



Anderson Mill Baptist Church 2025

Tuesday, July 29, – Sunday, September 7, 2025

40 Days of Prayer and Fasting Guide
Anderson Mill Baptist Church 2025

PREPARING SPIRITUALLY

- The foundation of prayer and fasting is repentance. Here are several things you can do to prepare your heart:
- Confess every sin the Holy Spirit brings to your mind. Accept God's forgiveness (1 John 1:9).
- Ask forgiveness from everyone you have hurt or offended. Forgive all of those who have hurt or offended you. (Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4; 17:3-4).
- Surrender your life fully to the purpose and plan of God (Romans 12:1-2).
- Believe that God "rewards those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).
- Do not underestimate spiritual opposition. Satan will usually intensify his efforts when you devote yourself to prayer and fasting (Luke 4).
- Develop an accountability partner who will encourage you in your fast.
- Keep a journal during your fast. Write down specific insights God gives you from His Word, promises that you have claimed, and answers to prayer that you receive.

Our building will be open Monday-Thursday from 8:30 am – 5:00 pm for anyone or groups of people who want to come and pray at the church during our 40 days.

We will also have 3 Tuesday evening, church-wide, prayer opportunities. On August 5th, 19th, and September 2, we will open the sanctuary at 6:00 pm for anyone who wants to meet in the building to pray for God to move mightily among us.

DAY OF FASTING AND PRAYER

Rick Warren

WHY FAST?

There are many good reasons, and even health benefits, for fasting. Fasting gives you more time for prayer. You can use the time you'd normally spend eating as time in prayer for what God wants to do among us during this Campaign. In the Bible, fasting is always connected with prayer.

"While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off." Acts 13:2-3 (NIV)

Fasting demonstrates the depth of your desire when praying for something. It shows you that you are serious enough about your prayer request to pay a personal price. God honors deep desire and praying in faith.

"Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord." Joel 1:14

"That is why the Lord says, 'Turn to me now, while there is time! Give me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning.'" Joel 2:12

Fasting releases God's supernatural power. It is a tool we can use when there is opposition to God's will. Satan would like nothing better than to cause division, discouragement, defeat, depression, and doubt among us. United prayer and fasting has always been used by God to deal a decisive blow to the enemy!

"So we fasted and prayed about these concerns. And he listened." Ezra 8:23

"God says, 'Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?'" Isaiah 58:6

TWO CAUTIONS

1. Remember that fasting is not "earning" an answer to prayer. God cannot be blackmailed by human effort. God wants to answer our prayers, and He answers out of grace. Fasting simply prepares us for God's answer.
2. Fast only if your health allows it at this time. If you are able to do only a partial fast, do it in faith, and God will honor your intentions.

In the Bible, we observe the people of God fasting for a variety of reasons:

- They were facing a crisis
- They were seeking God's protection and deliverance
- They had been called to repentance and renewal
- They were asking God for guidance
- They were humbling themselves in worship

A CALL TO FAST

- **Fasting is not so much about food as it is about focus.**
- **Fasting is not so much about saying no to the body as it is about saying yes to the Spirit.**
- **Fasting is not about doing with- out, it is about looking within.**
- **Fasting is an outward response to an inward attitude and cry of the soul.**

That is why the Lord says, "Turn to me now, while there is time! Give me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Don't tear your clothing in your grief; instead, tear your hearts." Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful. He is not easily angered. He is filled with kindness and is eager not to punish you. Who knows? Perhaps even yet he will give you a reprieve, sending you a blessing instead of this terrible curse. Perhaps he will give you so much that you will be able to offer grain and wine to the Lord your God as before! Blow the trumpet in Jerusalem! Announce a time of fasting; call the people together for a solemn meeting. Bring everyone-the elders, the children, and even the babies. Call the bridegroom from his quarters and the bride from her private room. The priests, who minister in the Lord's presence, will stand between the people and the altar, weeping. Let them pray, "Spare your people, Lord! They belong to you, so don't let them become an object of mockery. Don't let their name become a proverb of unbelieving foreigners who say, 'Where is the God of Israel? He must be helpless!' " Joel 2:12-17

1. **Fasting starts with the spiritual leaders.** Joel starts off his urgent call to a fast by saying, "Hear this, you elders." (Joel 1:2)
2. **Fasting is often associated with a sense of spiritual desperation.** Joel 2:12 says, "Turn to me now, while there is time!" Notice the sense of urgency and desperation.
3. **Fasting is a call to return to God.** (Joel 2:13) Israel's first need, like that of the prodigal son, was just to come home to the Father. God doesn't talk about the people's need for better plans, programs, or strategies. He is simply saying to them: You have been unfaithful to me. Come home.
4. **Fasting is not about the externals.** In Joel 2:13, God says, "Don't tear your clothing in grief, instead tear your hearts." It is entirely possible to go without food and not have a true fast.
5. **Fasting is the response of a broken heart.** Why does Joel say, "Come with weeping, fasting, and mourning"? (2:12) Because repentance is the appropriate response when you have strayed. And, God is responsive. "He is gracious and merciful...not easily angered" (2:13). Somehow, God is drawn to the empty, broken, needy, and weak. As Jim Cymbala says, "God is attracted to weakness."

6. Fasting is the humble response to immense responsibility. Joel calls a solemn assembly. In verse 15 he says, "blow the trumpet...announce a time of fasting" and he urges everyone to get there - the elders, the children, the babies; he even says to get the bride and groom! Why? Because God's name and reputation were at stake (2:17). The people of Israel were being urged to enter a time of fasting, with the direct result that they would preserve God's reputation and glorify His name. That is an immense responsibility!

ON YOUR DAY TO FAST

Spend time in solitude and get away from every distraction possible (television, radio, cell phones, computers, etc.) The more time you spend alone with God, the more effective and meaningful your fast will be.

Below is an example of a routine to use during your day of fasting.

Fasting is not a way for us to impress God or manipulate him. It is a way for us to turn from our physical appetites and recognize our greater hunger and need for God. As you refrain from eating (or some other time-consuming activity such as TV or computer time), be sure to devote that time to prayer.

Patterns for Your Prayer Time as You Fast

Pattern #1 in the morning

Praying Scripture is a powerful way to connect with the heart of God in prayer. Use the verses below to help you as you pray and fast.

- First, pray Psalm 51 aloud. Personalize it by putting your name in place of all the pronouns.
- Next, use these points of confession, prayer, and Scripture throughout the day:
 - Confess your sins to the Lord. Name them one by one. Really dig deep and ask God to pry open your heart and show you any unconfessed sins that are ruling over your spirit. (Psalm 66:18)
 - Share with the Lord your desire to flee from anything that is not pleasing to Him. (1 Corinthians 10:13 & 2 Timothy 2:22)
 - Thank God for the gift of His Son, Jesus, and the blood that He shed on the cross for our forgiveness. (1 Corinthians 15:57)
 - Thank God for His desire to transform you into the likeness of Christ. (Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18, 5:17)
 - Ask for His help to fight the war of sin that rages within each of us. (Ephesians 6:10-18)
 - Ask God to protect His people from fleshly desires. (Galatians 5:16)
 - Ask for protection over our homes and families that they might represent Him with integrity and authenticity. (1 Thessalonians 3:3)
- End by praising God for who He is. Use Psalm 145 as your guide.

