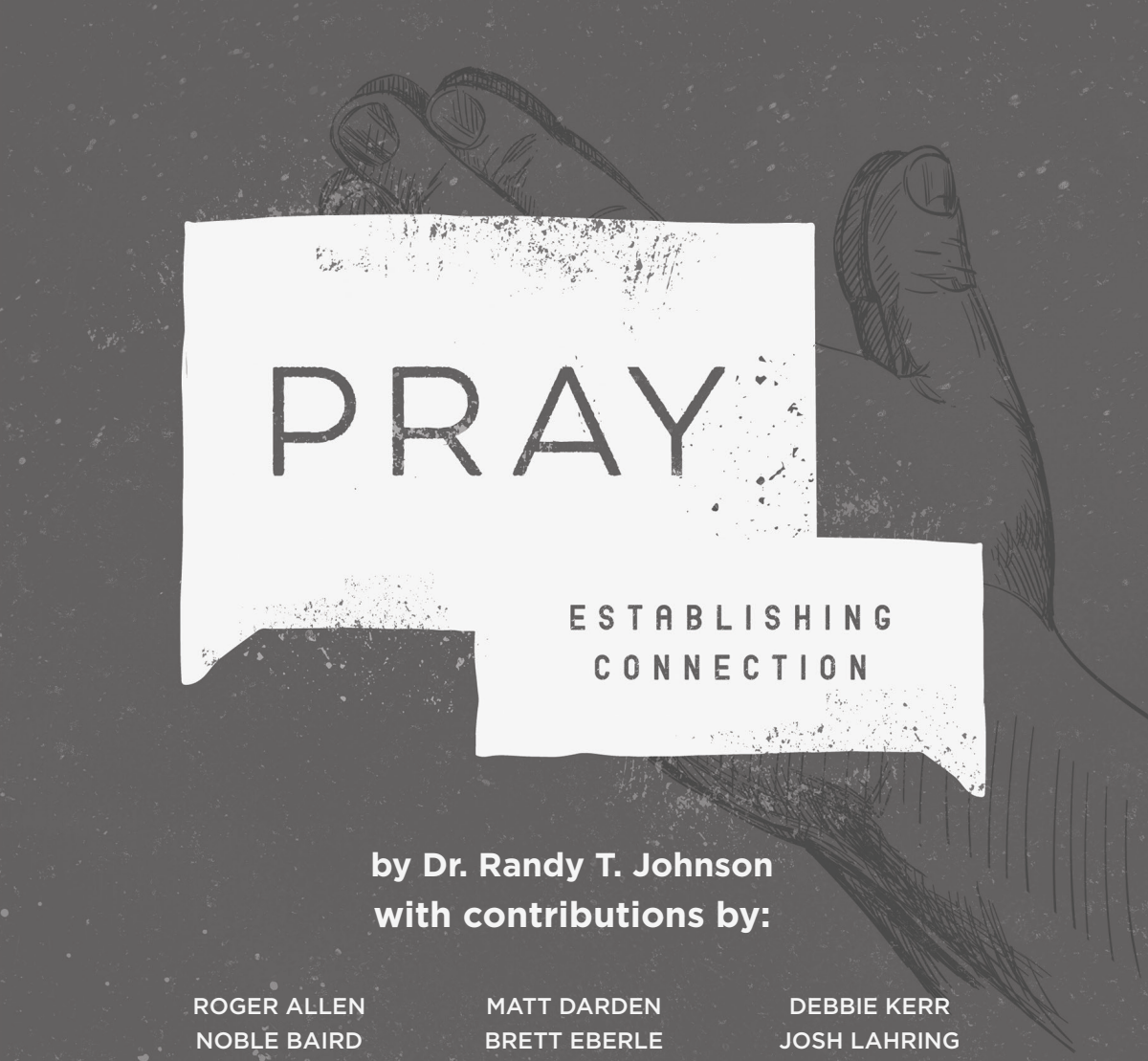


PRAY

ESTABLISHING CONNECTION

by Dr. Randy T. Johnson
with contributions by:

ROGER ALLEN
NOBLE BAIRD
PAT BEDELL
HOLLY BOSTON
CAROLE COMBS
ISAIAH COMBS
JEN COMBS
JOSHUA COMBS
SIERRA COMBS
MATT DARDEN
BRETT EBERLE
DONNA FOX
MICHAEL FOX
DEBBIE GABBARA
SUE HARRINGTON
RICHIE HENSON
KENNY HOVIS
JOHN HUBBARD
DEBBIE KERR
JOSH LAHRING
WES MCCULLOUGH
JILL OSMON
PHILIP PIASECKI
RYAN STORY
GARETH VOLZ
HOLLY WELLS

DESIGNED BY: CASEY MAXWELL
FORMATTED BY: SHAWNA JOHNSON

Copyright © 2018 The River Church

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be
reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means,
electronic or mechanical, including photocopying,
recording or by any information storage and retrieval system,
without the written permission of The River Church.
Inquiries should be sent to the publisher.

First Edition, September 2018

Published by:
The River Church
8393 E. Holly Rd.
Holly, MI 48442

Scriptures are taken from the Bible,
English Standard Version (ESV)



THE RIVER CHURCH

Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

WEEK 1: WORSHIP

Study Guide 09
Devotion 1: Start with Worship 15
Devotion 2: The World Revolves Around the Son 17
Devotion 3: First Name 19
Devotion 4: Rock Band 21
Devotion 5: Approachable 23
Devotion 6: Training Wheels 25

WEEK 2: GOD'S WILL

Study Guide 29
Devotion 1: What are We Even Saying? 37
Devotion 2: Seeing God Daily 39
Devotion 3: What are You Really Saying in Prayer? 41
Devotion 4: God's Will or Mine? 45
Devotion 5: Eloquence.. 47
Devotion 6: The Detroit River 49

WEEK 3: REQUESTS

Study Guide 53
Devotion 1: New Every Morning 61
Devotion 2: Prayer Changes Everything 63
Devotion 3: Daily 65
Devotion 4: Child-Like Faith 67
Devotion 5: Timing 69
Devotion 6: Daily 71

WEEK 4: CONFESSION

Study Guide 75
Devotion 1: Finding Peace 83
Devotion 2: A Win-Win Situation 85
Devotion 3: Grace Received and Given 89
Devotion 4: Paid in Full 91
Devotion 5: The Qualifiers 93
Devotion 6: Real Forgiveness? 95

WEEK 5: GUIDANCE

Study Guide **99**
Devotion 1: Tour Guide **107**
Devotion 2: Life is Not a DIY Project **109**
Devotion 3: Temptation **111**
Devotion 4: Maze or Amazing? **113**
Devotion 5: Listen, too! **115**
Devotion 6: Spirit of Truth **117**

PREFACE

In Matthew 6:9-13, Jesus shared what has come to be known as The Lord's Prayer,

"Pray then like this:

'Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.'"

Each section of this prayer teaches us an important aspect of prayer. *Pray: Establishing Connection* walks through the Lord's Prayer showing how worship, God's will, requests, confession, and guidance are all part of intimate and vibrant prayer that is acceptable to God Almighty.

Pray: Establishing Connection consists of five study guides for personal or group discussion and thirty devotions to help you in your daily walk and talk with God.



01

WORSHIP

NOBLE BAIRD,
COMMUNITY CENTER DIRECTOR

"Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name."
Matthew 6:9

Back in 2016, I had the privilege to go backstage at a concert in Fort Loramie, Ohio. For those of you who know me, I am a huge country music fan, so being in the middle of nowhere, in Ohio, and on a farm is the perfect spot for a country music festival! I had won four tickets to the festival from an auction earlier in the year. I called up my buddy Connor, to see if he and his fiancé would like to go with my girlfriend at the time (now my wife!), and I. Of course, Connor was all in, he and I have a long history of country concerts together. As we arrived at the festival, we were all extremely anxious to enter. Some people had been camping out and were at the festival way earlier than us, but as we arrived the lineup for the night was just beginning.

So, we went to will call, got our tickets and inside were four VIP passes. Now, I have met some various music artists in the past, but none that were in my top ten of all time. Alongside the passes, were instructions with a time and location of where to be to meet the headliner of the festival. As time passed, which felt like mere minutes, we got in line and waited to meet this artist. One of the VIP team members came out to talk to us and mentioned how we would have an opportunity for one picture each and were told not to take too long. I quickly became anxious because I could not believe that I was really about to meet one of my favorite musicians of all time.

Finally, the crew member came around the corner, pointed at us to let us know it was our turn. As I turned the corner, there was Dierks Bentley. I had listened to all his albums, sang his songs at the top of my lungs in the car and the shower, but now he was actually in front of me! Then I reached out my hand, and all I could get out was "Hi." A few seconds later, I realized I had not even introduced myself. So,

I looked back as Haley, Connor, and Cheyenne all came to meet him as well, and I yelled, "I'm Noble!" Needless to say, I was awestruck and speechless.

Who is someone famous who you have always wanted to meet?

_____

_____

Have you ever met a famous person? If so, how did you react or how did you address them?

_____

_____

_____

Now, I know this is a ridiculous and embarrassing story. However, for me, it is a reminder of how I need to approach my Heavenly Father. Yes, Dierks is a fantastic and extremely talented musician, but I am not sure if I have ever been that excited about prayer. In Matthew chapter 6, Jesus teaches us how we ought to pray to God. Now, He does not tell us that we must pray with the exact words that He uses. Instead, He uses this prayer as an outline to help show us how to pray. In verse 9, He begins by saying, ***"Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name."*** For this lesson, we are going to split this verse into two parts: ***"Our Father in Heaven"*** and ***"hallowed be your name."*** Jesus began by addressing the Father with respect and reverence. He does not say: "What is up?" "Hey there Big Guy," or "Hey Daddy-O." Instead, Jesus addresses God concerning not only His position as the head of our family of believers (Our Father) but also concerning His position in dominion over all creation (in Heaven).

Whenever you pray is there a specific way you begin your prayer?

_____

_____

_____

How do you address God differently then that famous person you met or want to meet?

_____

_____

_____

In the second part of this verse Jesus then worships the Father. He says, ***"hallowed be your name."*** By definition, hallowed means: holy, consecrated, sacred, and revered. Jesus uses this opportunity during His prayer to simply praise and worship the Father. He understands how holy the Father is as He comes before Him in prayer. He takes the time to not only give respect in addressing the Father but also takes time to worship Him for who He is.

When was the last time you worshiped God in your prayer?

_____

_____

_____

What does worship mean to you?

_____

_____

_____

One of the greatest privileges I have ever received is the ability to play drums. To this day I know, without a shadow of a doubt, that the only way I can keep a beat is because God gave me the ability. For that reason, worship is very special and important to me.

Whenever I have the privilege to play during a gathering, the team always stops before we go on stage and we do the most important thing. We pray! I love the time of prayer we have before we go on stage and worship. For me, it reminds me of why we do what we do; it reminds me of the ability He has given me, and it reminds me how we are playing for His glory.

In Nehemiah chapter 1, Nehemiah has a burden on his heart. At this time, the temple and the wall in Jerusalem have been destroyed. The temple is in ruins, and the wall is in shambles with only fractions and pieces remaining intact. As this burden for rebuilding lays heavy on his heart, Nehemiah does the only thing that he knows will give him clarity in this feeling, pray.

Have you ever had a heavy burden laid on your heart?

_____
_____
_____

How did you react? What did you do with that burden?

_____
_____
_____

As Nehemiah went before God in prayer, he began in Nehemiah 1:5 by saying, ***"And I said, 'O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments.'"*** Did you see anything familiar there? Nehemiah approached the Father in the same exact way as Jesus did over 500 years later! He began by addressing God's title and position as head of all creation. Then, he used two adjectives to worship the Father: great and awesome.

When was the last time you used the word “awesome?”

_____

_____

_____

Was whatever you were describing as awesome as who Nehemiah was describing?

