

A DEVOTIONAL GUIDE FOR A SEASON OF SEEKING THE LORD



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N A P L E S

From the Pastor

This is a very significant season for our church. I truly believe that God desires to do a fresh work in our midst. "It is time to seek the Lord, that He may come and rain righteousness upon you" (Hosea 10:12). While Janet and I certainly desire your prayers, God calls us to transition together into His next season of blessing as we say to each other, "Come, let us return to the Lord...let us press on to know the Lord" (Hosea 6:1, 3).

This time of pastoral leadership transition can be a miraculous turning point in the history of our church. We give thanks for all that the Lord has done in the years past, but know that we are to lean forward into His work in the future.

The Lord revives His people as they meditate on His Word. This devotional guide was prepared with much prayer and thought. It is not intended to be a thorough study of the passages but a launching pad to praise, confession, thanksgiving and petition. While you are urged to read the entire chapter of the Bible passage, let's focus on these specific verses together, at the same time "agreeing about what we ask of the Father in Heaven" (Matthew 18:19). Read the Bible passage first (most require a short time of reading). Then you can carefully soak in the thoughts of the devotional. Go back and pray through the scripture with those insights in mind.

The average American household owns 4.4 Bibles, but just one in seven adults claim to read the Bible daily, with one in four having never read it. This written guide allows us to drink from the Word's deep well in the Old and New Testaments, alternating each week between the two. "It is time for the Lord to act" (Psalm 119:126).

Expectantly,



Devotionals from the
Psalms

DAY 1

Psalm 107:1-9, 32

The passionate phrase, "cry to the Lord" is a Hebrew verb for accosting someone. Desperate prayer goes to the right source for help, knowing that only God can bring deliverance. Pray that God will lead us "by a straight way," without wandering as a church or as individuals. We thank Him that His "steadfast love" will lead us as He relentlessly recalibrates our steps (Psalm 37:23).

Matt Bennett of the ministry, "Christian Union," which impacts Ivy League schools, told his staff, "We will do nothing more than what the Holy Spirit calls us to do."



IN PRAYER

- » *Ask God to raise up a fresh spirit of prayer in our congregation.*
- » *Pray that our service, worship, programming and every other phase of our extensive ministry will glorify God. May we "offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and tell of His deeds in songs of joy."*



Our desire is that in all weekend worship services *spiritual breathing* will take place. Just as physical breathing is necessary in the sphere of the physical, so is spiritual breathing in the realm of the Spirit. We exhale sin and inhale God's grace. We also inhale His love and exhale our worship. May the air be clean and pure in His holy place.

My Reflections

DAY 2

Psalm 109:26-31

As David wrote this Psalm, he did so with a confidence that God would hear his cries for help. In mercifully answering, God would be glorified. His desire was that God would do something wonderful that only He could do. We trust in the Lord, Who “stands at the right hand of the needy one.” Just as an alert auto mechanic is drawn to a stranded motorist in a car with mechanical difficulty, so God is drawn to help “the needy.” We are so grateful that we can “come to the throne of grace to find mercy and grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).



IN PRAYER

- » *Seek after God's leading in every aspect of our church leadership. Pray that deacons, personnel and finance committees, as well as pastoral staff, along with all volunteers, Bible and Life Groups, Womens' and Mens' Ministries, various ministry teams and First Baptist Academy would all say, regarding the plans for the pastoral search process, "It seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28).*
- » *Ask God to enable us to follow our Church Constitution as we "do all things decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40) with the selection of the Pastor Search Team as we represent God (1 Corinthians 15:15).*



As we confidently cry out to God, may we all “know that this is God’s hand” when He brings us a new pastor. May we say that “He has done it.”

DAY 3

Psalm 110:1-7

Life for the Christ-follower is not one of easy existence and smooth sailing, but one of battle. The challenges and circumstances of life can make it seem that we are on the losing side, but the Lord Jesus defeated Satan and his demons at Calvary. He "always leads us in triumphal procession" (2 Corinthians 2:14) and enforces the victory when He "disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them" (Colossians 2:15). In our prayer battles, we must sometimes remind the devil and his forces that they lost the war and that we are under the blood of Jesus. Evil's authority over us is broken, and the devil's doom is sure.