Pattern #2 around lunchtime

As you fast, remember that we are seeking God's face, not His hand. Fasting is not a means by which we attempt to change God's mind. Rather, we are admitting to God our complete dependence on Him and our total surrender to His ways and His perfect will.

God will expose the sins of your heart and lead you to humble repentance and brokenness when you fast. This is a good thing! God is in the business of transforming us into the likeness of His Son, making us vessels that He can use for His glory.

Whatever you have chosen to give up as a part of this discipline of self-denial, rest assured that you will crave this thing. If it is food, allow your hunger to remind you to pray and seek the face of God for satisfaction rather than satisfying the desires of your flesh. If it is some form of entertainment (TV, social media, etc.) know that your desire to turn to it for fulfillment is nothing compared to the abundant life we have in Christ. Each time your mind wanders to that which you are fasting from, pray, turn to the Scriptures, and find joy in Jesus' presence.

Use the verses below to help you as you pray and fast today.

- Praise God for who He is. Use Psalm 8 as your guide.
- Repent of your sins. Read Psalm 32:1-5 aloud as a prayer to God. Confess your sins, one by one, to the Lord. Ask Him to uncover anything you are attempting to hide from Him so He can cover them with the forgiveness that only comes from the blood of His Son, Jesus.
- Ask God to use these points of prayer throughout the day:
 - Ask God to heal us of sin. (2 Chronicles 7:14)
 - Ask the Lord to heal our church from complacency regarding the lost and instill in us an intense desire to build relationships with unbelievers and love them into the Kingdom. (Romans 1:16)
 - Ask God to heal us from familiarity. (Psalm 119:18)
 - Ask God to heal us from the sin of idolatry. (2 Chronicles 20:33)
 - Ask God to heal us from fear and anxious thoughts. (2 Timothy 1:7)
 - Ask God to heal us from sexual immorality. (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5)
 - Ask God to heal us from being satisfied by the things of this world rather than finding our satisfaction in Him. (Psalm 42:1 & Philippians 4:10-13)

Pattern #3 in the evening

During your fast, be particularly sensitive to the Spirit's leading. Since we have been praying fervently, you may experience intense spiritual warfare. The enemy does not appreciate our prayers. He seeks to steal, kill, and destroy. We are in a spiritual battle, and it is imperative that we prepare ourselves well and come fully equipped and armed.

Begin by praying Ephesians 6: 10-17 personalized for you below.

Father, today I pray that I will be strong in You and in the strength of Your might. I am putting on the whole armor of God, so that I am able to stand against the schemes of the devil. I know that I cannot do this in my own strength, so I am looking to You, Lord. I do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, right now I am taking up all of Your armor, God, so that I may be able to withstand the evil that will surround me today, and having done all of this, I will stand firm as I am fastening the belt of truth around my waist. I am putting on the breastplate of righteousness, and the shoes of the Gospel of peace for my feet. In all of my circumstances today, I will take up the shield of faith, which will extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and I am taking the helmet of salvation and putting it on my head, and will hold on tightly to the sword of the Spirit, which is Your word, oh God. I commit this day to You, Lord, and I pray this in the powerful name of Jesus, amen.

Now move into praying these verses

- Make a list of those you know who need salvation. Pray individually through the following verses for each one on your list.
 - God, will you show _____ that the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our (Romans 6:23)
 - Help _____ to know that it is against you only that he/she has sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that he/she may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. (Psalm 51:3-4)
 - God, You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty. (Psalm 18:27) Would you humble _____ so he/she can see their need of Jesus?
 - Lord, will you rescue _____ from the dominion of darkness and bring him/her into the kingdom of Your Son, Jesus Christ? (Colossians 1:13)
 - God, help _____ to know that You loved him/her so much, that You sent Your only Son, Jesus, to die on a cross so that if he/she believes in Him he/she will not perish but will have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

Week 1

Day 1: Avoid the Tragedy of Unbelief

Read Matthew 13:53-58

"And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief." Matthew 13:58

This is one of the saddest verses in the Bible. It is the account of Jesus going to His hometown to teach. When people heard Him, they were astonished. However, their astonishment did not lead them to respond to His teaching in obedience and faith. Their lives could have been radically changed for the better. Their community could have been dramatically changed. However, no positive changes occurred in the people or the town of Nazareth. Why? The Scripture gives the reason,

"Because of their unbelief."

Unbelief shuts the door on the transformational power of Jesus. Faith opens the floodgates to that same transformational power. In contrast to this passage of Scripture are countless others where Jesus worked miracles in response to the faith present in the lives of people. (Read Matthew 9:2; 9:22; 15:28; Mark 10:52; Luke 8:48)

When Jesus looks at your life, what does He find? An attitude of faith? Or unbelief? Do you believe Jesus can do a work of renewal and growth in your church? Do you believe He will? Do you believe that, to the extent you are praying for Jesus to bring renewal and revival to our church?

Prayer

If your unbelief is a roadblock to Jesus working in your church, confess the sin of unbelief. Ask God to strengthen your faith in Him. (Mark 9:24)

Day 2: Remember God's Power

Read Jeremiah 32:17-44

"Ah, Lord God! You Yourself made the heavens and earth by Your great power and with Your outstretched arm. Nothing is too difficult for You!" Jeremiah 32:17

Sometimes we forget how powerful God is. We forget the great things that He has done in the past. We often allow the immensity of our own problems and challenges to overshadow the greatness of our God. Our view of God diminishes to an anemic, powerless God.

In order to build a case for the greatness and power of God, Jeremiah reminds us of what God has done in the past. He reminds us that God “made the heavens and the earth.” What a display of power! God spoke, and the world came into existence. No one but God could do that. Creation itself is a testimony to the fact that God can do anything.

Creation was just the beginning of God’s mighty display of power. Jeremiah reminds us that this same God led His people out of Egypt with signs and wonders (verse 21). As we read the Scripture, we are reminded that this same God sent Jesus to be born of a virgin, live a sinless life, die on a cross for our sins, and be raised to life on the third day. Only God could do that! The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is a reminder that God can do anything.

Have you forgotten God’s ability to do anything? Today, recall the many great things that God has done as recorded in Scripture. Remember the great things He has done in your life personally. Remember the great things He has done in your church.

Prayer

Prayer that you would be reminded how great and powerful God is. That your faith would stretch to believe that He can and will do something powerful in and through our church.

Day 3: Confess Pride and Embrace Humility

Read Luke 18:9-14

“I tell you, this one went down to his house justified rather than the other; because everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” Luke 18:14

Pride is a subtle sin. It is not always easy to detect in our own lives. Jesus understood this, so He gave us a picture of what pride and humility look like with the two characters in this parable. The Pharisee was an example of how pride behaves. The tax collector was an example of how humility behaves.