_____

_____

_____

When Jesus gave us this prayer, it is important to remember that it is not the only way we can pray. This is an outline, a guide for us. There are many times where I have stopped to simply send up quick “arrow” prayers that I shoot up to our Heavenly Father. Then, there are times where I will simply pray and just thank Him for all He has done and acknowledge how He has blessed me. As we begin this journey, taking a deeper look at prayer, I want to leave you with a challenge and a reminder. First, I want to challenge you to take time this week and truly worship our Heavenly Father in prayer. Lastly, never forget who our God is. Yes, there are some talented and gifted people in this world whom God created. If you ever have the opportunity to meet some of your top ten, that is an exciting time. However, remember how awesome and amazing our God is and never forget the awe and respect He truly deserves.

START WITH WORSHIP

WORSHIP, DEVOTION 1

Isaiah Combs | *Worship Leader*

My fourth-grade teacher's name was Virginia Winters. Mrs. Winters was the best kind of teacher. She was kind, helpful, and made learning fun (Mrs. Winters taught all four of the Combs' boys at some point). Surprisingly, I remember a lot of things she taught me in fourth grade. One of the things she taught us was how to pray. I think sometimes we pretend that it is easy to just start praying one day. Once you start, it is as easy as talking to a friend. But everyone needs to be taught. I use meals and bedtime as a chance to teach my kids how to pray to our awesome God. Even Jesus was asked, How are we supposed to pray? He answered by showing them with the Lords Prayer in Mathew 6:9-13.

Mrs. Winters taught us an easy way to learn and remember how to pray until we developed our way to pray. She said to use the word A.C.T.S. It is an acronym for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication (asking or begging).

The First step is to Adore or worship God. All of us have many reasons to worship God. It is important for us to start out telling God how awesome, incredible, powerful, and amazing He is. If you have been saved by grace through faith, you have a reason worship.

Ephesians 2:8-9 says, ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."***

Even Jesus began the Lord's Prayer with worship for His Father.

Mathew 6:9 starts the prayer, ***"Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name."*** Hallowed means to greatly revere and respect something or someone.

We have a great God who deserves endless worship and adoration. Before we start by asking God for what we need and want, take time at the beginning of prayer today to worship God for all He has done and will do in your life.

THE WORLD REVOLVES AROUND THE SON

WORSHIP, DEVOTION 2

Sierra Combs | *Women's Ministry Director*

I will never forget the moment when it all clicked for me. Well, maybe not everything clicked, but there was such a radical, instant shift in my brain that changed the entire view of my world. The light bulb turned on in my teenage brain. It was the moment when I went from thinking the world revolved around me to realize the world revolved around God. It went from me thinking that life's purpose was, frankly, all about me, to me realizing that my primary purpose on this Earth was to glorify God in everything I do. As I write this, I am tempted to delete that confession out of embarrassment. It sounds so ridiculous when I think about it. I was raised in the Church. I was properly taught who God is. I was very often reminded by those around me of the truth, but it never sunk into my mind and heart. I was so selfish. It was all about what God could do for me, instead of what I could do for God. You can imagine my prayer life. It was mainly focused on my wants, needs, and desires. I am sure there was "thankfulness" thrown into the mix when things were going my way. There was some "worship" added when I felt like God was doing what He was supposed to be doing. It is gross! Looking back, I can see that this was not true worship, and it is an absolutely terrible example of how we should pray. But how often do our prayer lives look like this?

Prayer is important. If it were not, it would not be mentioned so many times in the Bible. Prayer is how we communicate with God. He wants us to pray! It should be of utmost importance in our lives. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 calls us to ***"rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."*** Colossians 4:2 (NLT) tells us to ***"devote [ourselves] to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful***

heart." Finally, in Matthew chapter 6, Jesus gives us a model of how we should pray. While most people view prayer's main purpose as a way to ask God for things they want or need (and do not get me wrong, that is a component), they miss out on some other key elements. Prayer should start with worship. I do not mean singing (though this can be a form of worship). I am talking genuine, pure worship by bowing down in reverence and adoration before the One true God, acknowledging Him for all that He is, all that He has done, and all that He will do. So often we send up our prayers, expecting Him to answer when all we are thinking about is ourselves. We forget to whom we are praying. We forget that we are talking to the maker of Heaven and Earth! He created the Universe with billions of stars. He created the sun, moon, and a beautiful world. He just spoke it all into existence! He is so good and so worthy of our worship. How crazy is it that He made us, and He loves us so personally? The God who made the Universe loves you and wants to have a relationship with you!

I encourage you this week to examine your prayer life. How often are you praying? Are you praying continually, with joy and thanksgiving, as it says in Thessalonians and Colossians? Or is the focus of your prayers all about you? There is so much more to address with Him. When you pray, remember to whom you are talking. He deserves our adoration and our worship!

FIRST NAME

WORSHIP, DEVOTION 3

Debbie Kerr | *Office Administrator*

"Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name."
Matthew 6:9

My dad taught the Dale Carnegie course for many years. He not only taught it, but he also lived it! One of the first principles in the book, *"How to Win Friends and Influence People,"* is the concept of addressing everyone you come in contact with by their first name. According to Mr. Carnegie, there is no sweeter sound to someone's ears than the sound of their name. The first assignment in the class was to put this principle into practice and the following week give a two-minute talk on the results. The testimonies were often astounding as people shared their results. People would come alive and change their demeanor or attitude when they were personally recognized and noticed. While addressing someone by their name is effective and important, nothing compares to the power and importance of addressing our Heavenly Father by His holy name in our prayers and petitions to Him.

In Matthew chapter 6, Jesus begins teaching the disciples how to pray, but first he had to show them how not to pray. Starting in verse 5, He said ***"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their***

many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.'" He then continues the prayer that is known as The Lord's Prayer. You will notice that the first part of prayer is acknowledging God as, ***"Our Father."*** He is a personal, approachable, loving, caring Father. Romans 8:15 adds, ***"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!'"*** Abba means Daddy; He is our Heavenly Daddy!

The second part of the phrase, ***"hallowed be your Name,"*** acknowledges His name as holy and sacred, it is to be revered, it is not to be used casually, lightly, or in vain! When we pray, we are to start off with worship and adoration. He alone is worthy of our praise! While we are to approach Him in reverence, we do not have to approach Him in fear. Hebrews 4:16 (AKJV) says, ***"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*** We do not have to go through a pastor or a priest; we can boldly go straight to the Throne of God.

We are not only to acknowledge His holiness in our prayers, but also through our lives. Worship is a lifestyle; it is not just reserved for an hour on Sunday. Everything we do, whether in word or deed, is to bring glory to God and exalt His name which is above every other name.

"And you will say in that day: 'Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted.'" Isaiah 12:4

ROCK BAND

WORSHIP, DEVOTION 4

Wes McCullough | *Production Director*

A few years ago, I attended a Student Life conference by Louie Giglio and Chris Tomlin. Being a musician, the music aspect was especially meaningful for me. However, what I remember most from those special days is an illustration by Pastor Giglio in which he spoke about some stars that are thousands of light-years from Earth. The rotation of these stars produces a tone or pulse that he arranged one by one into the musical progression for the song *"How Great Is Our God."* His point was so clear; God created everything to give Him praise.

In Luke chapter 11, Jesus is asked to teach how to pray. Many of us have His response memorized:

"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one." Luke 11:2-4 (NKJV)

This response is short because it is more of an outline. Jesus teaches us to start prayer with praise. Later in Luke, we learn how important it is for us to worship God.

"As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!' And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples.' He answered, 'I tell you, if these (people) were silent, the very stones would cry out.'" Luke 19:37-40

Some translations say that the rocks would immediately cry out! I love the truth that God is so worthy of being praised that if people do not do it, animals and inanimate objects will jump in to get the job done. God may not have given you a beautiful singing voice, but I promise you your praises are still beautiful to His ears. Not everyone praises Him now, but they will one day.

"At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Philippians 2:10-11

APPROACHABLE

WORSHIP, DEVOTION 5

Sue Harrington

Prayer has become one of the biggest aspects of my life. I love spending time talking to my Father. There is a peace and calmness I experience when I come with a thankful heart and gratitude to the very throne room of Heaven. I do not pray because I believe I will get anything or everything I ask, but I pray because God has commanded me to do so. It is an act of obedience to Him. Prayer is just a simple, honest conversation with God inviting Him to be a part of our day.

As a child of the King, I know that He wants to give me good things, but I also know that His way, His timing, and His will are the most important way to live. I have come to the point in my life (finally) that when praying, I ask for Him to direct my every decision and move because staying on track and not getting distracted is vital for all of us, every day. Not listening to the Holy Spirit only takes me backward, and starting over is not an option I like to do. Trusting Him and knowing that the way He answers my prayers are key to my life. Please do not think that I believe I have arrived, but I do strive to make Him Lord of all of my life!

It is sometimes difficult because of the busyness of our lives to find the time to sit quietly and have that heartfelt conversation between God and us. Making time to do this is so vitally important. In 1 Thessalonians 5:7, we are told to pray without ceasing, meaning recurring and non-stop. It has to become a way of life, to be continually in an attitude of prayer because our Father is always up, waiting to commune with us.

When praying, I always begin by thanking Him for all He has done, all He is going to do, and all He has given and entrusted me. I love that He is always working upstream in our lives knowing what is best for us, answering our prayers according to His perfect will. I always invite the Holy Spirit to guide me each moment of every day. Sometimes I just come to Him and sing praises, worshiping the King of Kings. What an honor it is to be a part of the Kingdom of God that we can come boldly before Him. Colossians 4:2 tells us to continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

Spending time with Him, listening to the Holy Spirit, and waiting for His answers helps us to trust Him. Nothing stops us from communicating with God but us. It is our choice. So go humbly, letting go of all control, getting rid of your pride that you may know what is best for your life, keeping your perspective of whose you are. It is not of who you are, and it will build your faith. When your prayers are answered, it can serve as a witness for those around us who doubt. It also strengthens our relationship with God and fills us emotionally.

Scripture also tells us that even Jesus, the creator of the universe, went off by Himself to pray. Prayer is effective not because we are great men and women, but because of a great God who graciously hears His people, the One who suffered and died on the cross to make it possible for us to approach the throne of grace.

Steven Furtick said, “If we give God our attention, He’ll always exceed our expectation.”

C.S. Lewis said, “God designed the human machine to run of Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn on and the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other.”

TRAINING WHEELS

WORSHIP, DEVOTION 6

Josh Lahring | *Production Director*

When my daughter was five, I figured she could learn to ride a bike without training wheels. One day I took off the training wheels and tried to hold her up while she rode around. She cried and was so mad that I took off her training wheels. The next day I got her to try again, but she was so mad. She cried again and begged me to put on her training wheels. After a few more attempts she finally trusted I would hold her up while she practiced. Brooklyn was not too thrilled about it, but after a few days, she was cruising along while I ran with her holding on to her. Then I started to let go a little bit without her knowing till she would start to fall. She would yell at me, "Don't let go!!" Each attempt on her bike I would let her go, and before she knew it, she was riding on her own. She thought I was helping her, but I was not.

As her father, I knew that it is a lot more fun to ride a bike with two wheels than with training wheels, but I also know that to learn how involves falling a lot. It made me think of how our Heavenly Father allows us to go through struggles. We get so mad and upset at the way our life is, but He, being our Heavenly Father, knows what our future holds.

Isaiah 55:8-9 says, ***"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."***

It is so easy to be angry at God our Father for things that happen to us rather than completely trusting in His plan, knowing that His ways are higher than our own.

You love your children and would do anything for them but also realize the importance of letting them try things, learn lessons, struggle, and suffer to become better or prepared for something. Our Heavenly Father does the same for us, His children.

Realizing His direction and protection should cause us to start every conversation with Him in worship. We need to praise Him for what He is doing in our lives. He never removes His hand but provides true freedom.



02

GOD'S WILL

JOSHUA COMBS,
LEAD PASTOR

As Americans, we have difficulty fully understanding the concept of a king or living in a kingdom. In the same way, those living under dictatorship and even extreme poverty cannot possibly understand the right to vote or the splendors of a first-world nation. Imagine that for a moment the Bill of Rights ceased to exist, the Constitution disappeared, and we suddenly lost all of those precious rights given to us by the Founding Fathers. Not only that, but our entire government and all directional decisions were made by one man, a king. This one man, accountable to no one, could declare war, dispense justice at his discretion, and tax citizens at any varying rate that he desired. Of course, he could be a benevolent, kind, and just king as well. But the picture is nonetheless the same; the king has absolute authority and power. The citizens of his nation are his subjects, and he is their undisputed and absolute authority.