IN PRAYER

- » *Petition "the Lord of the Harvest" that He will provide the needed workers for His ministry and that His people "Will offer themselves freely" as they hear the call to battle.*
- » *May we see something of His powerful work every day as He manifests His presence among His people, answers prayers and performs miracles.*



As Oswald Chambers wrote, "We have to pray with our eyes on God, not on the difficulties." In prayer, we fight not FOR victory but FROM victory. Rejoice in that today!

My Reflections

DAY 4

Psalm 119:129-136

E. M. Bounds wrote, "The Word of God is the food by which prayer is nourished and made strong." Are you feasting on God's Word today? Are you allowing it to nourish your heart and that of your family? Today's passage calls us to take a personal look inward. Prayerfully let this Psalm help you to receive His Word, including all godly preaching and teaching in our church, as well as in Christ's larger kingdom.



IN PRAYER

- » *For yourself- Ask the Lord to fulfill His "promises" and "declare His wonderful testimonies" through your life to others.*
- » *For your family- Pray this Psalm verse by verse over your family and ask God to "keep" them and direct His commands as He gives light "in the unfolding of His Word."*
- » *For our church- Pray for the weekly sermons, that exposition, illustration and application be Spirit-led (Luke 4:18-19; Psalm 119:18). Pray for Christians to be convicted, challenged and encouraged and for the lost to be saved, even this weekend (Acts 20:21).*



The great missionary pioneer, Hudson Taylor, declared: "Prayer power has never been tried to its full capacity. If we want to see mighty wonders of divine power and grace wrought in the place of weakness, failure and disappointment, let us answer God's standing challenge of Jeremiah 33:3, 'Call to Me, and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things which you know not.' " May the Lord bless all of our heartfelt prayers to Him and that even today someone would cross your path who needs the Word, your love and your sensitive prayers.

DAY 5

Psalm 122:1-9

When we gather together each week to worship through song and the Word, God unites our hearts to His, and to each others. At salvation, God did not just save us from sin, but He also adopted us into His Forever Family. When we gather in His "house" there should be great joy over this truth!



IN PRAYER

- » *Ask that God will produce a spirit of joy for all who go to His House in our local church.*
- » *Pray for the entire process of seeking a new Senior Pastor and for me (Pastor Wicker) as I shepherd us through this transition time for as long as it takes.*
- » *Pray for the time when the Search Team will receive recommendations, begin the arduous process of screening, interviewing a narrowed list and then ultimately presenting to the church "in view of a call" the man that they sense God is calling us to consider.*
- » *Ask the Lord to impress on attenders who love our church that they might take "a stand within our gates" and become active, official members and not on the outside looking in. Pastor R. G. Lee said, "Your absence from church is a vote to close its doors."*
- » *Continue to pray for our friends in Israel and "the peace of Jerusalem."*
- » *Pray for harmony among "our brothers and companions in the fellowship" in the larger Body of Christ in Naples and beyond. We want the world to know of our unity in Jesus and solidarity with God's people, as there is "peace within your walls and security."*



As Dave Butts wrote, "Revival praying prepares a landing spot for the Holy Spirit to come in transformative power."

DAY 6

Psalm 127:1-5

No amount of work and effort will accomplish much if God's blessing is not on His people. God is calling us to build not only a facility of brick and mortar, but to build hearts and homes with truth and love in the strength that He gives. We know that "apart from Him, you can do nothing" (John 15:5).



IN PRAYER

- » *Intercede today for your family, that they will know and serve the Lord with willing and happy hearts. Pray for children and teens (or grandchildren) to be like "arrows" that are shot toward the target of truth. Petition that they will be "godly examples" (1 Timothy 4:12; 6:11, 12). Ask the Lord to give to you a specific goal in prayer for each member of your family, then tell them of your petition.*
- » *Ask the Lord to continue to build His work, to watch over us in protection and continue to call "watchman" in prayer who will do guard duty in the Spirit. Apathy is "aiding and abetting the enemy." Rebellion is high treason against holy God. Hopefully, we will all be like Epaphras, "always wrestling in prayer" and prevailing (Colossians 4:12).*



Andrew Murray wrote: "In intercession our King finds His highest glory and continues His work. Through it alone we can do our work and nothing avails without it."