Pride refuses to admit it has a need. Not one time in the parable did the Pharisee admit he had a need. Humility, on the other hand, readily admits it has a need. The tax collector struck his chest and admitted he needed forgiveness as a sinner.

Pride has an “eagle eye” for other people’s sins. The Pharisee said, “I thank you that I am not like those other people who are greedy, unrighteous adulterers.” Humility, on the other hand, sees its own sin. The tax collector declared, “God turn your wrath from me, a sinner.”

The main concern for pride is “What do other people think of me?” The Pharisee prayed about himself, stating, “I fast twice a week, I give a tenth of everything I get.” Humility’s main concern is “What does God think about me?”

Prayer

Pray that God will reveal any areas of unhealthy pride in your life and show you His way to true humility.

Day 4: Can you trust God?

Read Proverbs 3:1-6

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

There are two ways people live their lives as they pass through this world – either remembering God or forgetting Him. They either acknowledge His presence and live their lives in dependence on Him, or they pay no attention to His claims on them and live a life on the basis of their own understanding and abilities. The worst tragedy and cruelest deception is the man who says feebly with his lips, "I trust God," but an examination of his calendar and checkbook shows no difference between him and the man who does not even make that claim.

The question we must ask ourselves today is, "Do we trust God?" The very nature of this question produces two possible meanings: First, "Can you 'Trust' God?" That is, is He trustworthy? Can He handle the decisions and the problems in your life? Secondly – "Can 'you' trust God?" That is, do you have the ability to trust Him?

These verses reveal some important things about trusting God: The matter of trust is an all-or-nothing thing. Notice how many times the word "all" is used. The command to trust precedes the promise. Blessing comes after trust is expressed. The promise is conditional. Unlike many of the unconditional promises in the Bible, this promise of direction is given only to those who exercise trust in God.

Prayer

Pray that our faith and trust in God will grow. Pray that we will allow God to be in control, and we will utterly depend on Him and desire that His will be done. Pray that the fruits of our deepened trust in Him will result in guidance from Him. Ask God to identify an area of your life where you need to yield to Him and then look for His direction.

Day 5: Search me, O God

Read Psalm 139:23-24

"Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns." Psalm 139:23

It's one thing to pray for a larger house, a newer car, a different ministry assignment, or a salary increase. It's another thing to ask the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to search our hearts and test our thoughts. The Bible reveals that God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. He knows us better than we know ourselves. Nothing catches our Father off guard.

Health experts tell us that annual physical exams are wise and necessary. Early detection is key to physical health and personal longevity. Spiritual health requires periodic exams, too. Therefore, we make a decision and set a date to get away from the obligations and responsibilities of ministry. We desire solitude with the One who can reveal the most intimate things about us.

During the moments of solitude, we ask the Lord to search our hearts and attitudes. Is Jesus still our First Love? Are we guilty of simply going through the motions of ministry? Our solitude and transparency with God may lead to personal growth.

How long has it been since your last spiritual examination?

Prayer

Consider making a decision, setting a date, securing a place, and practicing a time of solitude with God. With an open Bible and blank pieces of paper, ask God to search your heart and attitude.

Day 6: A prayer for direction

Read Psalm 119:133

"Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me." Psalm 119:133

There are at least two essentials to the Spirit-filled life – prayer and the Word of God. As the old song says, "They go together, you can't have one without the other."

Prayer finds its very foundation in the Scripture. You could not pray with purpose, conviction, or direction without the revelation of God that you find in the Bible. Therefore, you must study the Bible and be a person of prayer. In Psalm 119, almost every verse refers to the Scriptures. Verse 133 is a prayer for direction.

The Psalmist here pleads for guidance from the Word of God. Have you ever considered that God desires to guide every step you take? He desires to guide not only the big steps in your life but also the mundane steps you take every day in the kitchen or your workplace. He will also guide you to the friend who needs encouragement, the neighbor who needs Jesus, and the co-worker who needs a witness of God's love.

Prayer

Thank God for guiding our church through Scripture as we plan for the future. Ask the Lord to continue to give the pastor and staff the wisdom and discernment needed to accomplish everything He has placed before us. Thank God for His guidance of your steps. Ask Him to continue to guide you by making the Scripture you read become alive and personal to you

Day 7: Take a Soil Test

Read Matthew 13:1-9

"Still others fell on good ground and produced a crop: some 100, some 60, and some 30 times what was sown." Matthew 13:8

Jesus addressed a large crowd of people, telling a parable (an earthly story with a heavenly meaning) to talk about a person's heart. As the farmer scattered seed, it fell along the path, on rocky ground, among thorns, and on good soil. Jesus desires for His followers to have hearts (soil) that yield a harvest.

What is the present condition of your heart? In Jesus' parable, He talks about four kinds of soil (hearts):

A calloused heart. This person lacks spiritual and ministerial expectations, goes through the motions, and relates to God with a selfish agenda.

A shallow heart. This person is often immature in the faith and busy in ministry. It's possible to be a mile wide and an inch deep.

A distracted heart. This person battles the worries of life and the deceitfulness of wealth.

A productive heart. This person lives his or her life to fulfill God's mission. In order to plant a garden, the ground (soil) must first be broken. If you desire to yield a spiritual harvest, brokenness is often what God uses.

Are you willing to be broken for God's glory? What kind of soil are you?

"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me." Psalm 51:10-12

Self-Examination

- Preparation:

Praise God for who He is

Confess your sinfulness and need for cleansing

Allow His Spirit to draw you near

- Ask God to:

Search through your life and reveal any sin

Help you be honest with Him about your sin

Fill you with a deep desire for holiness

Help you hate the sin in your life

Help you surrender sinful thoughts and practices

Help you live more faithfully

Restore any lost joy in your walk with Him

- Thanksgiving:

Thank God for hearing you

Trust that God is at work to accomplish His will

Week 2

Day 8: Ask, seek, knock

Read Matthew 7:7-12

"Keep asking, and it will be given to you. Keep searching, and you will find. Keep knocking, and the door will be opened to you." Matthew 7:7

The Bible is clear that God answers the fervent prayers of His people according to His will, and we know it is His will for His church to be revitalized and healthy. Perhaps revival tarries because we give up on prayer too soon.

A small girl watched as her mother smeared cold cream on her face. She asked, "Mommy, why are you doing that?" "To make myself beautiful," the mother replied. In a few moments, as the mother started wiping off the cream, the child asked, "Are you giving up already?"

We should never give up in prayer as we ask God to revitalize our churches. In fact, we should pray regularly and intensely until the answer comes. The verbs "ask, seek, and knock" are expressed in a form that denotes continuous action. Jesus is literally saying, "Ask, and keep on asking. Seek, and keep on seeking. Knock, and keep on knocking."

Do you regularly pray with intensity for the growth of your church? If your church needs to be revitalized, whatever you do, do not quit praying until the answer comes. Ask, seek, and knock!

