danger! He continued reasoning with God, and astonishingly, for the first time in history, God

responded to Abraham's clear and specific intercession. God was moved and pleased with Abraham, "His friend"! He knew God's Heart and responded to what he knew of God, until the Scriptures simply say, "So the Lord went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place." Genesis 18:33

What a moment in history! What a pattern for all time! A "friend of God" being granted an insight into the Heart of God and becoming a "worker together with God" 1 Corinthians 2:9 and "As God's fellow workers" 2 Corinthians 6:1.

And it seems that the highest mission with God is intercession. Even to this moment, our Lord's activity in heaven is intercession for you and for me.

"Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us." Romans 8:34

"Therefore, He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." Hebrews 7:25

Since this is the high ministry of our risen Lord today, any intimate relationship with Him will ultimately lead one to intercession, life-and-death intercession as well. That is what being a "friend of God" is all about!

What area of your prayer life needs special attention?

DAY 20

In Psalm 85:6 “Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?” the psalmist was asking God to revive his people, bringing them back to spiritual life. God is capable of reviving both churches and individuals. He can pour out his love on us, renewing our love for him.

Why should a church pray for revival?

1. The church that prays for revival prays for God’s power. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8 There is a certain amount of power mankind has been given. We can be persuasive. We can be innovative. We can be attractive to a degree (as long as you don’t look too closely). We can plan and organize and pull off amazing feats. But all of those things are nothing compared to the power held within God. When a church prays for revival that church is praying for a power not their own. They are praying for the power of the Holy Spirit to be poured out in greater measure than what they can imagine. Power from the Holy Spirit is not limited to strength beyond the ordinary – that power also involves courage, boldness, confidence, insight, ability, and authority. The disciples

would need all these gifts to fulfill their mission. If you believe in Jesus Christ, you can experience the power of the Holy Spirit in your life. It is a prayer of faith, a prayer of need, and a prayer of humility. Jesus promised the disciples that they would receive power to witness after they received the Holy Spirit. Notice the progression:

- A) they would receive the Holy Spirit
- B) He would give them power, and
- C) They would witness with extraordinary results.

Often, we try to reverse the order and witness by our own power and authority. Witnessing is not showing what we can do for God. It is showing and telling what God has done for us.

Jesus had instructed his disciples to witness to people of all nations about Him. But they were told to wait first for the Holy Spirit. God has important work for you to do for Him, but you must do it by the power of the Holy Spirit. We often like to get on with the job, even if it means running ahead of God. But waiting is sometimes part of God's plan. Are you waiting and listening for God's complete instructions, or are you running ahead of his plans? We need God's timing and power to be truly effective.

2. The church that prays for revival prays for a great awakening. "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your

sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus.” Acts 3:19-20 John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus by preaching repentance. The apostles’ message of salvation also included the call to repentance – acknowledging personal sin and turning away from it. Many people want the benefits of being identified with Christ without admitting their own disobedience and turning from sin. The key to forgiveness is confessing your sin and turning from it. When we repent, God promises not only to wipe out our sins, but to bring spiritual refreshment. Repentance may at first seem painful because it is hard to give up certain sins. But God will give you a better way. As Hosea promised, “Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth” Hosea 6:3.

There is a reason the revivals in early America are referred to as the Great Awakenings. If there is anything needed today it is an awakening from our slumber. We are so sleepy toward God, even the best among us. Our God-sensibilities, by and large, are so dreary that many Christians no longer even pick up their Bible. Entertainment has dulled us, yes, but the problem is deeper than that. We haven’t merely been entertained by other things; we have failed to be awed by God. The church that prays for revival, then, is praying for an awakening to God. They are praying for times of refreshing from the Lord. Do you feel a need to be refreshed?

3. The church that prays for revival prays for salvation of many far from God “praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” Acts 2:47. Revival always demands attention. I’m not sure it can be said something is revival if people far from God have no idea it has been going on. Those who currently mock and scoff at the Lord, in times of revival, come to Him – miraculously. All of the work pastors and elders and ministry leaders can do in 50 years the Lord can do in one minute. God is in the business of bringing people to Himself, and therefore, manifesting His glory. That is done best when people are saved, when Jesus is lifted up and all people are drawn to Him. That happens in massive quantities, with great wonder in times of revival.

A healthy Christian community attracts people to Christ. The Jerusalem church’s zeal for worship and brotherly love was contagious. A healthy, loving church will grow in numbers.

What are you doing to make your church the kind of place that will attract others to Christ?

DAY 21

What does praying for revival teach the church?

1. When a church prays for revival, the church learns to be expectant. “Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us,” Ephesians 3:20. Praying for something that only God can do is hard because it pushes us down into new areas of humility. We are more comfortable praying for God’s help in our current plans, but to pray for God to do something that only He can do reorients our prayers away from ourselves and onto God. It is risky, but it is bold – and Christians should be bold. We serve a God who is able to work wonders.