My Reflections

DAY 7

Psalm 138:1-8

All true blessing begins with open hands which involves yielding to the Lord before receiving from Him. A surrendered heart sees God answer prayers, and that is what the Psalmist shows us here. When God answers prayer, His Name is glorified and His people should respond with grateful hearts. No purpose of God's can be thwarted, and in this Psalm David reminds us that God's plans will be accomplished. Warren Wiersbe has said that "the purpose of it is not to get man's will done in Heaven but to get God's will done on earth."



IN PRAYER

- » *Ask the heavenly Father to aid you in whole-hearted surrender (Romans 12:1) as you "set your heart to seek the Lord your God" (2 Chronicles 11:16). Know that your investment in ministry reaps rich dividends, not only in this life but in Heaven as the Lord rewards faithful service.*
- » *Pray that He fulfills His perfect will and purpose for our church and particularly for my family and me in this year or so of transition. We all know that God will "not forsake the work of His hands" over these last 27 years, as well as all the years since our church was founded in 1947.*
- » *Pray that all pastors in our church will continue to shepherd and serve God like King David, with "upright hearts and skillful hands" (Psalm 78:72).*



May we proclaim "God's might to the next generation, His power to all those to come" (Psalm 71:18). Let's answer the questions that the younger ones, like "mosaics" and "millennials," are asking. Let's be transparent with our failures but also testify of our victories. Let's not write off those who might be in "the Lamb's Book of Life."

Devotionals from
Acts

DAY 1

Acts 1:1-26

Because of our risen Christ, we are grateful to be His witnesses in South-west Florida and beyond in fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19, 20). We are not only gathering in worship but also going in witness. Of course, this cannot be accomplished without the power of the Holy Spirit, Who has indwelt all believers and wants to infill us to be His proclaimers.



IN PRAYER

- » *Stop for a moment today and ask the Lord to fill you with His Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). You are asking Him to control your thoughts, words and actions and to help Himself to your life.*
- » *Concerning our church, ask the Lord to "guide us into all truth" by His Spirit and to keep us from personal agendas and humanistic ways. He "knows the hearts of all" and has the perfect plan for His people.*
- » *Continue to pray for the mobilization of our Pastor Search Team as they seek the one to "take the place in this ministry." Pray that they will be strengthened by "the knowledge of God's will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Colossians 1:9).*
- » *Continue to request that God will bring all of our pastors and lay leaders into an authentic, Spirit-led walk.*



Each and every day, we pause...pray...plan...and then proceed! You have been empowered to proclaim the Good News of Jesus! But this can't be done without prayer. As Oswald Chambers said, "Prayer does not fit us for the greater work; prayer is the greater work."

My Reflections

DAY 2

Acts 2:36-47

Hebrews tells us that "the Word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword...it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). On the day of Pentecost, many heard the truth and they "were cut to the heart." Peter's powerful message underlined the necessity of certainty in knowing what Jesus had done and wants to do. On that day 3,000 believed and were saved! Every pool in town was used for water baptism. The New Testament church was born! Those who think that only small churches are good need to look at this Jerusalem congregation. Pastor Adrian Rogers humorously spoke about a large church - "just sit somewhere in the first ten rows...and don't look back."