Prayer

Begin your journey of ongoing, fervent prayer for your church's growth today. God will answer in His time.

Day 9: Value His name

Read 1 Samuel 12:20-22

"Samuel replied, 'Don't be afraid. Even though you have committed all this evil, don't turn away from following the LORD. Instead, worship the LORD with all your heart. Don't turn away to follow worthless things that can't profit or deliver you; they are worthless. The LORD will not abandon His people, because of His great name and because He has determined to make you His own people.'" 1 Samuel 12:20-22

The past few years have changed the value of many things: houses, retirement accounts, salaries, etc. There will be long-lasting effects on the companies and individuals impacted. Value is something that changes. What would it be like if something of great value never changed?

The value of something that is priceless remains priceless throughout all eternity. Yes, each of us knows that we have a priceless Savior!

These verses in 1 Samuel remind us that even during times when we have sinned against the Lord, we must not turn from HIM. The name of the Lord has great VALUE for us. One of the ways we see the value of the Lord is that He will not forsake His people. Not that we have that much value, but because His name and reputation are that valuable.

Do you see the value of the name of the LORD? Does your life reflect how much value you see in the Lord?

Prayer

Pray today that the value of God's name would be seen in your life so that a world may see HIM. Pray that your church would reflect the value of the name of the LORD

Day 10: Bear fruit of the Holy Spirit

Read Galatians 5:22-26

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." Galatians 5:22-23

As followers of Jesus, we are to yield daily to the control of the Holy

Spirit. Verse 25 encourages us to "live by the Spirit" and "follow the Spirit." The tangible evidence that the Holy Spirit is in control of our lives is spiritual fruit.

Just as an apple is the outward evidence of the inner reality of an apple tree, so the fruit of the Holy Spirit is the outward evidence that the Holy Spirit is in control of our lives.

When the Holy Spirit is in control, our lives will be characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faith, gentleness, and self-control. God's plan is to produce all of these qualities in us as we yield to Him. When the Holy Spirit is not in control of our lives, we are unloving, joyless, restless, impatient, unkind, and out of control.

If the person who knows you best used the qualities in verses 22 and 23 as a checklist, what words would they choose to describe you? Would they describe you as a loving person? A person characterized by joy? Would they refer to you as a patient person? A kind person?

Prayer

Yield today to the work of the Holy Spirit in you. Ask God to produce in you the fruit of His Holy Spirit.

Day 11: Forfeit my agenda

Read Luke 22:39-46

"Father, if You are willing, take this cup away from Me — nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done."

Luke 22:42

Jesus was fully God and fully man. In this passage, we see the humanity of Jesus as He struggles with the will of the Father in light of His imminent suffering and death. Jesus realized that in a few short hours, He would carry the weight of the world's sin in his body. The Scripture states that, "He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

As Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, He prayed with such intensity that His "sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (verse 44). On the one hand, He wanted the Father to remove the cup of suffering. On the other hand, He realized that the same suffering and death were necessary for the salvation of precious souls and the fulfillment of the Father's plan for Him. Therefore, He ultimately prayed, "Not my will but Yours be done."

Above all, Jesus wanted the will of the Father to be carried out in His life.

Prayer

Pray today that you would be willing to lay down your own plans, preferences and your own agenda for your church so that the plan of God might be carried out. Pray as Jesus did, "Not my will but Yours be done."

Day 12: Be Controlled by the Spirit

"For those who live according to the flesh think about the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, about the things of the Spirit." Romans 8:5

The text in Romans 8:5 reminds us that by nature, we are controlled by sinful desires. That we are born as sinners is not unbelievable to us because it is so easy to live life as a sinner, right? The text also tells us that those controlled by the Spirit respond in a spiritual way. In a normal day, as things happen around us, how we respond shows which we are controlled by: our sinful nature or our spiritual nature.

We must choose what controls us, whether our sinful nature or our spiritual nature.

How would your life be different if every day you chose to be controlled by your spiritual nature? What about your church? Over these next weeks, ask God to speak to you and guide you to the growth of your spiritual life and your church.

Prayer

Pray that God will show you areas of your life you need to allow Him to control. Also, pray for the leaders in your church to be guided by Him.

Day 13: Forgive One Another

Read Ephesians 4:25-32

"And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ." Ephesians 4:32

One thing we all have in common is that we have all been hurt by other people. Others have said or done things that have hurt us. Sometimes we have been hurt by what someone failed to say or do. The issue in life is not “will we be hurt,” but “how will we respond when we are hurt by others?”

The Scripture passage for today cites several possible responses that often accompany the hurts we encounter: anger (verse 26), bitterness, wrath, and malice (verse 31). When we identify these things in our lives, we are challenged to “remove” or “put away” these things. In place of these responses, we are called to choose the response of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is the way God has chosen to relate to us. Forgiveness is the way God encourages us to relate to each other. Forgiveness means we treat the person in the future as if they had not hurt us in the past. Forgiveness involves refusing to relate to the person out of anger and bitterness. Forgiveness means we choose to extend grace to the person who hurt us.

Have you harbored anger, bitterness, wrath, or malice toward someone in your church? Take time today to confess your sinful response to that person. Choose with the help and grace of God to forgive that person.

Prayer

Ask God to identify the presence of unforgiveness in your life. Confess the sin of unforgiveness. Ask God to produce in your life a humility that honors Him.

Day 14: Raise Up New Leaders

Read II Timothy 2:1-2

“And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” II Timothy 2:2

One of the common needs voiced by pastors and church members is the need for more leaders. These concerned people of God are saying we need people to lead in the children’s programs, to work with youth, to do outreach, to give financially for the work of the church, and on and on. But where will these leaders come from unless they move into your area from another community or transfer to your church from another congregation?

Paul gives Timothy the answer concerning the need for more leaders: You raise them up. Christian leaders are made, not born, and II Timothy 2:2 tells how to make one. Mature Christian leaders are to teach and train faithful people who can become leaders and then teach and train others.

Are you willing to personally train another person in your church to become a leader or would you be willing to be trained yourself to eventually lead in some way in your church?

Prayer

Please pray today that God will give your congregation a vision and a plan for developing new leaders from within the church family.

Spiritual Renewal Begins in Me

Investing Through Group Connection

LifeWay Research recently responded to research data by stating that spiritual maturity comes through “intentionality...in a disciple’s life.”

Investing regularly in a small group is an important piece of an intentional spiritual renewal plan for a disciple. Just as an ember pulled out of the fire goes out, so also is spiritual progress extinguished when a disciple separates from other believers.

But spiritual renewal and progress demand more from the small group experience than simply regular attendance. Consider the following ten actions you can take to raise the level of your investment through your group in your spiritual renewal and progress.

Support your spiritual growth and group by . . .

- seeking God in Bible study daily.
- Praying for and inviting guests to group meetings.
- communicating regularly with group members.
- fellowshiping with group members and guests.
- helping group members in need.
- reading and preparing for group meetings.
- participating honestly and openly in group meetings.
- living out the truths discussed in group meetings.
- serving in some way to strengthen the group and church.
- supporting efforts to launch new leaders and start new groups.