When Jesus spoke these words on a hillside in Galilee nearly 2,000 years ago, Caesar was the absolute "king" of the known world. Before the rise of the Roman empire, great kingdoms, like the Babylonians, Egyptians, and Persians, had risen and fallen. Following the fall of the Roman empire, more great kingdoms would do the same. Kings with their royal family lines have risen to power and then fallen, recorded often in the pages of history.

What are some kings from history that you know?

_____

_____

_____

Several years ago, I made a trip to the country of Jordan. When I entered the country, I realized it was the first time I had been in an earthly kingdom, with a king. Nothing incredibly different on the surface, because I knew I was leaving in a few days, but still a strange feeling.

What do you imagine living with a king would be like?

_____

_____

_____

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, spoke to an audience who fully understood what it meant to live in a kingdom with an absolute monarch (a king). When asked to teach them how to pray, Jesus gives what we know as The Lord's Prayer, but it is more of a model of prayer than a specific script. Within the powerful teaching from Jesus, He leans on the king and kingdom understanding of His audience, to teach a profoundly important insight of God. Jesus says, ***"Pray then like this...Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"*** (Matthew 6:9-10).

Pastor-teacher, John MacArthur writes, "All prayer, first of all, submits willingly to God's purposes, plans, and glory." Jesus is teaching us that when we pray, we are both asking and, through the act of prayer, submitting to His authority and His will in our lives. True followers of Jesus long for the Lord's full authority in their lives, just ***"…as it is in heaven."***

How is God's will obeyed in Heaven (Isaiah 6:1-9)?

_____

_____

_____

If we are followers (subjects) of Jesus Christ's authority, kingdom, the next logical question is, "What is the King's will?"

This is an incredibly common question asked by believers. The underlying motives for this question often concern careers, finances, marriage, children, moral dilemmas, and other life-altering

decisions. But the Scripture is clear that God through Christ, according to Ephesians 1:9, has ***"…made known unto us the mystery of His will…."*** Later, in Ephesians chapter 6 verse 6, the Holy Spirit commands believers to do ***"…the will of God from the heart…."*** Pursuing and fully comprehending the will of God is not only a mystery revealed, but a command to follow. Peter in his first epistle, exalting Christ as the ultimate example, challenges believers to abandon living ***"…the rest of time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but [rather] to the will of God"*** (1 Peter 4:2 KJV). The purpose of every believer is to daily live out the will of God for the "good pleasure" of our Savior.

How much do you care about obeying your King's will?

_____

_____

_____

When we obey the King's will, we usher in His Kingdom (authority) in our lives. It is helpful to look through the New Testament and see what exactly God's will is for our lives.

1. Salvation is the will of God.

Although certain portions of the will of God are tremendously difficult to understand, Scripture does make it clear about much of the will of God. In 2 Peter, a foundational element of God's will is revealed. Peter writes that the Lord is ***"…not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"*** (2 Peter 3:9 AKJV). Salvation and repentance are the will of God. When a believer or even an unbeliever asks, "What does God want? What is His will?" The answer is first to be saved. The believer longing to understand the mysteries of God's will must initially cling to the portions of God's will that are expounded upon in Scripture. Each believer must

adopt God's will and desires as their own. The commission for true Christians is to see others come to salvation through faith in Christ. Jesus' final message to His disciples was simple, concise, and incredibly profound, ***"Go and make disciples..."*** (Matthew 28:19 NIV). When we wonder either in our heart or aloud what the will of God is, we must recognize that our lives being used to see more people know the saving grace of Christ, is the clear and revealed will of God.

Have you been born again?

_____

_____

_____

Take a few minutes and share your story with those in your Growth Community.

2. Self-sacrifice is the will of God.

The Holy Spirit, speaking through Paul, uses the Macedonian believers as an example for the Corinthian Christians to follow. Scripture details the immense poverty and persecution that the churches in Macedonia suffered. Paul says, they ***"...first gave their own selves to the Lord and unto us by the will of God"*** (2 Corinthians 8:5 KJV). These followers of Christ had nothing by way of material possessions or prominence in the community to offer, but rather they first gave themselves. This was more than just a token offering of time, energy, or resources, but, as Paul notes, it was the will of God. For each Christ-follower the will of God is that we live self-sacrificing lives. Romans chapter 12 verse 1 (NKJV) says, ***"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice..."*** Even Jesus came, not to be served, but to serve ***"...and to give His life a ransom***

for many" (Matthew 20:28 NKJV). According to the Scripture, the will of God is that we daily sacrifice ourselves and our plans for the furtherance of the Gospel.

Are you following the will of God in serving others?

_____

_____

_____

3. Sanctification is the will of God.

The Apostle Paul writes to the church at Thessalonica about the massive issue of immorality. Within the context of the Greco-Roman world, sexual immorality was a rampant issue. Very often this devastating issue found its way in the church and caused havoc. Here Paul addresses that issue and more broadly deals with the issue of sanctification. This simply means becoming more like Christ as He, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, changes us, molds us, and purifies us. Repentance is the continual state of the believer's life from the moment of salvation. Paul writes, very clearly, ***"For this is the will of God, your sanctification"*** (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

What are some issues and sins from which the Lord has cleansed (sanctified) you?

_____

_____

_____

What are some issues that the Lord is currently working on with you?

_____

_____

_____

What are some issues you are looking forward to the Lord developing?

_____

_____

_____

With a plethora of so-called preachers and revealers of God's will, on what basis does an authentic follower of Christ truly understand the will of the Father? Jesus says, ***"For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother"*** (Mark 3:35 KJV). Without a doubt finding and doing the will of God is essential to intimacy and oneness with Christ. But again, with so many opinions concerning God's will, which one is right? Paul in Romans chapter 12 verse 2 (KJV), addresses this issue, writing, ***"…be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."*** How do we prove and confirmed the will of God? As the Holy Spirit through Paul teaches, we must renew of our mind. This renewal is a complete renovation that is done by Christ through His Word. Paul admonishes believers in 2 Corinthians 10:5 (KJV) to bring ***"…into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."*** Discerning the will of God is fundamentally done through constant study and meditation of the Scripture, for it is through the Scripture we spiritually comprehend God's will.

WHAT ARE WE EVEN SAYING?

GOD'S WILL, DEVOTION 1

Richie Henson | *Young Adults & Production Director*

The church world loves to speak Christianese. We love to speak in code that makes sense to other believers but does not mean a whole lot to the world at large. Before I offend too many, let me give some examples of what I mean. Have you ever said or heard someone say, "I just have to let go and let God," or "God will never give you more than you can handle?" My favorite, and one I have heard many times in my life is, "When God closes a door, He opens a window."

I am not saying that any of these terms or phrases are inherently bad, but what I hope to draw attention to is that many times as Jesus followers, we can get caught up in sayings and fail to grasp the underlying truths they are trying to express.

At The River Church, we believe that God has called us to accomplish His will in many ways. We choose to sum up our work as a church through three simple words; Reach, Gather and Grow. I think it is awesome that we keep these words at the forefront of all we do because it helps us to stay focused on what is important. However, it can be easy to see them simply as words and to miss the truth they represent.

In Matthew 6:10, Jesus teaches us to pray for the Kingdom of God to come, ***"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."***

As I was thinking of this simple phrase, I struggled to wrap my mind around it. It is easy to say this is a reference to the eventual return

of Jesus to rule on the Earth, but I think it is important that we not get so heavenly minded we are no earthly good (another classic Christianese phrase from my childhood). What I mean is this, it is easy to think of God's Kingdom as something distant, but in what ways is the Kingdom of God currently being manifested on the Earth? I think we need to look no further than the Church's purpose. God's kingdom comes to the Earth as people are reached with the Gospel, as we gather as a Church to praise God and encourage one another, and as we all grow to be more like Jesus.

So, as we pray, may we pray that God's Kingdom of salvation, praise and growth be present now on the Earth just as it is forever present in Heaven. Let us pray that as a church and as individuals, we would strive to live with purpose to see the realities of Heaven be present now on the Earth.

SEEING GOD DAILY

GOD'S WILL, DEVOTION 2

Dr. Randy T. Johnson | *Growth Pastor*

"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Matthew 6:10

I have a certain concept I pray every day for my wife and children. I pray that they would see God in their life today, acknowledge it, and give Him credit. I want them to be blessed, but more importantly, I want them to know it is from God. Their relationship with God is of utmost importance to me. I like how the revivalist Jonathan Edwards said it, "God is glorified not only by His glory's being seen, but by its being rejoiced in." I want them to see Him daily and thank, rejoice, and worship Him.

This prayer implies two things. First, God cares and is involved in our daily lives. Second, God has a plan, and it is designed to include His children. I want my family to see God, witness a miracle, and celebrate Him. Paul said in Colossians 1:9, ***"And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding."*** He prayed they know God's will for their life. He wanted them to know how God wanted them involved in His bigger scenario.

If we start looking for God's activity in our lives, I believe it will become obvious. He is present and active all around us. C.S. Lewis said, "Miracles are a retelling in small letters of the very same story which is written across the whole world in letters too large for some of us to see." God is alive and well. Look for Him. Make it a habit to start the day praying you will see, follow, and please Him.

Ephesians 1:18 says, ***"Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints."*** I love the image of ***"the eyes of your heart."*** It is the idea of seeing with our whole person. It is seeing and comprehending. The word ***"enlightened"*** is pretty powerful, too. God is involved in our daily lives, and He has called us to come out of the darkness.

It is amazing that God can work with all of us at the same time. We do not have to wait in line or take a number. A.W. Tozer said, "An infinite God can give all of Himself to each of His children. He does not distribute Himself that each may have a part, but to each one He gives all of Himself as fully as if there were no others."

WHAT ARE YOU REALLY SAYING IN PRAYER?

GOD'S WILL, DEVOTION 3

Holly Wells | *Assistant to Pastor Jim Combs*

Prayer is one of the most vital forms of communication we get to have *directly* with the Lord. Most of us have been a part of a church, small group, or family prayers where it was led by our pastor, leader, or family member. I believe we have prayed directly over these same groups and likely others who God places in our lives. So, we have heard others pray, and we have prayed ourselves, but what is being said? I do not believe that fancy worded, wonderfully illustrated, smoothly spoken prayers have any greater value or impact than those that are a little rougher, raw, and well real. I have always been told that prayer is simply a conversation (not a monologue) between the Lord and us and that it is our heart posture (or heart condition) toward Him that is most important.

Jesus cared greatly about prayer so much that He gave us a prayer model to follow. Through it, as we continue to glean all we can, let us really focus on the meaning of what is being said so that we can understand if and how our hearts align.

"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Matthew 6:10

That is a bold petition to make to the One who is holy, righteous, and just. He is the One who is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. He is the Alpha & Omega, the beginning and the end, and the Great I AM! But *what does it mean* when we pray it? A few words come to mind – the first being *trust*. I want what God wants, and I trust that He knows best and how to accomplish it. Isaiah 55:8-9 is a reminder to me that even when my opinion or flesh is sure to know the answer

or the way, God's thoughts and ways are not mine. In fact, the verse tells me that His ways are higher than mine! Additionally, I must *surrender* my will to Him through submitting myself under His authority. I need to stand down and let God be God because guess what? I am not God, and spoiler alert: neither are you (See Isaiah 45:9). To be honest, I fully know that I could not handle even the tiniest portion of being God, which leads me to the next thought: *rest*. Matthew 6:10 honestly refocuses my eyes, my priorities, and my will to God's through which I find rest and breathe with relief. I may not know the how, the when, or the why, but I know the Who, and He is more than enough for me (Matthew 11:28-29). This verse also stirs in me a *confidence* in God, *anticipation* for what is yet to come, and a *thankful* heart fully believing that ***"God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God to those who are called according to His purpose"*** (Romans 8:28 NASB).