IN PRAYER

- » *Pray that in all of our worship services and ministries that we will magnify the crucified and risen Christ and that people will be "cut to the heart" in conviction. May they always ask, "What shall we do?" Conversion only occurs with conviction.*
- » *Pray that people will be willing to repent and then give scriptural testimony of the reality of a changed life by believer's baptism. We pray that all will understand that it is not the water that cleanses, but Jesus Christ who offers "the forgiveness of sins." Continue to pray that the Lord will "call to Himself" as many as possible through us as His vessels.*
- » *Ask that the Lord would help us to follow the example of the early church, that all will "devote themselves to the teaching of the Word" through Bible and Life groups, Men's and Women's Ministries and other discipleship gatherings for growth.*
- » *Particularly petition that there will be a sense of the supernatural work of God as we together continue in "the prayers" for God's manifested presence.*



Let's not forget the truth of Pastor Ronnie Floyd's statement, "Prayer occurs when you depend on God; prayerlessness occurs when you depend on yourself." We dare not say, "We can do this ourselves; Jesus, we will let you know if we need anything." Spiritual dependence on God is not human co-dependence on another. God is our Master and not our mascot.

DAY 3

Acts 6:1-15

Just as the Lord led the early church to pick seven good men to be server-deacons, "full of the spirit of wisdom," pray that the Lord will lead the Pastor Search Team to sort through the various resumes for the next Senior Pastor position. Ask the Father to help us to be full of faith and not of fear.



IN PRAYER

- » *Pray to the Heavenly Father that our church ministry will be marked by spiritual servants who serve to meet practical needs and put out Satan-inspired fires.*
- » *Petition the Lord that our pastors will devote themselves to "prayer and the ministry of the Word" and not get sidetracked with lesser things. This entails a working together relationship by pastoral and leadership teams, whose priority is being led by the Spirit and walking in truth-directed obedience.*
- » *Pray that the Lord will help us to courageously proclaim Jesus as we passionately seek to "increase the Word of God." May our church be known as a grace place where many hard-to-reach people "become obedient to the faith," just like the Jewish priests in the early days of the church.*



May our church be a place where believers are stretched and strengthened in their faith and where unbelievers doubt their doubts.

My Reflections

DAY 4

Acts 9:1-22

Alvin VanderGriend said, "Before we talk to men about God, we should talk to God about them." May God give us the desire and the courage to speak to His Sauls of society.

Have you recognized that Jesus is Lord and that you must crown Him as Lord in your life? Are you willing to "suffer for the sake of His Name?" Few people have experienced such a radical dramatic conversion as Saul, who became known as Paul. When Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, he "fell to the ground." He was humbled to hear that he was a "chosen instrument" in the Master's hand and to be used for the salvation of Gentiles, the very people that this proud Pharisee despised. Have you declared anyone off-limits to be a witness?

Experiencing blindness made Saul/Paul totally dependent even before Ananias came to him. He had to be led around by his bodyguards and then sat in darkness and silence. The willingness to follow Christ in water baptism by immersion completed the Lord's crash course in humility. How is He humbling you today? How low can you go?

Allowing God to humble us in brokenness always precedes blessedness. Christ must conquer your rebellion. Only when we get down can we look up. The ability to "not think of yourself more highly than you ought" (Romans 12:3) follows the "presentation of your body as a living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1). Do that today in a fresh way.



IN PRAYER

- » *Continue to intercede that hardened unbelievers will meet the risen Christ and not only ask, "Who are you, Lord?" but also declare, "Here I am, Lord." Pray that we will be sensitive to the leading of the Lord, even when He asks to do hard things, as He did with Ananias.*
- » *Prayerfully consider any areas where pride has hardened your heart. Ask God to help you receive His humbling and breaking by His grace.*
- » *Ask God to help our church be characterized by service and humility, not prideful assertion of our rights and preferences.*
- » *For this transition season, ask God to give us all eyes to see how we can further reach our community with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, particularly during Love Naples day.*

DAY 5

Acts 12:1-19

Jesus' followers will always face persecution and difficult times, so it is very important that we pray for each other. The key to powerful intercession is found in this passage as the Lord performed a miraculous deliverance from prison for Peter.

As the Apostle faced imminent death, "earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church." True prayer must not be haphazard and sloppy, but "fervent" and "earnest." James reminds us that "the effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16). This promise can also be translated as "The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its working." Here's the formula for faith: "For him...To God...By the church."

Peter was released and even went to the house where the prayer meeting was taking place! Samuel Chadwick wrote, "The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks our wisdom, but he trembles when we pray."