Rate yourself from 1 to 10 (1 is weak and 10 is strong) in each of these areas. On which of these could you be more intentional in supporting your spiritual growth and your group? Ask God to help you, and ask a group member to encourage you to take steps in the month ahead. If you are not currently in a group, take an intentional step of spiritual renewal and growth by joining a group this week.

Week 3

Day 15: Teach Me to Love

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

"About brotherly love: You don't need me to write you because you yourselves are taught by God to love one another." 1 Thessalonians 4:9

Most problems in any church can be overcome by love. Love causes dissensions to be settled. Love prompts a church to serve the poor. Love moves us to do missions and evangelism. Love even makes us want to give more financially, work with children, paint the nursery walls, or build a new building for the youth. Love is the greatest motivator to church action of all types. But what if we just don't have that much love?

1 Thessalonians 4:9 gives hope to those of us who come up a little short in the love department. It reveals that God can teach us to love. Love is not so much an emotion to be experienced but an action to be taken. The greatest act of love in history was Christ on the cross. The good news for us is that the one who called Jesus to the cross can teach us to love people in our own congregation. Love really does change everything and is a real key to church growth.

Would you ask God today to increase your love for a person or group of people in your church for whom you do not feel much love?

Prayer

Consider praying a prayer like this: Dear God, I do not feel much love for (you know which name to put in the blank). I'm asking, and counting on you to teach me to love the way you love him or her. Thank you for hearing my prayer.

Day 16: Be a Peacemaker

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." Matthew 5:9

We see so much unrest in our world, even to the point of conflict. When conflict erupts, hate wins! Sides are drawn, and people are placed into two or more groups. When conflict permeates a people, we see trust broken and lives affected for years.

In the church today, we see the same thing; people choose sides, and conflict impacts the church. When conflict happens inside the church, the only winner is Satan. Most church conflict has little to do with biblical issues and more to do with individual choices such as color, styles, and practices.

Jesus teaches us that peacemakers are needed. The people with the gift of being a peacemaker find ways to squish conflicts to help the church work in peace.

The actions of a few can cause the church to lose its effectiveness in the community. The conflict side of the church has divided families, friends, and neighborhoods. Conflict holds bondage, where peace gives freedom.

For a church to find growth, there must be peace in the body. We must find ways to broker peace in the body.

Prayer

Is there conflict in your church? Ask God to help you identify ways for you to become a peacemaker in your church.

Day 17: Be a Servant

Read Mark 10:42-45

"And whoever wants to be first among you must be a slave to all." Mark 10:44

In churches today, there are many who would be labeled as people of influence. These folks make a lot of the decisions about direction. There are also those folks who talk a lot without any real direction. The church is made up of many different types of individuals with varying characteristics.

Jesus tells us that many want to control others, but He has called us to be "servants." For church growth to become part of your church, servants are needed. Servants who will give their time to impact people with their hands. The value of servanthood is critical as we seek to make an eternal impact.

Prayer

In what ways do you serve others in your church? Pray, asking God to show you ways you can serve the Body of Christ through your church. Ask God to give you the best understanding of where to serve in the church. Also, pray that your church understands its BEST place to serve as the Hands and Feet of Christ in your community.

Day 18: Begin with Brokenness

Read Nehemiah 1:1-11

"When I heard these words, I sat down and wept. I mourned for a number of days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven." Nehemiah 1:4

Brokenness is often what God uses to reveal vision. Nehemiah serves as an example of a leader who was broken over a city and its people. The enemies destroyed the wall around Jerusalem, leaving the city in a vulnerable position. The people were in great trouble and disgrace. Nehemiah sought God's heart and followed His leadership. He was available for God to use.

Church health requires bold, courageous leadership. Nehemiah painted a clear picture of what strong leadership looks like in our day. (1) Nehemiah asked questions. He wanted to know about the city and

its people. What questions do you need to ask? Is your church in need of change? Are the people committed to sharing Jesus and developing believers in the faith? When was the last time you baptized a new believer? (2) Nehemiah accepted reality. He heard the news that the wall was broken down, and the people were in trouble. Do you need to accept reality? What is the current condition of your church? (3) Nehemiah acted now. He cried, prayed, fasted, and surrendered. What do you need to do now that will lead to health in your church? Do you need to cry, pray, fast, and surrender?

Are you broken over the “current reality” of Anderson Mill?

Prayer

I challenge you to ask questions, accept reality, and act now. God desires to use you as a catalyst for positive movement within His church.

Day 19: Be Salt

Read Matthew 5:13-14

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It’s no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled on by men.” Matthew 5:13

As followers of Jesus, we have the potential to influence. We have the potential to influence others for good. Our lives, when lived for Christ, can encourage others to glorify God (Matthew 5:16). We also have the potential to influence others in a negative way (Luke 17:1-3). To influence others for Christ is to be “salt.” To influence others in negative ways is to be “salt that has lost its taste.”

When we face the extremes of warm summers and cold winters, we understand the importance of a thermostat. When a room is hot, we adjust the thermostat, and it works in conjunction with the air conditioner to adjust the temperature in the room. We could say that the thermostat influences the room.

We can place a thermometer in that same room, and the thermometer would be influenced by the temperature of the room. If the room were warm, the thermometer would adjust to the surrounding temperature. As the salt of the earth, we are called to influence for Christ, not be influenced by our surroundings.

Prayer

Is your daily life and witness more like a thermometer or a thermostat? Pray that God will give you strength and wisdom to be a good influence for Him.

Day 20: Rely on God's Power

Read 1 Corinthians 4:16-20

"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power." 1 Corinthians 4:20

What is powering your church? This question triggers different answers. Some may say prayer, some great preaching; others a loving church family, one or two might even say electricity. Yet some churches have plugged into sources that will never power a church.

The Word of God tells us that the Kingdom of God is not powered by words. We can use words and try to get people motivated, but the reality is that words without action are of no lasting value. Someone once said, "Talk is cheap."

One of the great characteristics of God is that He has great power. For our church to be healthy, we must plug into the power that comes from GOD!

How much God power are you currently using? Throughout His Word, we find God using supernatural power to sustain His people, and He still does!

How much God power is your church currently using? God wants to be the power source of your church! God wants His children to plug into the power of His Word. Are you spending time in His Word daily? God wants His children to spend time in prayer. Are you spending time daily talking with Him and listening to Him?

Prayer

As for you, make a commitment to be in His Word and pray daily. Encourage others in your church to do the same, then see how your church responds. You will see a great power from God envelop your church toward becoming healthy.

Day 21: Strengthen Your Faith in the God Who Revives

Read Ezekiel 37:1-14

"This is what the Lord God says to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you will live." Ezekiel 37:5

Parched and bleached by the sun, the brittle bones scattered across the valley presented a vision that summoned two words to the prophet's mind—death and discouragement. The only thing more discouraging than the vision itself was the fact that God's own people were represented by these abandoned bones. They had died, and their growth required significant intervention by God.