Jesus is the perfect example of this promise, and He helps us understand this concept fully. It was at the end of Jesus' ministry and nearing the end of His life on Earth that He went away with Peter, James, and John to the Garden of Gethsemane to plead in prayer to His Father. This was the most distressing time of Jesus' life, and it was here that Jesus (fully God and fully man) seemed most human and frail. Overcome with emotion and anguish, He pleaded with God three separate times to ***"let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will"*** (Matthew 26:36-46). Jesus prayed for relief from the suffering He knew He would endure and He laid Himself out before the Lord begging for another way. But He trusted, surrendered, and submitted to God's will. Over 2,000 years ago, Jesus willingly paid the ultimate sacrifice because He knew fully who was at stake – you and me. He went to the cross so that we could spend eternity with Him in Heaven. Those who pray to receive Christ as their personal Lord and Savior are the fruit of Jesus' prayer and decision to accept God's will over his own.

Despite the cost, and that being His life, Jesus meant what he prayed. Do you?

"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Matthew 6:10

GOD'S WILL OR MINE?

GOD'S WILL, DEVOTION 4

Kenny Hovis | *Prison Ministry Director*

For over 20 years, I have worked in youth ministry. There have been many different students in that time that I have watched mature both physically and mentally. I have watched as some of them have made some very bad choices that resulted in strained relationships with their parents and other family members. Sometimes it has resulted in children and parents being estranged for most of their adult lives. As a parent myself, I cannot imagine not having a relationship with my kids because of something they did or did not do.

I have been close with a number of the students I worked with, but there have been a few that have broken my heart. Kevin was one of these. He was a super personable kid and fun to be around. Anytime with Kevin was always spent laughing. Sometimes I laughed so much my ribs would hurt! But Kevin could not do anything other than what he wanted to do. He thought he could do whatever he wanted as long as it did not hurt anyone else. Tragically, I watched him burn his world to the ground many times making choices that separated him from friends and family. Him imposing *his* will ended up costing him a relationship with his parents, grandparents, and eventually his child. Kevin was abusing a gift from God: free will.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus takes time to address some areas that were a concern to Him. One of those areas was prayer. He even gives a prayer template in Matthew 6:9-13. It is most commonly called "The Lord's Prayer." One of the specific things in that template for prayer that He addresses is in verse 10. It is at the beginning of the prayer so it must be pretty important. Matthew 6:9-

10 says, ***"Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth is it is in Heaven."*** Jesus is telling the listeners that praying for God's will in our lives should be priority number one. When we use our wisdom and discernment to make decisions, the results are not usually positive.

God did not create us to be robots. He created us to desire a relationship with Him, our Heavenly Father. We do have a free will that allows us to not listen to our Heavenly Father's directions. In Jesus' prayer template, He tells us to ask for God's will to be done in our lives. This is the process of us dying to our natural tendency to grab the reins of our lives and submit to the supernatural steering of the Holy Spirit. When we fail to do this, it is to quite literally telling the All-Knowing Creator that we know better than He does how we should live our lives.

Our "free will" was not really free. It was paid for with the sacrifice God's Son, Jesus, made on our behalf. That is why we now can have a restored relationship with our Heavenly Father. The freedom is in the choosing Who or what will influence us. It is the realization that left to our own choices, without the direction of the Holy Spirit, like my young friend, we will destroy and separate ourselves from a right Parent/child relationship with God.

Too many times I have done this in my life. Now, every day my prayer is, "Lord, Your will, not mine in all that I do!" Whose will are you acting on today?

ELOQUENCE

GOD'S WILL, DEVOTION 5

Jill Osmon | *Assistant to the Lead Pastor*

"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Matthew 6:10

The Lord's Prayer is a template for how we should pray. If you look at verses 5-9a, you will see that the Gentiles were praying incorrectly, they were praying to be heard by men, not by God. ***"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."***

I do not know about you, but I like to sound eloquent when I pray, and that can make it more about the words then the actual meaning of what I am saying. It can sound really good and still be empty, meaningless prayers. Which, I think, if we all admit, we want our prayers to have depth, meaning, and be powerful before God. So how we pray is important and what we pray is important.

Verse 10 has always been so interesting to me. In one commentary, it talks about how we ask about His will to be done. Are we resigned to His will, knowing it will happen? Are we annoyed that we do not get our way? Our attitude when asking for His will to be done is important. It shows where we are in our faith. When we ask for God's

will to be done, it should be because we have come to the point in our love and trust that we know God has the best for us, whether it is what we think is best or not. It is difficult; no one can say that giving up control, giving up earthly desires, is simple or easy. But what I do know is that when we begin to give control over to God, let go of what we think we should get, let go of what the world says we should have, and look around to what God has given to us, we will find our faith stronger, and our life being used by God. That starts with a prayer asking for His will to be done.

We know that what He has planned will happen, but He still commands us to pray. John MacArthur says, "To pray Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven is to rebel against the worldly idea that sin is normal and inevitable..." We pray because we want our life to reflect God here on earth, not to reflect what our flesh wants. As we continue to learn about prayer, do not forget that we pray for many reasons and one of those reasons is to connect with God. In connecting with Him, our desire for His will grows, and our request for His will to be done is an outpouring of our faith in Him. So we need to be clear in our prayer, it does not have to be eloquent or perfect, but it does have to be about God and not men.

THE DETROIT RIVER

GOD'S WILL, DEVOTION 6

Brett Eberle | *Production Director*

"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Matthew 6:10

As we did the week before, we are going to continue breaking apart The Lord's Prayer. The part that we are working on today is found in Matthew 6:10. There are two main points in the verse, ***"Your kingdom come"*** and ***"Your will be done."*** We are going to look at what God's kingdom looks like and also what His will is for us.

I want to address God's will for us first. Romans 8:28 says, ***"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."*** The will of God is that all things work together for good, but it does not say that everything is going to work out for everyone. There are specific qualifications to have all things work together for good. The first qualification is that we have to love God. It is God's will for us to love Him. The second qualification is that you have to be one called according to His purpose. What does that mean? I think that Jesus spelled out what His purpose for us is right before He ascended to Heaven in Matthew 28:19-20, ***"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*** God is the only place that we find the truly good things in this life but we have to love Him and live according to His purpose.

The second part we should address is, ***"Your kingdom come."*** The word "kingdom" is used 53 times in the book of Matthew alone and one of the examples used that I gravitated to is in Matthew 13:47, ***"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind."*** This parable caught my eye because one of my favorite things in the world to do is to go fishing with my dad. There are days that I do not want to get up at the crack of dawn to half freeze to death on the Detroit River, but when it comes down to it, there are few things that I value above the time we spend together in a boat. When we are fishing, our goal is to catch Walleye, that means that we have special hooks and specific bait to target that certain species of fish. But no matter how hard we try or what bait we buy, we always end up with some other type of fish in the boat. In the short time that I have been in ministry, I have seen the same thing happen whether it be a message that was tailored for students that resulted in a parent getting saved or even a message meant for inmates that encouraged the warden of the prison beyond what anyone could have imagined.

In the broken world in which we live, the one good thing that we have is God. Therefore, we need to spread His Word as far and to as many people as we possibly can.



03

REQUESTS

RYAN STORY,
STUDENT PASTOR

At the beginning of 2018, my wife, sons, and I went to Disney World. It was an awesome family vacation. While we were there, we had an opportunity to see some of the Disney characters that have made Disney famous to children, and let us be honest, adults. Before the trip, I was trying to expose my oldest to as many Disney films as I could. My hope was he would recognize characters other than just his favorite, Lightning McQueen. We had shown him *Toy Story, Finding Nemo, The Incredibles, Bolt,* and other Disney classics, but it still seemed as if McQueen was going to be the top sight to see. Surprisingly, when he had the opportunity to select his own "Mickey ears," he selected Buzz Lightyear. He then selected Woody ears for me. As the day went on, the opportunity to meet Buzz arose, so we got in line. Now waiting in any line with a two-year-old can seem like an eternity. Once again my son shocked me. Surprisingly, my oldest son waited with absolute patience and excitement for his turn in line to meet Buzz. When we finally got to the front of the line, my son got to meet Buzz, and Buzz even signed his "ears." For the rest of the night, all we heard about was "Buzz" and "to infinity and beyond."

What is something you have had to wait for to see or had to wait to get? Was the wait worth it?

_____

_____

_____

After getting home I realized one thing, my oldest son is weird. I am not sure where he gets it. As I type this, he is going on day five of wearing his Buzz Lightyear pajamas, and there is no hope in sight that those things will be removed. I have tried to reason with my son that I (let me be honest, his mother) could throw his pajamas in the wash and they would be clean for him by the morning. We get a resounding, "No clean! Me Buzz!" I have always had a phobia

in middle school about being the smelly person. It caused me to change my clothes often, and use an overabundance of knockoff Tommy Hilfiger cologne. I am having paranoia thoughts whenever I have to take my son out in public. I cannot seem to get my son to stop thinking about today and start thinking about tomorrow.

Do you worry more about today, or do you worry more about tomorrow? Why?

_____

_____

_____

In Matthew 6:9-13, Jesus gives us the Lord's Prayer:

"Pray then like this:
'Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.'"

The fourth petition in the Lord's Prayer is ***"Give us this day our daily bread."*** There is an interesting tension as a believer that exists in prayer. On one end of the pendulum, there is the truth that we can go to our Father in Heaven and ask that He provide for us in our times of need. On the other side of the pendulum, there is the truth of making sure when we pray we pray of "His will be done." The tension between asking God to provide, but not asking God

anything other than His will can create some serious confusion in our relationship with God. When my son asks for mac and cheese for lunch, I am not worried about him being worried I am going to give him sushi. When our relationship with God is tuned-in to where it needs to be, our prayer life starts to line up with what God wants.

Have you ever treated your prayer life like God was your genie?

_____

_____

_____

How does our prayer life become self-centered instead kingdom-centered?

_____

_____

_____

Whenever you study the Bible, it is always beneficial to look at the original language that a portion of Scripture is written. The Bible was not written in English, so making sure we study words can add amazing depth to our understanding of Scripture. In verse 11, ***"Give us this day our daily bread,"*** the word "Daily" is the Greek word "epiousios." The word "epiousios" only appears one other time in the Bible, and that is in the Gospel of Luke when Luke is giving his account of The Sermon on the Mount. If you use the English word "daily" in the way that the Greek was intended, the phrase reads, "Give us this day the bread of our necessity."

Why do we struggle to trust that God gives us only what is necessary each day of our life?

_____

_____

_____

Is it hard for you to only live in the today?

_____

_____

_____

One of the best stories about God providing our daily bread is found in the book of Exodus. It is not a huge jump to think that Jesus may be using this story in Exodus to help His listeners understand prayer.

Exodus 16:1-8 says, ***"They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, 'Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'***

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.' So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, 'At evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against the Lord. For what are we, that you grumble against us?' And Moses said, 'When the Lord gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the Lord has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the Lord.'"

Verse 31 adds, ***"Now the house of Israel called its name manna. It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey."***

Why did God still provide manna despite the fact that the Israelites were complaining?

_____
_____
_____

Do you ever complain to God about what you think you should or should not have?

_____
_____
_____

What happened if someone tried to save some manna for the next day?

_____
_____
_____

Jesus knows why He is teaching us how to pray properly, but the amazing thing is after He tells us that we should pray "give us this day the bread of our necessity," a few sentences later, Jesus tells us not to be anxious about our lives.

Matthew 6:25-34 says, ***"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than***

they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

How can worry and doubt affect your prayer life?

_____

_____

_____

Do troubling times push you closer or further from God?

_____

_____

_____

How does seeking the Kingdom of God and realizing God answers prayers go hand in hand?

_____

_____

_____

Recently, one of my favorite authors and theologians, R.C Sproul, went to Heaven. He wrote: "We have a tendency to pray in general.

When we pray in general, the only way we will see the hand of God's providence is in general. As we enter into prayer, this conversation and communion with God, and put our petitions before Him, pouring out our souls and our needs specifically, we see specific answers to our prayers. Our Father has invited us to go to Him and ask Him for our daily bread. He will not fail to provide it."