2. When a church prays for revival, the church learns to plead with God in prayer. “Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.’ Then the one inside answers ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything. I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man’s BOLDNESS he will get up and give

him as much as he needs" Luke 11:5-8. Here's what I mean: when was the last time you used Scripture to ask the Lord to do again what he has done in the past? How much do you take God's word and use it back to him in prayer? That's what you're doing when praying for revival. You look at the book of Acts, for example, and see the multitudes coming to Christ and you're saying to God, "Lord, I don't see this in my city today. Why? Will you do this again? Will you pour your Holy Spirit out on us? Your name must be magnified here. You must be glorified in our city, in our time. Please, Lord. Do this for the sake of Christ." That is not irreverent. That is pleasing to God. Jesus told us so in Luke 8 with the parable of the friend in need at midnight. But most of all, it is pleasing to God because God wants to glorify Himself. Do you want Him to be glorified? Asking Him for more of Himself magnifies His glory.

3. When a church prays for revival the church learns to wait on the Lord. Similar to number 1 above, praying for something that only God can do puts us on God's timetable. He doesn't live in our space/time box. He lives outside of it. But He does care about it, and He does work in and through it. Our patience is so thin compared to God's. What if you spent your entire life praying for revival only to miss out on it? What if through your patiently expectant prayers your children or grandchildren experienced the revival that you spent your life praying for? Are we ok with our prayers today being the means of blessing for our children tomorrow? We must wait on the Lord. After all, what we are asking for is His work in His way through His means for His glory. We wouldn't want it manufactured. We have enough of that in

this world. We want it only as He would give it to us. So, we wait – pleading expectantly.

Why is a category for revival important in the life of a church? Revival is an important category for a church to have. The history books are filled with revivals. They are significant. They have spurred the church onward, and given her new life time and again. Reading about, talking about, and remembering revival stories are important in the life of the church for at least three reasons:

1. Revivals remind us that we are not God. “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined!” For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.” Isaiah 6:5. Seeing the Lord and listening to the praise of the angels, Isaiah realized that he was unclean before God, with no hope of measuring up to God’s standard of holiness.

2. Revivals remind us that there is always great hope for the church. “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” Matthew 16:18 The rock on which Jesus would build his church has been identified as Jesus Himself (his work of salvation by dying for us on the cross). We are in God’s hands, not the world’s. When the landscape looks the bleakest, the sun is about to rise. The world does not seem to be getting better. Sin is still powerful. Satan is still the prince of the power of the air. Creation is still groaning. But there is a great hope because God is still God. There is a great hope because the Lord Jesus Christ is

alive and through his Spirit, He is calling men and women to Himself. History has proven that God is still able to move in great power for extended periods of time to bring massive amounts of people into His kingdom. As long as Christ is on the throne we have hope – and HE is not moving! Neither should our hope.

3. Revival reminds us we need to constantly repent. “But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” 1 John 1: 7. Real cleansing from sin came with Jesus, the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Sin, by its very nature, brings death-that is a fact as certain as the law of gravity. Jesus did not die for His own sins; He had none. Instead, by a transaction that we may never fully understand, He died for the sins of the world. When we commit our lives to Christ and thus identify ourselves with Him, His death becomes ours. He has paid the penalty for our sins, and His blood has purified us. Just as Christ rose from the grave, we rise to a new life of fellowship with Him (Romans 6:4).

We need to be a people of Prayer. His church must be a House of Prayer. If we want the church to wake up from its slumber, pray for the Lord to rend the heavens and come down. Pray with passion. Pray with urgency. Pray with expectancy. Pray with humility. Pray without ceasing. Pray in the Spirit. Pray. Just pray. God is able to break through.

The only final solution to all the evil in the world, and all the evil in our hearts, is the glory of God shining forth. Come,

Lord Jesus! Revive us once again!

DAY 22

As we have focused on three different pursuits over the last three weeks – Week One “RETURN”, Week Two “RESTORE” and Week Three “REVIVE” we have one final pursuit left. Let’s pursue becoming a “House of Prayer.” Have you ever considered yourself being a “House of Prayer?”

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?” 1 Corinthians 6:12

No wonder Jesus got so upset when He saw greed, wickedness, and exploitation, in the Jerusalem Temple, because that’s not what a house of prayer is like, and that temple was a prototype. It represented each of us as followers of Jesus.

“But” you may say, “I am a lot of things, but I am nowhere near being able to call myself a house of prayer.” That’s fair. But there was probably a time when you were nowhere near being able to call yourself a follower of Jesus. The question is not “Am I a house of prayer?” but “Am I willing to cooperate with God in becoming a house of prayer, as God calls me to be?”

If you are, then here is your first step to bring you closer to that place: Ask for a clean sweep.

As Jesus evicted the moneychangers from the temple, so He will sweep clean the temple of your heart. His actions show us that we can't become a house of prayer without throwing out greed, bitterness, unforgiveness, lust, pride or uncleanness that live within us.

Invite Him, to make a clean sweep of your soul. Let's remember:

"But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the BLOOD of JESUS, his Son, purifies us from all sin." 1 John 1:7.