This vision challenged Ezekiel's faith. God asked him an unthinkable question, "Son of man, can these bones live?" He replied, "Lord God, only You know." Ezekiel's response revealed his thought, "If these dried bones live again, it will require a miracle from You, God."

In the vision, God did what only He could do. As Ezekiel preached, the bones came together, were wrapped by muscle and skin, and those corpses were resuscitated. The dry bones lived! Likewise, Israel was revived and restored.

There is a lesson we need to learn. God delights Himself in revitalizing that which seems to be dry and lifeless. Do you believe by faith that what God did in Ezekiel's vision and for Israel, He can do for your church?

Prayer

Pray for new life to begin filling our church. New faces, new families, new believers, new leaders.

Week 4

Day 22: Discern God's Plan

Read Matthew 6:9-15

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

In this passage, Jesus teaches us how to pray. Each portion of His teaching gives us an important aspect of prayer. Verse 10 reminds us that God has a plan for our church. Our church is a part of God's kingdom. His desire is that His kingdom penetrates neighborhoods, communities, cities, and ultimately the world with the gospel. When we pray, "Your kingdom come," we are praying for God to work in and through our church to extend His kingdom.

When God views our church, He sees its potential. In the mind of God,

He envisions what it can and should become in the future. We call that "God's preferred future." He loves our church so much that He doesn't want it to remain where it is today. He has in mind a "preferred future."

When we pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," we are asking God to reveal to us what He envisions for us. Through prayer, we discern "next steps." When entering into a process to become the church God desires, the voice we need to hear above all others is the voice of God through prayer.

Prayer

Pray today, asking God to reveal to you and to other church members what God envisions for the future of our church. Share your willingness to yield to what He wants. Prayerfully consider this question: How do you want our church to carry out the Great Commission in our context?

Day 23: Choose your side

Read Joshua 5:13-15

"Neither," He replied. "I have now come as commander of the Lord's army." Then Joshua bowed with his face to the ground in worship and asked Him, "What does my Lord want to say to His servant?" Joshua 5:14

When Joshua, preparing for the heat of battle, saw a human figure with a sword drawn, he naturally went to the man and asked if he was for them or against them. The man, who Joshua soon discovered to be an earthly appearance of God, answered that he was not for them or against them, but instead the Captain of the Lord's army. Joshua appropriately bowed down and worshipped him.

During a growth effort, it is possible for us to begin to choose sides in the church. We distinguish between those who are for our vision and those who are against. A better route is to make sure we personally are lined up with the Lord. We will know that we are with God when our desires for His

church match His desires as seen in Scripture, when we are submissive to God-ordained leadership, and when our actions and attitudes reflect Christ-like character.

So, based on the above-listed criteria, are you for God and His vision for the church?

Prayer

Consider praying today that God will help you align your- self with His vision for your church. Pray that His desires for your congregation, in the community where He has placed you, would be reflected through your words, actions, and attitudes.

Day 24: Pursue the keys to healing

Read II Chronicles 7:12-14

"(If) My people who are called by My name humble themselves, pray and seek My face, and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land." II Chronicles 7:14

Excitement and optimism ruled the day. After seven years of construction, the Temple was built and dedicated. God's presence was manifested in an unusual way. Fire fell from heaven to consume the sacrifice, and God's glory filled the Temple.

Later, God appeared to Solomon at night and told him that not every day would be like the day of dedication. There would be days when, in an effort to draw His errant people back to Himself, God would send drought and pestilence.

At such a time, God told Solomon His people were to pursue four keys to healing: humility, prayer, seeking God's face, and repentance.

Today, God's people are His church. In many churches, indicators mark the need for growth. If this is true of your church, are you pursuing revival with the keys of humility, prayer, seeking God's face, and repentance?

Prayer

Ask God to help you and others in your church to humbly walk with Him, prayerfully depend upon Him, diligently seek His face, and honestly repent of sin that hinders fellowship with Him.

Day 25: Love Jesus above All

Read Revelation 2:1-7

"... But I have this against you: you have abandoned the love you had at first." Revelation 2:4

The final line of the refrain from my favorite childhood hymn is, "Oh, how I love Jesus, because He first loved me." When sung from a true heart, it is a beautiful offering of worship to our Lord. Our love for Jesus should not only be hailed in our worship, but it should be the motivating factor for everything we claim to do for Him.

The church at Ephesus outwardly appeared to be a wonderful congregation. Jesus Himself pointed out their hard work, faithful endurance, worthy walk, and doctrinal integrity. The problem was that these works were performed out of duty, rather than out of love for the Savior. Though they did not know it, the Ephesian Christians needed revival. They were running the risk of losing their light for the Lord.

Many believers are wearing themselves out with a manic schedule of church programming while seeing few results. In their harried lifestyle of "Christian" activities, they do not spend time cultivating their love for Jesus. They need a revival of the heart. They need to heed the words of Christ, "Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first" (Rev. 2:5a).

Is your love for Jesus the motivation for your work for Him?

Prayer

Tell Jesus how much you love Him. If needed, repent for allowing your love for Him to grow cold.

Day 26: Seek God first

Read Matthew 6:33

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you."
Matthew 6:33

A bank statement, a day planner, a church calendar, or a hospital stay often reveals our priorities. Misplaced priorities generally lead to hurt and confusion in our lives, marriages, families, and churches. Jesus gave His followers a simple and conditional promise. If believers would make the Father's kingdom a priority, then they would lack for nothing in life. That's a priceless guarantee! Unmet needs may be an indication that our priorities are out of order.

Seeking God first says that we're dependent on Him, that we're desperate for Him, and that we're dedicated to Him. It's worth noting that this is a great way to live and serve in ministry. The daily responsibilities of life, the challenge to raise godly children in an ungodly world, a fresh vision for the church, and the ability to live on less than we make testify that we need to see our decisions from God's perspective.

As you consider your life, marriage, family, and church, are you seeking God first? What decisions are you facing at this moment?

Prayer

Take Jesus' challenge and seek the Father's kingdom first. Ask God to help you see your life, marriage, family, and ministry from His perspective.

Day 27: We have never done it this way before

Read Mark 2:1-12

"He got up, took his mat, and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this!'" Mark 2:12

Ancient sailors recorded many times that in the midst of a coming storm, the top of their ship's mast would be circled with a mysterious circle of light. Many times, their hair would begin to stand straight out as this light appeared. They called it St. Elmo's Fire. Experienced sailors knew it was time to take cover because the air was so electrically charged that a lightning strike was imminent.

The air must have been so charged in Capernaum at the time this Scripture passage took place. There was a crowd. This crowd was curious about the ministry of Jesus, and the scribes were scowling as they watched this new Rabbi, hoping to catch Him in an error. The room was charged with excitement. Everyone knew something dramatic was about to take place – not St. Elmo's Fire, the King of King's fire.