With all of that, God used my mini space ranger to teach me something amazing about prayer. We focus so much on tomorrow, and we forget to see how God has shown up and blessed us with the "basic" things we have each day. When was the last time your dinner prayer was sincere? As my family is praying for dinner, my oldest will occasionally just start by saying, "Amen." He does this because he knows that word concludes the prayer so we can eat. Sometimes we pray like that with the quick, half-hearted thanks for providing lunch.

NEW EVERY MORNING

REQUESTS, DEVOTION 1

Dr. Randy T. Johnson | *Growth Pastor*

"Give us this day our daily bread." Matthew 6:11

I am a sticky note fanatic. I create at least one sticky note every day of what needs to be accomplished. I can get so overwhelmed by the big picture that I need to create "baby steps." I might check off an item on tomorrow's list, but I try not to fret about those items. If I just look at the project as a whole, I can become anxious, defeated, and depressed. The whole course is good to consider, but the next step needs immediate focus.

Something that jumps out at me is that the Lord's Prayer speaks of ***"this day"*** and ***"daily."*** The focus is on today. Too often we get so caught up in the future that we miss the blessings of the present day. Matthew 6:34 adds, ***"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."*** Max Lucado got me thinking when he wrote, "No one can pray and worry at the same time." We need to pray in confidence. George Mueller is known as a man of extreme faith. He added, "The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith, and the beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety." Anxiety is real, but too often it tries to focus on things that are out of our sight.

Lamentations 3:22-24 presents this concept in another way, ***"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.'"*** God's mercies are ***"new every morning."*** His mercies are for today, and He will not run out of love. Corrie Ten Boom experienced

God's mercies at a time most would have missed them. She said, "Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow. It empties today of its strength." It reminds me of the whole thought that 90% of the things we worry about never happen and the other 10% we cannot change. Therefore, worrying does not make sense. Luke 12:25 captures the idea, ***"And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?"***

God offers peace for today. In John 14:27, Jesus said, ***"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."*** God will not leave us. He will not forsake us. He is with us. Enjoy Him today.

"As you walk through the valley of the unknown, you will find the footprints of Jesus both in front of you and beside you." Charles Stanley

PRAYER CHANGES THINGS

REQUESTS, DEVOTION 2

Donna Fox | *Assistant to the Growth Pastor*

My daughter gave me a plaque years ago that said "Prayer Changes Things." It does, it changes you! It is all about a relationship with Jesus. Prayer is a conversation between the two of you that deepens your relationship with Him. You tell Him your heart, you are hurting, you need a job, you want a baby, and He speaks to you through His written Word, and through the Holy Spirit. As you dig deeper into His Word and listen to the Holy Spirit, you begin to realize He has a plan for your life. He knows what tomorrow will bring, and it may be bigger and better than what you are hoping. If we pray for His will, our minds and attitudes are the ones that change, and we begin to look for what is going to happen next that God has planned for us instead of our worldly desires.

Prayer is not trying to change God's mind about His plan for our lives. It is about changing our mind to align with His will so that we open our eyes to see His plan. Prayer changes me! It gets my mind focused on His will, not my will. I ask for things "if it be Your will" and if I do not have my prayer answered, I understand it is either not His will, or not in His timing. When I ask for what He wants me to have (peace, joy, love), He answers because I know He wants me to have these things. This does not mean that life will be wonderful, always. There will be trials, but even in the midst of the trial, I am at peace knowing He is by my side. He is hearing my prayer of sorrow asking for the pain to go away. But I know during this time, He has a plan, and He has a purpose for this trial. I ask "what do you want me to learn from this trial?" I thank Him for it and rejoice that He was with me the entire time and did not abandon me. He said, ***"I will never leave you nor forsake you"*** (Hebrews 13:5).

In Jesus' example of prayer, The Lord's Prayer, He says, ***"Give us this day our daily bread"*** (Matthew 6:11). Here He is talking about our physical needs. Bread was a staple in the Jewish diet, a symbol of God's provision in the Old Testament. His audience would understand ***"our daily bread"*** as meeting their day-to-day needs. When we come humbly in prayer and ask Him to meet our day-to-day needs, we know that He will provide. Jesus did not say, "Ask for lots of money or a better job." Instead, He said, "ask for your daily needs to be met, and I will meet them." He knows what we need, and want, before we even ask. But by asking, through prayer, we are the ones who change – our hearts, our minds, our attitudes – about what is important and what God wants for us each day. That is, to be humble, to be still, and to watch and listen for God's leading in our lives.

"And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him." 1 John 5:14-15

"Remember that prayer doesn't depend on how you pray. The power of prayer depends on the One who hears the prayer." Max Lucado

DAILY

REQUESTS, DEVOTION 3

Roger Allen | *Recovery Director*

"Give us this day our daily bread." Matthew 6:11

One of the most rewarding memories I have as a child is the smell of freshly baked bread. One late November afternoon, my mother had put her efforts into baking the finest bread I had ever tasted. The day was an overcast fall day in Michigan. My brothers and I came in from raking what was left of the leaves and preparing for the long winter ahead. Chilled and tired, the bread warmed and filled us.

As we know, bread has been a food staple for thousands of years. It is often referred to as the "staff of life." Mentioned many times in the Bible, the references seem endless. From the symbolic, spiritual, and physical we are shown our most basic needs. However, here in America, we are rarely worried about our basic needs. Our needs naturally turn to wants very quickly. Wealth and prosperity consume our thoughts and prayers. Bread now represents cash, instead of something far more enduring. Instead of praying each day and trusting God for our needs, we covet for a nice little "nest egg" in which to rest, never having to depend on the Father who will sustain us through the Word.

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

By being consumed by treasures here on earth, we show where our heart is at and that we still rely on our strength. Simply put, asking daily for our sustenance and believing He will provide, is having faith in the one who shed His Son's blood for us.

Matthew 6:26 adds, ***"Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"***

Knowing His love for us should be like that sweet savor of fresh bread. Even when we are hungry and cold, we can have faith that He fills us completely.

"Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.'" John 6:35

CHILD-LIKE FAITH

REQUESTS, DEVOTION 4

Debbie Gabbara | *Assistant to the Gathering Pastor*

My Grandson does not hesitate when it comes to praying. Before meals or when he hears of someone who is sick or one of the members of our family has pain or a problem, he immediately folds his hands and bows his head and prays. He does not care if we are out somewhere or at home, he just prays. He does not take time to worry about things or analyze them and try to figure out how he can solve it; he just gives it to the Lord. It is refreshing to have the innocent, bold, and unhindered faith of a child.

When Jesus gave us the model of how to pray in Matthew chapter 6, He tells us to ask God for our daily bread. One commentary that I read described the "bread" as all of life's necessities.

"Give us today our daily bread." Matthew 6:11 (NIV)

When the Israelites were lost and wandered in the wilderness, God provided bread from Heaven, called Manna, every day for them to eat. It was only good for one day. They had to collect it every morning. God wanted them to depend on Him every day! He wants us to depend on Him every day, too. Just like we need to eat every day, we need God every day. God wants us to count on Him in all areas of our lives and have a relationship with Him daily.

"I am the bread of life." John 6:48 (NIV)

"Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens." Psalm 68:19 (NIV)

Jesus says that He is the Bread of Life. He cares about all the details in our lives and wants us to cast all our cares on Him. He hears our every prayer and wants us to bring all of our needs to Him. We, too, can have that bold, childlike faith! God is waiting to hear from us. The Bible is filled with promises from the Lord that tell us that He hears us, sees us, and cares for us. Do not be weighed down by the cares of this life, spend some time with God every day, take your requests to Him, and let Him fill you with His love and peace.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6-7 (NIV)

TIMING

REQUESTS, DEVOTION 5

Matt Darden

I recall as a small boy my mother teaching us a prayer about angels watching us through the night and thanking God for our daily bread. With no real understanding, I would rehearse the words after her thoughtlessly and with no sincerity to my prayer. My pilgrimage on this earth has not yet been as long as others, yet I have seen God provide in amazing ways. Long before I ever made Him Lord of my life, He had his eye on me. I think back to third grade shortly after my house burnt down, a church came and helped my family. They gave us food, clothes, and put us in a hotel for a time.

Ezekiel 34:11 (NKJV) says, ***"For thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I myself will search for My sheep and seek them out.'"*** What I love about this verse is the realness of its meaning in my life. Fast forward seven years to my sophomore year of high school, a friend from my new school who I had known for three weeks, his parents opened their home to me the very day I moved out of my dad's house. I had no plan and nowhere to go yet God provided with people who were total strangers to me.

Three years later, I was sleeping in my car, and God provided me a refuge. From before the first story to this present day, God has and I believe will provide all of my needs. Not when I decide it is time for something but when He sees fit.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, ***"He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end."*** I tell you these examples of how God has provided for me in

the hope that you reflect on how you have been provided for in your life regardless of whether it was due to your folly or circumstances beyond your control. Although it may have been unpleasant, in the end, God was able to take care of you. Joshua 10:25 (NIV) adds, ***"Joshua said to them, 'Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Be strong and courageous. This is what the Lord will do to all the enemies you are going to fight.'"*** I have hoped in myself: it failed as did placing my hope in jobs, friends, plans, pastors, and family. My hope now is in one thing and one thing alone, my hope is in Jesus and His cleansing blood.

DAILY

REQUESTS, DEVOTION 6

John Hubbard | *Worship Leader*

My daughter has a pretty good bedtime routine each night. The last thing on the list, just after mom or dad check off the 'tuck me in all warm and cozy' box, is to pray together. Her usual prayer request is a very general "for everyone," which I love. You never can know just who exactly needs prayer after all. Recently, she has been interjecting a thought or comment while we are praying: "for my brother not to be sick," "that we can still go to the park tomorrow," or something like that. It got me thinking, are requests the only things that I bring to God in prayer?

It seems to me that the most common way that I hear people describe prayer is as a request. We pray, "God, keep me healthy, please help me pass this exam, get me through today somehow, heal my grandma." The list is endless. The Almighty God of creation can so often be reduced to some wishing well. What exactly should we bring to God to ask for help?

The disciples wondered this same thing when they began to follow Jesus. In Luke chapter 11 Jesus shows the disciples how to pray. In verse 3 Jesus says, ***"Give us each day our daily bread."***

The disciples, being Jews, had a very real connection with what Jesus was saying. While their ancestors wandered in the desert, the Lord provided food for them daily. In the book of Exodus chapter 16, God lays the ground rules for how the Israelites should gather manna, the bread from Heaven. Each day they were instructed to gather only what they needed for that day. When they did not listen and gathered more than they needed, it would be full of worms and

begin to smell. How often do we take more than we need? How much more often do we ask for even more than we need?

God wants to hear our requests. He cares about every aspect of our life. However, have we become selfish in our prayer life? Are we praying for things, so we do not need to live by faith?



04

CONFESSION

PHILIP PIASECKI

The idea of roadmaps has always fascinated me. I remember going on road trips while growing up. My parents would pull out their roadmap and find their highlighted route and follow it all the way to Florida, New York, Washington D.C., or Sandusky, Ohio. It still blows my mind that someone, or a team of people, could put all that information together. Documenting every road in each state, putting them all together, so that people could successfully travel to their destinations is such a blessing. However, as accurate as the roadmaps may have been, it was always up to my parents to make sure they were following it accurately. If they missed a turn, they did not have GPS on their cell phone to let them know they were going the wrong way. Without paying close attention to the roadmap, following each turn, the map could not help us! One time we were driving home from Cedar Point late at night, and we missed a turn. It was so late my parents did not realize we were heading in the wrong direction until we hit the Indiana state line.

What is the most lost you have ever been? How did you find your way back to your original destination?

_____

_____

_____

Matthew 6:9-13 says, ***"Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'"***

The Lord's Prayer acts as a roadmap to our prayer life. It is not intended to be a strict script for prayer, but something that shows us what different aspects should be included in our prayers. Just like a roadmap, if we do not follow the direction of the Lord's Prayer, I

promise we will get lost in our prayer life. We need to be practicing each aspect of it, even the difficult ones. In verse 12, we find the concept of confession in prayer. Jesus instructs us to ask our Father in Heaven to forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors.