Some of the lyrics to a song, The Blood. Remind us how everything changed, how it gets harder to recognize the person you were before we encountered Christ, we don't walk like you use to, we don't talk like you use to, we were washed from the inside out.

Lyrics from an old hymn, what can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus, oh precious is the flow that
makes me white as snow; no other fount I know, nothing but
the blood of Jesus.

"Come now, let us reason together, saith the LORD: though
your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;
though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."
Isaiah 1:18

If you want to be purified and spotless, it's only by the Blood. It has never been about performance, perfection or striving for acceptance, it's only by the Blood. It's never been about deserving or earning, it's a gift that is freely given, it's only by the Blood.

That's how you do a clean sweep! Ask HIM to make you aware of anything you need to repent of and ask for His forgiveness. Then remember, it's only by the BLOOD. This is step one in becoming the House of Prayer He has called each one of us to be.

DAY 23

Make a Fresh Start!

You may be like many who have tried repeatedly to pray everyday or to read through the Bible in a year or any number of things to make prayer more a part of your life. And maybe it even worked for a while before you lost momentum. Still, it's likely that every good habit you have today – such as making your bed or locking up your house at night – was repeated many times before it became habitual. So why not make a fresh start today on something that will change your heart, soul and mind into a more prayerful place?

May I suggest, accept a humble beginning. Many past efforts at making prayer a daily part of your life may have failed, not because you weren't sincere, but because well, may I say arrogant. Oddly, when you try to start a new prayer habit in a spirit of pride and self-sufficiency, it does not work out as planned. You will become more like a House of Prayer though when you bow before God and ask Him to grant you the grace of a praying heart and make that your first prayer of the day.

Regardless of how prayerful or prayerless you've been in the past, try this: make it your goal for the next 28 days (that's how long they say it takes for a practice to become a habit) to do something more than you've been doing to cooperate with God in making you a House of Prayer.

Before long, you will have a sweet fellowship with God. The depths of this fellowship will grow deeper with every thought, word and deed. How intimate can this fellowship be? It's all up to you.

A few scriptures to ponder on:

Psalm 4:3 Know that the Lord has set apart the Godly for himself; the Lord will hear when I call to him.

Psalm 5:1-3 Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my sighing. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray. In the morning I lay my requests before you and wait with expectation.

Psalm 55:17 Evening, morning, and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice.

Matthew 14:23 After they had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone.

Mark 1:35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Luke 18:1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 Pray without ceasing.

Luke 18:1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

Colossians 4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

Whatever it looks like for you, start today to let the temple of the Holy Spirit that is your body, heart and soul become more like a House of Prayer.

DAY 24

We belong to Jesus, and our home is not of this world. Do our prayers reflect that? Sure, the Lord wants us to talk to Him about our day and bring those personal requests that our on our heart, but He desires that we pray for kingdom concerns, too – prayers for others’ salvation and for the spiritual growth of His children.

Let’s look at Paul’s prayers.

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, for the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1:9-14

Paul's prayers were Christ-centered and kingdom related—that people know Jesus, pattern their life after Him, and carry out God's will. The apostle yearned for believers to be filled with spiritual wisdom and understanding and to walk in a worthy manner. He prayed that they would please the Lord, be fruitful, and increase in their knowledge of God.

Finally, he asked that they be strengthened with Spirit's power and exhibit steadfastness and patience. Our God delights to answer such prayers because they are all part of what He desires for us. Paul wasn't ignoring the people's physical and emotional needs. Rather, he knew that God's answers to these prayers in Colossians above were the way believers would triumph in situations facing them. Then they would have strength to persevere and be good witnesses during difficult times. Like Paul, take steps now to make your prayer life more heavenly-minded than earthbound.

Jesus talked a lot about prayer. He taught its importance not only by His words but also through His actions. At times His prayers were spoken publicly; sometimes He withdrew from the crowds to be alone with the Father. Let's look at what Jesus said about the power of united prayer.

“Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” Matthew 18:19-20

Jesus looked ahead to a new day when he would be present with his followers not in body, but through his Holy Spirit. In the body of believers (the church), the sincere agreement of two people is more powerful than the superficial agreement of thousands, because Christ's Holy Spirit is with them. Two or more believers, filled with the Holy Spirit, will pray according to God's will, not their own; thus their requests will be granted.

If our church gatherings and small groups were to offer heavenly-minded petitions on a consistent basis, what would our prayer meetings be like? There would be greater focus on God and His kingdom. More of us would praise Him for who He is, express godly sorrow for our sinful ways (2 Corinthians 7:10) and speak of our gratitude for all He has done. Our voices would be lifted in praise as we witnessed people coming to the Lord, pride giving way to humility, and insensitivity being replaced by love. We'd rejoice in our glimpses of God's work in and through our local churches. And we'd be beseeching our Father for others' salvation and for believer's spiritual growth.

How excited we would be to see God answer our prayers. Some of us would find it easier to testify about our Savior, others would be filled with His peace when facing trials, and still others would have the strength to stand firm. Imagine our church, filled to overflowing and becoming the "House of Prayer" Jesus said we were meant to be.