When He is present, miraculous things happen. Sure enough, excitement mounted as four men tore up the roof to let a friend down in the presence of Jesus so he could be healed. The Bible says they literally "took off the roof." When we gather, it should be a "roof-raising experience," and we should be able to say, "We've never seen anything like this before!" According to this passage, these three things are needed to have a "roof-raising" experience with Jesus: a Savior who can save, God's word being proclaimed, and a flock who has faith.

Prayer

Pray that our church will be filled with people of faith like these four roof removers, for they did everything possible to bring their friend to Jesus. Ask the Lord to make you like one of these four.

Day 28: Unify us

Read Psalm 133:1-3

"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in harmony!" Psalm 133:1

There are not many things more discouraging or distasteful than a heated church business meeting over a trivial issue. At the moment, when tensions are high and voices are raised, no issue seems trivial. Later on, however, when relationships have been severed and people have left the church over an issue regarding taste and not substance, those meetings do leave an unpleasant feeling for the people involved.

Consider, on the other hand, the beauty and pleasing atmosphere created in the vision described in Psalm 133. When a congregation is unified around knowing and serving God in the fulfillment of His purpose and vision for the church, it is a beautiful thing. Not only is God pleased with appropriate church unity, but also the people of God are pleased and enabled to experience more of the power of the Holy Spirit in their work for the Lord.

As you move into health, in what ways are you seeking to promote unity in your church? And is there anyone in your church family with whom you need to seek Christian reconciliation?

Prayer

Would you pray today that God will help you be a person of peace in your congregation? Consider praying that God will give you a peace-making, conciliatory spirit to aid your church as it moves forward toward becoming healthy.

Week 5

Day 29: Love your leaders, don't idolize them

Read 1 Corinthians 3:3-4

For whenever someone says, "I'm with Paul," and another, "I'm with Apollos," are you not unspiritual people?" 1 Corinthians 3:4

How many church pastors have been compared to their predecessor with the comment, "Bro. so and so didn't do it that way?" These comparisons are seldom helpful and make life difficult for the leader God has assigned to the congregation today. While every church member should be encouraged to show honor to past ministers, we make a mistake when we begin to think that their approach to ministry and church leadership is the only approach God can use.

The Corinthian Christians had divisions in the church because of different leadership personalities that God had used in their congregational life. The members picked which side they were on, to the exclusion of the people who preferred the other leaders.

Paul pointed out their error and challenged them to put away carnal favoritism. We would do well today to honor past leaders God has used in the church, while at the same time submitting to the Christ-like leadership God has set before us today.

What is one thing you can do this week to honor your pastor and staff?

Prayer

Maybe this would be a good day to pray for your pastor and staff. You might consider praying that God will fill them with the Holy Spirit, restoring the joy of their salvation, affirming them in their calling, and refocusing them on the mission at hand.

Day 30: Become a church cheerleader

Read Hebrews 10:24-25

"And let us be concerned about one another in order to promote love and good works, 25 not staying away from our worship meetings, as some habitually do, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day drawing near." Hebrews 10:24-25

The job of a cheerleader is to support the team and call the fans to action. Fans at a ball game can really make a difference as they cheer their team on to fight for victory. In church, while each of us has a part on the team, we also have a part like that of a fan. Sometimes we are in the game, while at other times we are in the stands cheering for those who are working hard for the sake of Christ's mission.

We cheer each other on when we affirm the way God is using one of our brothers or sisters in the work of ministry. We cheer our team when we amen the truth brought out by our pastor. We cheer the team when we participate joyfully in worship and greeting the guests. The positive attitude of one person can make a real difference as that individual vocalizes his or her support of the team in the hallways and gatherings of the congregation.

What is coming up, or happening now, in the life of your church for which you can offer your vocal support?

Prayer

Pray today that God will show you ways you can support your church vocally with encouraging words as you move toward congregational health.

Day 31: Discover and Do Your Part

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-7

"A demonstration of the Spirit is given to each person to produce what is beneficial." 1 Corinthians. 12:7

There are two essential truths that should be vocalized and magnified as a church desires to move into congregational health. Those truths are that every person has a part, and that one person really can make a difference. 1 Corinthians 12 teaches that God gives a spiritual ability to every member of His church. God indwells us in the form of the Holy Spirit and empowers us to serve the body in some important way. That explains the first truth.

The second truth is also vital: one person really can make a difference. Many of us feel hopeless about church growth because we think the entire congregation will never get on board. While congregational buy-in and unity matter, it is also true that one person can make a huge difference as he or she serves God wholeheartedly in the church to which he or she belongs. One person who will witness, pray, give, serve, love, and live for Christ will inspire and impact others as well as be used by and blessed by God in his or her faithfulness. Instead of waiting for others to join in, decide today to be one person who will make a difference.

Will you surrender yourself afresh today to Jesus in hopes of being used to revitalize your congregation?

Prayer

Consider praying today a prayer of re-surrender. Maybe you could offer yourself to God the way you did when you first came to Him. Maybe also you could ask God for personal direction in how to live your Christian service to the fullest in the place where He has put you to serve and grow.

Day 32: Build Up The Church

Read 1 Corinthians 14:6-12

"since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, seek to excel in building up the church." 1 Corinthians 14:12

In these verses, Paul is speaking to young Christians in Corinth. There is some desire to have certain spiritual gifts. Paul reminds the people here that spiritual gifts are used to build up the church.

One of the problems in the church today is that people do not know their spiritual gifts. The Bible teaches that each person is given at least one spiritual gift from God.

HAVE YOU DETERMINED YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFT(S)?

The other problem related to spiritual gifts in the church is the lack of people using their gift(s). If you know your spiritual gifts, then how are you using them in the church? If God gives us these gifts, He expects us to use them!

Many pastors I speak with tell me about their great need for workers in the church. If we are putting our gifts to work, then the church would have all the workers it needs, right?

A healthy church is one that is using the spiritual gifts of the members to build up the body of the church and reach that community for Christ.

Prayer

Pray today for God to show you your spiritual gifts and how He wants you to use them to build up His church!

Day 33: Love One Another

Read John 13:34-35

"... I give you a new commandment: love one another. Just as I have loved you, you must also love one another." John 13:34

In the Upper Room, Jesus gave some final instructions to His apostles, whom He would soon leave. He began that final lecture by challenging His disciples to love one another as He had loved them. Addressing this issue first in the Upper Room speaks to its importance.

Love and unity in the church are critical to growth. Jesus stated that all people would know we are His disciples by our love for one another. Some of our churches are stagnant or in decline due to their lack of genuine love for one another and subsequent disunity. A watching world wonders if it can be loved by a group of people who do not seem to love one another.

In *The Mark of the Christian*, Francis Schaeffer states that the love of Christ in the lives of believers is what sets them apart from the world. He concludes that the world has a right to judge the authenticity of Christ's claims to be the Messiah, the Savior, the Son of God, by what they see in the lives of His followers. Is Jesus the one who can change lives?

Are the lives of His followers different than those of the world? Do they truly love one another in difficult times? Do you live in unity and love with other Christians?

Prayer

Ask God to help you love your brothers and sisters in Christ as He has loved you.