What do you think is significant about the word debt being used in verse 12?

_____

_____

_____

Do you forgive people in the same way you want Jesus to forgive you?

_____

_____

_____

I find it so interesting in this Scripture that Jesus assumes that we forgive other people in the same way that we want God to forgive us. I think before we deal with the idea of confessing our sins, we need to make sure that we forgive other people first and foremost.

Colossians 3:13 says, ***"Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."***

Ephesians 4:31-32 adds, ***"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."***

What specifically challenges you in these verses?

_____
_____
_____

Why is it sometimes so hard to forgive others?

_____
_____
_____

Christ forgave us of our debt that we could not pay. He gave His life for us so that we could be forgiven and live in eternity with Him. It only makes sense that we then need to extend forgiveness to others. How can I hold a grudge against someone, when I fully grasp from what I have been forgiven? Once we can comprehend the magnitude of what we have been forgiven, we then can without hesitation extend forgiveness to those around us.

Okay, that was the easy part. Now that we have covered the forgiveness side of things, here comes the difficult part. We need to lower our defenses and confess our sin in prayer.

Psalm 32:1-5 says, ***"Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin."***

What areas of this Scripture are impactful to you while thinking about the importance of confession?

_____

_____

_____

Practically, what does it look like in our lives to have these consequences of unconfessed sin?

_____

_____

_____

This section of Scripture is so heavy. Psalm chapter 32 is written by King David, and he recounts how his life was impacted when he was trying to hide his sin from God. The key word here is "trying." We know that God is all-knowing, it is impossible for us to hide our sin from Him. So why then is it so important that we confess our sins when He already knows them? First, we see in this Scripture that when David kept silent about his sin, he suffered serious negative physical and mental effects. As believers, when we are living a life that is contrary to Christ, we will feel the weight of that sin. It is a weight that gets heavier and heavier the longer we live in it and try to conceal it. I have had times in my life where I knew what I did or was doing was wrong and instead of turning from it, I fought the conviction of Christ. Thinking of those times still to this day causes my stomach to turn.

Have you had a time in your life when not confessing sin impacted you in this way?

_____

_____

_____

When we take the sin in our lives and fully expose it to Christ, asking for His help through it, He brings restoration. God wants us to lay down our pride, and admit to Him that we cannot fight our battles on our own. If you are currently struggling with secret sin in your life, my advice to you is to give up! Give up, and cry out to God for His help, His strength, and His peace. Confession in prayer is so essential because we are showing Christ that we acknowledge our sin and that we know we need His help to overcome it. When we try to carry our sin on our own, we are telling Christ that we do not need His help to overcome it. Satan wants us to believe that our struggles are something that we can overcome on our own. This allows Satan to sideline us, causing any effectiveness in our lives for the work of Christ to break down and become useless.

How have you found yourself "knocked out" of effectiveness for Christ by the enemy because of a lack of confession?

_____

_____

_____

Confessing our sin is the first step on the road to conquering that sin through the power of Jesus Christ. How can we be freed from the bondage of a sin that we cannot even acknowledge needs to be confessed to Christ? There is nothing worse than seeing a believer so blinded by their sin that they are not even aware they are doing something wrong.

Why do you think it is so easy for us to be blinded by our own sin?

_____

_____

_____

Jesus does not instruct us in the Lord's Prayer to confess sins so that we beat ourselves up all the time. We can stand confidently in the saving grace of Jesus Christ that our sins are forgiven and that His mercies are new for us every morning. However, if we never go to Christ confessing our sins and struggles, this is a sign that we are not allowing ourselves to be convicted by the Holy Spirit. It should be a Christian's goal to grow to be more and more like Christ every day, and acknowledging areas where we need to grow is a major part of that. Spend time in prayer asking God to reveal areas in your life where there is sin. When He does reveal those areas, confess, admit your need to Him, and take steps towards removing that sin. Do not be content struggling with sin. Through the power of Christ, whatever you are battling against can be conquered. Ask for forgiveness in the same way that you extend forgiveness to those around you.

Proverbs 28:13 says, ***"Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy."***

FINDING PEACE

CONFESSION, DEVOTION 1

Pat Bedell | *Special Ops*

When I was asked to do a devotion on the Lord's fifth petition in the Lord's Prayer, I knew He was about to do a work in my heart. Many of us have daily struggles of various parts of our lives, and this so happens to be one of the most difficult for me. There are two parts to this verse that go hand in hand. Matthew 6:12 (NIV) says, ***"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."***

The first segment of this verse is so easy to understand but so difficult to feel like you can do it adequately. It is so basic, ***"Forgive us our debts."*** The debt that we ask for forgiveness so fervently for is our sins that we commit against Him. By His design, we are born into sin. All of the sins that we commit over the course of our lifetime in thought, word, and action are on the table. If you so choose, think as far back into your childhood when you first disobeyed your mother or father. Now try and count your sins from that moment on to now. I do not know about all who read this, but I for one, have a plethora of sins to this day and as hard as I work to keep them in check, I fail daily. But one thing I do as often as I can is to ask for forgiveness. Jesus has done so much for me, and to sin against Him is both heartbreaking and disappointing in everyone's eyes. The only thing that I can do on a recurring basis is asking for forgiveness. As much as I do this, it will never be enough to pay for His sacrifice.

The second segment of this verse seems easier than the first segment, but for me, it just does not work that way, ***"As we also have forgiven our debtors."*** We live in a world of sin. People will offend us, friends and spouses will hurt us, and we will sometimes be

a target for sinful actions and words. We have all been in a position where we have been hurt by a loved one. Be it your family, a close friend, or a colleague, someone at some time has brought you down by their words or actions against you. Whether it was unintentional or premeditated, the Bible teaches us that God was willing to forgive us of all of our sins, we must also forgive those who have wronged us as well. Even though we have a desire to get even, God says we must forgive. Sometimes even though it is a crazy concept, I try to see things in the eyes of God. Some things are easier to see than others. Luckily, this concept made things a little clearer for me. If God looks down on me and can forgive a lifetime of sins (thousands upon thousands of sins), I can take a moment to cool off and forgive someone who has wronged me.

Tying everything together, God states five verses later what the consequences are for not forgiving others, ***"For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins"*** (Matthew 6:14-15 NIV).

The only way that we can learn how to forgive freely and fully is to focus on the forgiveness that we have from God through Jesus. Because Jesus took the blame for our sins, God does not hold us accountable for our many sins against Him. He promises that our relationship with Him will be peaceful because He will remember our sins no more. I find peace in focusing on my relationship with Jesus and will do whatever it takes to keep the peace in that relationship.

A WIN-WIN SITUATION

CONFESSION, DEVOTION 2

Holly Boston | *Women's Ministry Director*

"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Matthew 6:12

I am so glad that Jesus does not forgive me the way I forgive others. When I read Matthew 6:12, the saying "Do as I say not as I do" comes to mind. I am good at quoting Scripture and claiming God's promises as it applies to me. I believe in the complete forgiveness of my sins from my Savior and that He remembers my sin ***"no more"*** (Jeremiah 31:34). But when it comes to the sins of others, forgiveness is often conditional, and I have a memory like an elephant.

My daughter is studying to be a social worker and is finishing an internship at a juvenile detention center. She struggles because she faces youth every day who are in desperate need of a Savior but she is not allowed to speak of Jesus or the things of God. A young girl wrote a response to a question, "I don't have to forgive. My Jesus does it for me." Mackenzie called me and wanted advice on how to talk about forgiveness without mentioning Jesus. This great, timely question got me thinking (God was already working upstream to help me prepare to write this).

I began to put myself in this young girl's place. I wondered who she was having trouble forgiving: an absent parent, an abusive parent, perhaps a family member or friend who abused her. It is hard to imagine the "unforgivable" person or circumstances that led to her being detained. What I do know is there have been people and circumstances in my life that I viewed as unforgivable. As believers, we are called to forgive as Jesus forgives, ***"Forgiving each other; as***

the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive" (Colossians 3:13).

God's Word does not say Jesus will do the forgiving for us, but it does say He will help us. 2 Timothy 3:16 says, ***"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."*** On our own, forgiveness can be impossible, but with God, all things are possible (Matthew 19:26).

Then I began to imagine the reasons this young girl might not want to forgive: they do not deserve forgiveness, they did not apologize and ask for forgiveness, or she wants them to hurt the way they have hurt her. Sound familiar? I have found I have much more in common with her than I realize. Whenever I find myself considering what others deserve, I remember what I deserved. But by the grace of God and the shed blood of Christ, I will not get what I deserve - an eternity separated from God. Often, I think that I do not need to forgive because they have not even apologized. But then I am reminded that Jesus died for me when I was "yet a sinner" (Romans 5:8).

Yes, I believe we have much more in common with this troubled youth than we think. But there is one profound difference: we have people who can and will tell us about Jesus if we choose to listen. Most of what I just shared with you, Mackenzie is unable to share with this lost little girl. What can she say? There is one truth we all seem to miss: our unforgiveness hurts us more than it hurts others. If you read the story of the prodigal son in Matthew chapter 15, you will see the effects of unforgiveness and the fruit of forgiveness. We see the bitterness and anger of an unforgiving brother and the joy of a forgiving father.

Forgiveness is a “Win-win situation.” When you show forgiveness, especially to the undeserving, they see Christ in action, and you experience the joy and freedom you are meant to experience.

GRACE RECEIVED AND GIVEN

CONFESSION, DEVOTION 3

Richie Henson | *Young Adults & Production Director*

I love when things go my way. It makes my life so easy. For instance, when I catch all the green lights on my way to work or when a new checkout stand opens at the store and they call me over. However, I was confronted with a reality that does not sit well with me. For every green light I catch, there is another sitting at a red light, and for every check stand to which I get called, there is another who continues to wait in a long line. It dawned on me that I am way more self-absorbed than I care to admit.

Although the examples I gave may seem trivial, I think the way we think and respond in the mundane is a great indicator of what is in our hearts. For example, looking deeper into my life, I realized that I love for God to give grace to me. I love it when I mess up, and I run to God asking for Him to forgive me, and I know without a shadow of a doubt that I am forgiven by the blood of Jesus. On the other hand, I struggle to give grace to those who offend me. I much prefer to hold grudges and withhold trust from individuals who have sinned against me.

This way of living is challenged in Matthew 6:12 where Jesus says, ***"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."***

Jesus makes it abundantly clear that just as we are forgiven our debt of sin by the grace of God through salvation in the sacrifice of Jesus, we must also make room for grace in forgiving those who owe us a "debt" as they have wronged us. It must be our intention every day to show the love of God to the world. A big part of that is to live a life full of grace. That is, grace received from Heaven and grace distributed on Earth are equally important.

My prayer is that we would not think too highly of ourselves, but we would live in awareness of the grace given us and in turn, would spread that grace throughout our world. I know that if we commit ourselves to this prayer each day, the Holy Spirit will guide us to live in grace from God and it will be easier for grace to be given to others.

PAID IN FULL

CONFESSION, DEVOTION 4

Carole Combs | *Women's Ministry*

"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Matthew 6:12

I do not like any debts at all. I do not like to borrow anything or even owe one dollar to anyone. If the Lord shared with His disciples that there was a debt and they needed to pray about this, we must sit up and learn what that debt is.

Do I have this same debt? Do you? The debt is our sin, yours, mine, and the whole world, too. There is nothing we can do to pay off our debt of sin toward God. But God sent His Son, Jesus, to pay the penalty of our debt.

There is a heart attitude that Jesus is teaching here as well. It is a heart of humility. You and I have a debt that needs to be settled. We cannot give enough money or do enough good deeds to nullify the debt. We must humbly approach an Almighty God and ask and receive the forgiveness of sins He so graciously lavishes upon those who have repented. It is like God was going through the grocery store of life. He saw you and picked you up off the shelf and placed you in His shopping cart. He went to the checkout and placed you on the conveyor belt. When the cashier scanned you, buzzers sounded and lights flashed. The cashier's screen read, "Do not scan, already purchased." God said, "I know. This is my child." Are they already covered? Yes.

The debt of your sin has been paid in full by Jesus if you have put your faith and trust in God's Son as your Lord and Redeemer!