Day 34: Church Check-up

Read Acts 11:19-30

"The Lord's hand was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord". Acts 11:21

Are your life, marriage, family, career, and church healthy? The church in Antioch was healthy and strong. News about the church reached Jerusalem. It's a fact that people talk about the church (good or bad).

Barnabas reported that he saw the "grace of God" when he arrived in Antioch. What are people saying about the church you serve? As people attend your church, do they see the "grace of God" at work?

What signs distinguish a healthy church? A healthy church...

Expects commitment. Persecution couldn't stop the witness of early believers.

Shares Jesus. Early believers didn't talk about the economy, sports, or Hollywood. Jesus was the subject of their conversations.

Welcomes change. The church in Antioch saw the Lord change lives, marriages, and families. The church's message must never change. However, methods need to change as the Lord leads.

Serves together. Barnabas needed Saul's help to teach the believers in Antioch. Healthy churches embrace a "team" approach to ministry.

Disciples believers. Barnabas and Saul taught a great number of believers for one year. Healthy churches never separate evangelism and discipleship.

Practices generosity. A worldwide famine convicted the early believers to give. Generosity is a must in a healthy church.

Trusts the leaders. The Antioch church trusted Barnabas and Saul. Leadership trust is essential in healthy churches.

How is our church doing?

Day 35: The Power of Agreement

Read Acts 6:1-7

"So the preaching about God flourished, the number of the disciples in Jerusalem multiplied greatly, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith". Acts 6:7

Some churches avoid voting on issues of importance in the church because they believe votes divide people and give opportunities for church problems to occur. These people do have plenty of evidence to back up their practice. Many church splits have happened because half of the congregation wanted to go one direction while the other half wanted to go another.

In Acts 6:1-7, there was a different mindset toward congregational decisions and outcomes. The church needed help with its ministry to the widows of the congregation. A solution was proposed by the leadership, and the proposal found favor with the congregation (6:5). The result was a unified church that continued to reach out with the gospel and make more disciples for Christ.

How can you aid in congregational agreement regarding upcoming decisions in your church?

Prayer

Please pray that God will give wisdom to your church leaders regarding a plan for church health and that their plan will find favor in the congregation.

Week 6

Day 36: Look for God Among You

Read 1 Corinthians 14:24-25

"and as a result he will fall facedown and worship God, proclaiming, 'God is really among you.' " 1
Corinthians 14:25

What would you say is the most important thing about your church?

For many people, the answer would be that this church meets my spiritual, emotional, or relational needs. As you think about our church, who are some of the people who have or are making a difference in your life?

What are some of the ministries of our church that deepen your relationship with the Lord?

In the text we read today, we find what I think is the best response to the question "What do you say is important to this church?" First, an unbeliever discovers the truth about a Savior, next accepts Jesus, and finally shouts, "God is really among you!" How great if this could be said about every church in our land.

In a healthy church, it is easy to see that God is the center of that church.

Prayer

Pray for God to show you how He is moving in your church. Ask God to help you reflect His presence to a lost world

Day 37: Obey His Marching Orders

Read Matthew 28:16-20

"Then Jesus came near and said to them, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.' "
Matthew 28:18

In military circles, when a high-ranking officer speaks, people listen and follow directions. Our Commander-in-Chief, Jesus Christ, has spoken and called His church to action. The Great Commission is not optional or suggestive in nature. Jesus expects His followers to obey His marching orders. Our marching orders begin at home and extend to the ends of the earth. The Great Commission is the mission mandate for every church, regardless of the church's structure, size, or style.

In the act of going, Jesus hasn't called His people to merely record decisions. He has commanded that His people make disciples. A disciple is a learner and follower of Christ. Is the church you serve intentional about making disciples? What is your strategy for reaching all nations? Our Commander-in-Chief refuses to send His followers into the mission field alone. He promises to always be with us.

You and I have been called to attention and given an assignment that can change lives, marriages, families, churches, and nations. Let's not disobey our Commander-in-Chief's marching orders!

Prayer

Reflect on how you've responded to the Great Commission. Have you and your church treated Jesus' command as optional or mandatory? May you allow the Lord to use you to impact the nations for His glory!

Day 38: Hot, cold, or lukewarm?

Read Revelation 3:14-22

*"So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of My mouth."
Revelation 3:16*

As a result of a bad meal, a curvy road, or a contagious virus, you feel sick to your stomach. Feeling nauseated is uncomfortable. Jesus challenged the Laodicean church on several points. However, the church's real condition left Him nauseated. A lukewarm church makes Jesus sick to His stomach. What led the Laodicean church to be lukewarm? God's people thought they were self-sufficient. Jesus wasn't really needed on a day-to-day basis. In fact, He was standing outside the church, knocking on the door, and hoping to be invited back in.

Generally not in words, but at least in actions, many churches rely on their structures, staff, and strategies rather than on Christ Jesus. The church's Redeemer is left standing outside the fellowship, desiring to be welcomed back in. There's hope for a lukewarm church. Jesus gives His people an opportunity to repent and change directions.

Is our church dependent on the presence and power of Jesus Christ? Is our church's behavior causing Jesus to be nauseated?

Prayer

Position yourself to discover what Jesus thinks about your church. If you and your faith family are nauseating Jesus, hear His knock, open the door, and invite Him in. He longs to fellowship with you!

Day 39: Strengthen what remains

Read Revelation 3:1-6

"Be alert and strengthen what remains, which is about to die, for I have not found your works complete before My God." Revelation 3:2

After Jesus had evaluated the church at Sardis and given his assessment, He then gave them a divine action plan. Christ said to, "Strengthen the things which remain." It sounds as if there were some things in the church that were good and pleasing to God, but which needed attention before they lost their vitality.

Most churches have one or more areas of strength. Some congregations are great mission churches that go on mission trips and give money to missions. Others are really good at welcoming outsiders in and making them feel loved and valued without feeling judged by people. Some are great worshipping congregations where folks are invited into the presence of God through singing and other means.

How can you be used to strengthen areas in your church?

Prayer

Would you pray today that God would reveal to you and others in your church those areas where your congregation is strong? Ask God to help you build on that area of strength for His glory and the good of the church and the community where God has placed you.

Day 40: Evaluate your church

Read Revelation 3:1-6

"To the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The One who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars says: I know your works; you have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead.'" Revelation 3:1

Your church is evaluated every week. The first-time guests who visit have an opinion about your church. The senior adults who attend have convictions about the life and ministry of your congregation. The young families have some thoughts as well as the youth. The community in which your church is located also has something that comes to mind when they think of your church.

These opinions are varied and may have some merit. The opinion, or rather judgment, that matters most is the one offered by Jesus, the Head of the church. Jesus has some thoughts concerning your congregation, and the road to growth begins with seeking Jesus' view of your church.

How does your congregation's perception of your church's effectiveness differ from the perspective of Jesus?

Prayer

Pray today that God will help your congregation understand how He views it, and what He wishes to see happen for your church to move into new life and ministry, and be an influence for Christ in your community.