Jesus continues with His instruction to the disciples. They were to pray for forgiveness and forgive those who had wronged them. It involves forgiving those, if you may, that are in debt to them. We then are to forgive maybe someone in a broken relationship. It may be someone who has hurt you in your childhood. Is it someone who has committed crimes against you? Whatever debts they may be, people hurt people. Do you realize that if we can somewhat fathom what Jesus did for you and I on the cross, forgiveness would come much easier?

"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." Colossians 3:12-13

Because we have been forgiven, we must forgive. I had a wonderful woman ask me to pray for her struggling heart. She went on to give me the details of her struggle. The next day she would be at the trial of the man who had killed her sister. She told me that she knew that she had been forgiven by God and that her debt had been paid in full. She wanted to forgive this man who had stolen her sister's life. I wish we all could be like this woman who had the realization of God's forgiveness in her life and she wanted forgiveness to transcend to those that had a debt against her. Jesus is our best example of forgiveness as He hung innocently on the cross for you and I. Jesus even said, ***"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"*** (Luke 23:34). I still do not like to be in any debt, but I am thankful beyond words that I am not in debt to God! My debt has been paid in full! Are you in debt to God?

THE QUALIFIERS

CONFESSION, DEVOTION 5

Jen Combs | *Women's Ministry*

"And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors." Matthew 6:12

Anytime the word forgiveness comes up, I think we all bristle a little bit. Some of us do this more than others. I am one that tends to bristle a lot. I would say I lean more towards the resentful side of things, so forgiveness does not come very easy for me. I jokingly say that I live by the feud. What does that mean exactly? You cross me; you are dead to me. It seems easier to never speak to you again than forgive. But as many of you know, this is the flesh that we battle and that kind of thinking, living, and attitude cannot be a part of us if we are a Christ follower. Charles Spurgeon puts it this way, "Unless you have forgiven others, you read your own death warrant when you repeat the Lords' prayer." I am not one to use quotes, but I thought that this was so poignant. If we say that we are a believer, we are doing two things when we read Matthew 6:12.

1. We are acknowledging to the Lord that we are sinners (If we were sinless, there would be no debt to address or forgiveness needed).
2. We are saying that we have received the forgiveness of Christ, so we want to extend that forgiveness to others.

Have you ever had to forgive someone? How many times have we had to forgive others? How many times have others had to forgive us? (Eh…not one I like to think about.)

Notice in the verse there are no qualifiers. It does not say if someone has wronged you sixty times you do not have to forgive them. Nor does it say if someone hurts you in a specific way, you do not have to forgive. There are no qualifiers. However, I am so thankful for that. Do you want to know why? If the Lord had qualifiers on His forgiveness, I would be up a creek without a paddle. Therefore, how can I put qualifiers on my forgiveness to others if I have received His qualifier of free and unlimited forgiveness?

Now there is a flip side to this. If you are not extending your forgiveness to others, have you experienced the Lord's forgiveness? I am not saying that it is easy. I describe forgiveness like this, every day I have to choose to forgive. It is not just a one and done; I forgive you, and we can move on as if nothing ever happened. It is daily choosing to forgive someone. Some days I do great, and other days, I am a resentful, bitter, vengeful jerk. Onto which side do you fall? Are you extending forgiveness because you have been forgiven? Or are you not?

REAL FORGIVENESS?

CONFESSION, DEVOTION 6

Kenny Hovis | *Prison Ministry Director*

We need to face it. We all do stupid things, which in hindsight, we would do everything in our power to go back in time to change history. It is instances like this that we truly test the limits and willingness of others to forgive us for our terrible decisions in life.

I grew up on a farm, the only boy in our family for most of my childhood. Unless I wanted to play games with my sisters, I had to be creative when it came to occupying my idle time. I started my first business, selling night crawlers to local fisherman. I built a two-story tree house. I made a pile of cinder blocks into a make-believe tank. It was fun boy stuff.

On one of my make-believe military excursions, I was armed with my Daisy BB gun. I was rolling around shooting trees, ant hills, or anything that was supposedly attacking me. I looked at our barn and saw my enemy's stronghold. I started laying down suppressive fire. One of my shots found a window, and the new glass that my dad had just put in throughout the barn, just shattered. It was so cool! So much so that I proceeded to shoot out every window in the entire barn. My dad would not even talk to me for three days. I had done something that drove a wedge between my father and me, and he was struggling to forgive me.

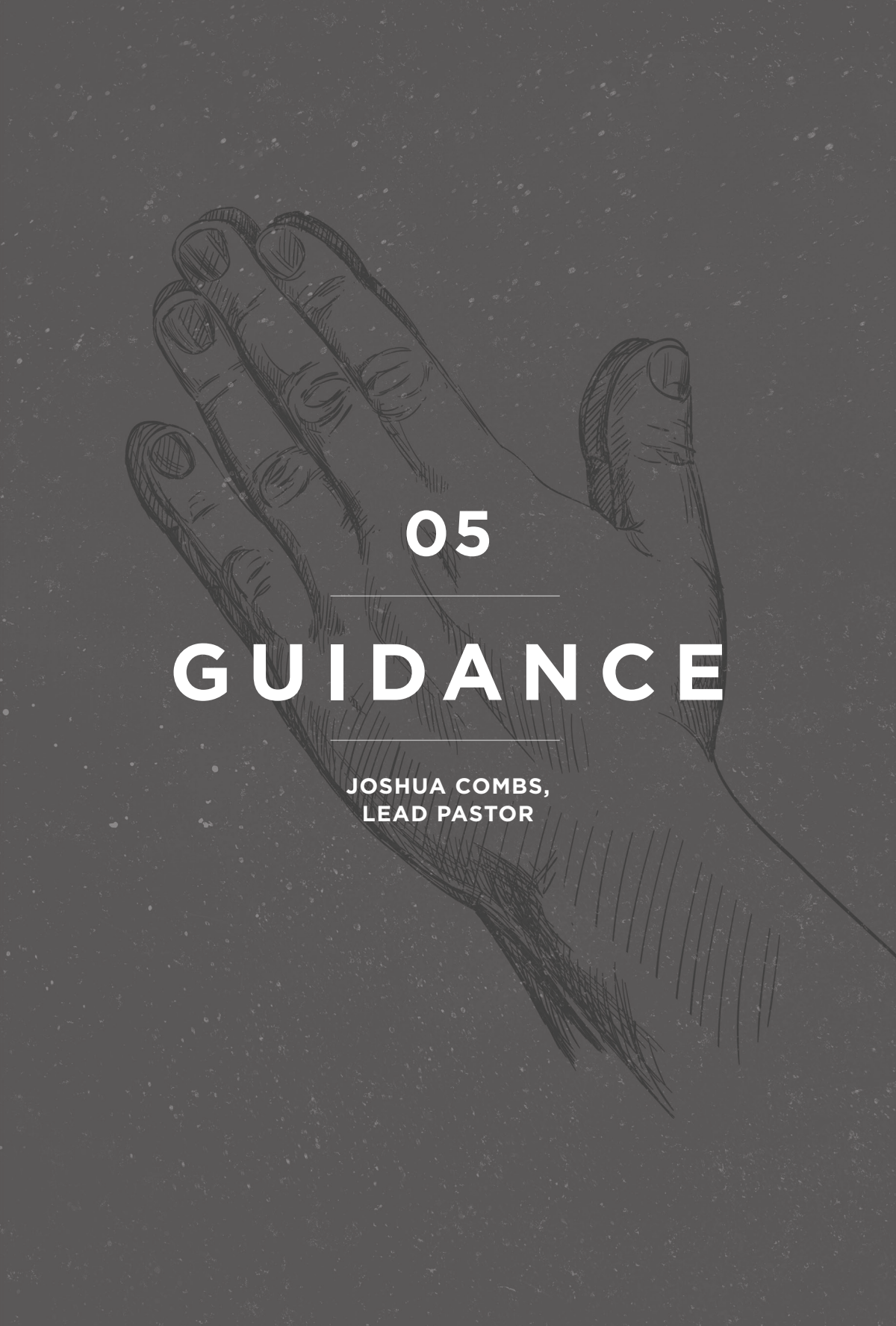
Much like the strain that my actions put on my father's and my relationship, sin drives a wedge between our Heavenly Father and us. When we are truly repentant and turn from our sin, He forgives us. Being forgiven is a phenomenal feeling, but how quick are we

to follow the example when a person sins against us? We tend to hold a grudge and always bring up the past. That is not the model Jesus shared.

Peter brings up the topic to Jesus in Matthew 18:21, ***"Then Peter came up and said to him, 'Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?'"*** Peter thought he was giving the "churchy" answer saying we should be willing to forgive someone up to seven times. Jesus, being the All-Knowing God, put Peter in his place in verse 22, ***"Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.'"*** Put simply, without ceasing. It is just as many times as God will forgive us, thankfully!

In Matthew 6:12, right in the middle of the Lord's Prayer, He says, ***"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."*** We are supposed to forgive just as God forgives us: without ceasing, without holding a grudge, and without bringing up the past. We have experienced the freedom that comes from forgiveness, and we are supposed to take that model and apply it to our lives. So much so, Jesus gives a warning in Matthew 6:14-15, ***"For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."***

How many times are you willing to forgive someone? Before you answer that, maybe you should remember all the things you have been forgiven.



05

GUIDANCE

JOSHUA COMBS,
LEAD PASTOR

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Matthew 6:13

As Jesus continues to answer the disciples' request, ***"Lord, teach us to pray…"*** (Luke 11:1). He has laid the foundation for both the Christian life and how we speak to our Heavenly Father. We begin by honoring the nature, character, and the very essence of who the Lord is. We then submit to the Lord's Kingship in our lives, seeking His will above our own. Once those two major building blocks of following Christ and praying to Him are in place, then we can ask for godly and proper things. We often get the pattern for prayer out of order and find ourselves struggling even to believe. We begin by asking and then find ourselves frustrated by the Lord because we feel He is not answering our prayers. James 4:3 says, ***"You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions."***

Have you ever found yourself frustrated with God in prayer?

_____

_____

_____

How have you strayed from the Lord's pattern of prayer?

_____

_____

_____

Jesus teaches how to pray properly. We must begin by acknowledging the holiness of God, His lordship in our lives, and then we can ask. One of the petitions we are told by Jesus that we can make concerns temptation. Jesus said, ***"Pray then like this…And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."*** (Matthew 6:13)

Before we break down the prayer principle Jesus is teaching here, we need to read a passage from the Book of James to understand what temptation is.

Note: Anytime you read the Sermon on the Mount from Jesus (Matthew chapters 5-7), read the Book of James with it. They are great together! James serves as a commentary on the greatest sermon ever preached.

James 1:13-15 says, ***"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."***

What is temptation?

_____
_____
_____

The prayer principle that Jesus is teaching us is two-fold.

1. We can ask the Lord to keep us from being tempted.

We are told by the Lord to ask God the Father to keep our steps from temptation. This is a godly request that falls perfectly in line with God's will.

Read and write out Psalm 37:23.

_____
_____
_____

In Matthew chapter 4, immediately following the miraculous and thrilling events surrounding Jesus' baptism, the Scripture says, ***"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came..."*** (Matthew 4:1-3a). The Bible makes it very clear that this temptation was ordained and allowed by God. This battle between Jesus and the tempter was part of the plan, and clearly, Jesus was directed by the Holy Spirit into the arena of temptation. When we are tempted, it is not a surprise to God. It may, in fact, be very shocking to us, but when we face the enemy, God is not caught off guard.

When was a time where you found yourself tempted in the last week?

_____
_____
_____

Were you caught off guard?

_____
_____
_____

How do you feel to know that at times God will actually lead you into temptation? _____
_____
_____

Go back and read Matthew 6:10 and remember who is your King/Lord and that you have submitted to His will and plans above your own.

We can ask the Lord to keep us from being tempted, but there is more.

2. We know that at times it is the Lord's will for us to be tempted, so we ask the Lord to deliver us when we are tempted and keep us from sinning (evil).

What are the four major promises God gives to us in 1 Corinthians 10:13 concerning temptation?

a. ***"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man."***

Read Hebrews 4:14-16.
Have you ever felt like the only person tempted in a specific area?

_____
_____
_____

b. ***"God is faithful."***

Read Lamentations 3:22-23.
What do you as a child of God wake up to every morning?

_____
_____
_____

c. ***"He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability."***

Read Genesis 39:6-12, ***"Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, 'Lie with me.' But he refused and said to his master's wife, 'Behold, because of me my master has no***

concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. He is not greater in his house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?' And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her. But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, she caught him by his garment, saying, 'Lie with me.' But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house."

What things did Joseph do to combat temptation?

_____
_____
_____

d. ***"With the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."***

Read 2 Timothy 2:22a.
What are some temptation escape routes that you have taken?

_____
_____
_____

What are some temptation escape routes that you have missed?

_____
_____
_____

Jesus faced serious and merciless temptation from the enemy, yet He stood firm and repelled the attacks of the devil. We need to daily pray for God to keep us from temptation, but trust that if God does

allow the enemy to tempt us, it is part of our Heavenly Father's plan. In the Gospel of Luke, the Scripture says, ***"And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time"*** (Luke 4:13). Satan is looking for an opportune time, but God is standing with you to defeat the temptations of the enemy. He can deliver you from evil.

TOUR GUIDE

GUIDANCE, DEVOTION 1

Isaiah Combs | *Worship Leader*

I am a big fan of museums. I enjoy learning about the history of things from the past while seeing new exciting things. I have been to museums where you walk around at your speed. Those are fun. But what I enjoy is having a tour guide. The tour guide walks you around and knows exactly what to show and where to go. I also enjoy the tour guides knowledge of the history of so many fascinating things. I weirdly also like the awful jokes that are told.

The Lord's Prayer (Mathew 6:9-13) is Jesus' model on teaching us how to pray. He gives us an example. During the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray for guidance. I do not know about you, but I need a lot of guidance.

Verse 13 says, ***"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."***

Our life is like a crazy big museum. It is a place we have never been before. We can choose to walk around aimlessly on our own accord and get lost. However, the better choice is to use the ultimate tour guide. He wants to guide us through this life. Just like the tour guide in a museum, God knows exactly where to go and has extensive knowledge of this life.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, ***"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."***

My own will and desires lead directly to evil. Trusting in the Lord as a knowledgeable tour guide will make my path straight and drop my chances of getting lost.

I also believe God has a great sense of humor and loves to hear us laugh. His guidance should put a smile on your face and at times even a chuckle in your gut. Proverbs 17:22 says, ***"A joyful heart is good medicine."*** It is better than those awful tour guide jokes.

LIFE IS NOT A DIY PROJECT

GUIDANCE, DEVOTION 2

Wes McCullough | *Production Director*

I do not know about you, but I am stubbornly independent. After buying my first home, a fixer-upper, I insisted on doing most of the updates and upgrades myself. I have a good mind for understanding how most things work and should be. So, having the right tools made most of the projects doable.

The painting was easy enough. Installing new electrical switches, outlets, and lights, required minimal research. Laying vinyl planks required a bit of trial and error. Installing new cabinets was simple but tedious. Most recently my project was the crown molding for said cabinets. Like any "professional" amateur, I went to YouTube to learn what needed to be known. I watched a couple of how-to videos and learned that the molding needs to be cut upside down and backward. This concept took a while to grasp. I could not afford many mistakes, so I watched those videos over and over to understand.

What about life? We all need help navigating the ups, downs, and unpredictability we face. The Bible is an indispensable tool for helping you know God's instruction and will. Additionally, spend ample time in prayer communicating with the Almighty who has plans for you to prosper.

Proverbs 3:5-6 was drilled into my memory at a very young age:

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."

It may be a career move, a long distance move, whether to expand your family, or maybe just what to say to friends or family with whom you have a rough relationship, but we will always face decisions in which we need guidance from our all-knowing Heavenly Father. Your gut may push you strongly one way or the other but do not follow it if it goes against God's guidance.

Psalm 32:8 is another great reminder: ***"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you."***

God will not let you down. Spend the necessary time in prayer and the Bible to fully understand the wisdom God is trying to provide. Read and reread, pray and pray again as you seek guidance. God will, at the right time, reveal the answers. Make sure you are always listening.

TEMPTATION

GUIDANCE, DEVOTION 3

Gareth Volz | *Senior (55+) Director*

What do you think of when you hear the word temptation? According to Webster's Dictionary, temptation is *"the act of tempting or the state of being tempted especially to evil."* Back in the 80's, there was a comedian who was known for the saying "The devil made me do it." That is how most people view temptation, and the devil does tempt us, but that is only one part of the answer. The other part is our sin nature.

So as Christians, how should we respond to temptation? The Good News is that as Christians, we have been delivered from the kingdom of darkness where sin reigns. Before we accepted Jesus as our Savior, we were slaves to sin. But when we put our faith in Jesus and accepted His perfect sacrifice for our sins, we passed out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of Jesus, God's Son. This means we are no longer under the authority of sin, and we can choose not to sin. The Bible says, ***"Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord"*** (Romans 6:11 NKJV). The next verse continues, ***"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts."***

While Christians have been freed from the authority of sin, because we still have our old sin nature, we can still sin. James 1:14 says, ***"Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed."*** To guard against letting our sin nature steer our lives, we need to remember Whose we are, and not make any provision for the flesh. Romans 13:14 (NKJV) adds, ***"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts."*** We need to fill our minds with God's Word. Psalm 119:11

(NKJV) says, ***"Your Word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You."***

While Satan no longer has authority over Christians, he still tempts us to sin, to render us ineffective for God. We are warned in 1 Peter 5:8-9, ***"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world."*** How can we do this? This is done by putting on the whole armor of God, as listed in Ephesians 6:11-17.

Remember 1 John 4:4 (KJV) says, ***"Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world."***

MAZE OR AMAZING?

GUIDANCE, DEVOTION 4

Noble Baird | *Community Center Director*

Several years ago, my buddy Connor and I decided to go to a corn maze with a few friends. When we arrived, it was around 7:00 pm and pitch black outside. There were already a ton of people at the farm, and many were in the maze. As we waited in line, only a few had successfully made it to the end, warning those of us in line not to go. However, as Connor and I have a track record of doing, we looked at each other and knew although others were struggling to get through the maze on their own, that we would be able to do it.

In Proverbs 15:21-22, Solomon writes, ***"Folly is a joy to him who lacks sense, but a man of understanding walks straight ahead. Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed."*** I have always admired Solomon. In 1 Kings 3:1-15, God asked Solomon what he wanted. He could have had anything in the world: money, a brand new Benz, 140 acres with a mansion, or maybe even a spaceship! However, Solomon asked God for wisdom and understanding to lead and reign over the people of Israel. For this reason, I have always admired Solomon. As he writes in Proverbs chapter 15, he is warning us about the importance of seeking guidance in all we do.

So, as Connor and I embarked on this journey to conquer this maze, we were confident that we could be better than everyone else. As time went by and we may have retraced our steps a handful of times, we started to realize that this might be a little harder than we anticipated. Eventually, we gave in and asked one of the guides who was in the maze to help people who were lost, to help us with directions. I have never forgotten that crazy maze because it is a

reminder to me of the importance of the truth which Solomon wrote about thousands of years ago.

As followers of Christ, it is all too often easy for us to forget the importance of seeking guidance. During the hard times of our lives, we are constantly praying and seeking His guidance. However, when things go well, and life is at a normal pace, we can tend to slow down our interaction with God and seek counsel from those He has placed in our lives. So, I want to leave you with this challenge to seek after wisdom and guidance, continually. Solomon had the opportunity to receive anything he wanted from God, and he asked for wisdom. I hope that this reminder challenges you to seek out His guidance and wisdom daily.

LISTEN, TOO!

GUIDANCE, DEVOTION 5

Michael Fox | *Creative Director*

"Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'"
Matthew 6:9-13

Prayer is a vital part of our life as a Christian. It is our way to communicate with God, and He communicates in return through the Word of God. Today we are looking at Matthew 6:13, ***"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."*** It is good to take a look at a few verses that speak about temptation and provide guidance.

"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." 1 Corinthians 10:13

"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one." James 1:13

"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." Matthew 4:1

There are two things I notice from these verses. First, temptation comes from Satan. Second, God will not let us be tempted beyond

our ability. He provides tools to help us avoid and get through temptation. Recently, a friend reminded me of one of these tools being the Armor of God.

Take some time to read and learn from Ephesians 6:10-18 which describes the Armor of God as the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, shoes fitted with the Gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the Sword of the Spirit.

Take time to pray, share what trials and temptations you are facing, have a conversation with God, and then read His Word and allow Him to speak to you through His teaching and instruction to help lead you away from temptation.

SPIRIT OF TRUTH

GUIDANCE, DEVOTION 6

Sierra Combs | *Women's Ministry Director*

Think about God's guidance. We all want it until it is not what we want to hear. Then we toss it aside, pretend like we never heard it and keep pressing for a different answer. Sound familiar, or am I the only one raising my hand? I for one am certainly thankful that God has not given up on guiding me, even though I do not always have the best track record in following. Not only has He given me grace here, He wants to keep guiding me! He loved us enough to send His Son to die for our sins, to die so that we could have a relationship with Him. That is some intense love. Because He loves us so much, He will never leave us in the dust. As much as I may think that my ways are the best ways, time always proves that His ways are much, much better.

You might be thinking, this all sounds great, but we need to be practical. How do I receive guidance from God? I want to clear some things up first. Did you know that soon after Christ ascended to Heaven after His resurrection, God sent the Holy Spirit? Christ Himself calls Him "the Helper," and that is just what He is. Every single one of us who have accepted Christ as our Savior has the Spirit of God permanently living inside of us. Let that sink into your mind and heart. We have the Helper with us at all times. John 16:13 says that the Spirit of Truth will ***"guide us into all truth."*** God also gave us His Word, which was given to men through the Holy Spirit. Everything that He wants you to know is right there in your Bible. If you feel like God is not giving you any answers, and you are not regularly in the Word, then that is where you should start. If you feel like God is giving you an answer and it contradicts what is taught in the Bible, well then you are sadly mistaken. That is not the Spirit of

Truth that has led you there. If God has said something in His Word, He will never contradict it. It is so important that we know what God says, are obedient, and are constantly being led by the Spirit of Truth.

Maybe you have all of the above boxes checked (you know what God's Word says, you have been obedient, and you are keeping in tune with the Holy Spirit), but you still need guidance. I have been there. It is a difficult place to be, and sometimes it seems like you can be stuck there forever. Here is what I have found to be helpful. How is your prayer life? Sometimes we are so focused on finding the answer that we forget to ask! Jeremiah 29:13 says that ***"you will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart."*** In James 1:5 we are told, ***"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."*** Are we truly seeking Him? Are we truly asking, and then having faith to know that He will answer? When He does answer, will we follow where He leads, even if it does not fit our plan? God loves us and wants to lead us in His ways. In Proverbs 3:5-6 we are told that when we truly and deeply trust in the Lord and focus on His plans (not ours), He will guide us. Trust me; His plans are always best. Thank you, God, for your grace, love, and guidance!

OUR MISSION

Matthew 28:19-20: ***"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."***

REACH

At The River Church, you will often hear the phrase, "We don't go to church, we are the Church." We believe that as God's people, our primary purpose and goal is to go out and make disciples of Jesus Christ. We encourage you to reach the world in your local communities.

GATHER

Weekend Gatherings at The River Church are all about Jesus, through singing, giving, serving, baptizing, taking the Lord's Supper, and participating in messages that are all about Jesus and bringing glory to Him. We know that when followers of Christ gather together in unity, it's not only a refresher it's bringing life-change.

GROW

Our Growth Communities are designed to mirror the early church in Acts as having ***"all things in common."*** They are smaller collections of believers who spend time together studying the Word, knowing and caring for one another relationally, and learning to increase their commitment to Christ by holding one another accountable.

The River Church
8393 E. Holly Rd. Holly, MI 48442
theriverchurch.cc • info@theriverchurch.cc

BOOKS BY THE RIVER CHURCH