IN PRAYER

- » *Consider praying about something that you may have considered "off-limits."*
- » *Audaciously ask according to Ephesians 3:20, expecting to be surprised by God's answer.*
- » *Pray for those being persecuted in "closed countries," where missionaries have no legal access to share the Gospel.*



The good news of this deliverance was told to "James and to the brothers," which is the first significant mention of a Lead Pastor in the early church. James is the half brother of Jesus and had rapidly grown in his faith and influence. God is calling all of us to "do the work of the ministry," but He particularly uses pastors/teachers to "equip the saints" (Ephesians 4:11, 12).

DAY 6

Acts 13:1-12

We have the deep conviction that God particularly gives guidance to His people when they are in a season of seeking the Lord. As the early church in Antioch was “worshipping the Lord and fasting,” the Holy Spirit called out two leaders for their first missionary journey. Thus began the witness to the Gentiles by Saul.

God uses fasting with prayer to prevail over long-entrenched, satanic strongholds. Fasting deepens your hunger for God, intensifies and clarifies prayer concentration and also disciplines personal desires. The great evangelist, R. A. Torrey, wrote, “Every great crisis in life and work should be met by such prayer.” Even if you medically cannot fast from food, you can set aside certain times and do without certain other pleasures or life habits for the sake of intercession.

When God has called the new pastor, we trust that He will not only be “sent out by the Holy Spirit” but will consistently “proclaim the Word of God.”



IN PRAYER

- » *Seek the Lord for His direction concerning our ministry and that He will lead the Pastor Search Team and the rest of the congregation to “set apart” and send forth His man. It is not for his own agenda but “for the work to which God has called him.”*
- » *As God gives unbelievers ears to “hear the Word of God,” pray for the inevitable opposition from the devil and that the new pastor, as well as all of us, will be “filled with the Holy Spirit.”*
- » *Pray that our church will boldly speak the truth in love about the major moral and ethical crises facing America and be willing to follow “the straight paths of the Lord.”*
- » *Ask that God would give Janet and I continued opportunities to proclaim God’s Word, wherever He might send us, both in this transition time and beyond.*

DAY 7

Acts 14:19-28

Don't be surprised that during this season of seeking the Lord that there will be extra pressure. God's great character course is usually through adversity and not prosperity. During the events that took place in Acts 14, the Apostle Paul penned his last letter to Timothy. In the midst of intense persecution, the disciples "gathered about him...strengthening...encouraging them to continue in the faith."

Our study in 2 Corinthians should particularly remind us to "Comfort those who are in any affliction with which we ourselves are comforted by God, since we have shared abundantly in Christ's sufferings" (2 Corinthians 1:4-5). Declare bankruptcy before the Lord today and claim that you are not "Sufficient in yourself to claim anything as coming from yourself, because your sufficiency is from God" (2 Corinthians 3:5). Adrian Rogers preached, "Growing churches love, and loving churches grow."



IN PRAYER

- » *In this time of seeking the Lord, pray that First Baptist Church will always "preach the Gospel," based on the inerrant Word of God.*
- » *Ask the Lord to help you appropriate His power to persevere even in the midst of trials and tribulations, knowing that God can open doors of faith at the right time and way.*
- » *Ask God to put on your heart someone who may be going through trials and needs your prayers.*



You can be a Phoebe as "a servant of the church" (Romans 16:1). Be willing to be a Mary who "has worked hard" for others (Romans 16:6) and to be like the mother of Rufus who acted like a mother to those who needed care. This is an encouragement to the wonderful ministry of adoption and foster care and an encouragement to all parents who struggle with strong-willed children. Since Rufus' mom became a surrogate mother to Paul (Romans 16:13), certain deep needs were met in his life. Thank God for those who "serve our Lord Christ" and not "their own appetites" but are "wise as to what is good and innocent to what is evil" (Romans 16:18, 19).

Devotionals from
Proverbs

DAY 1

Proverbs 1:1-7, 29; 2:1-15

The Lord calls us in reverence to serve Him in “the fear of the Lord.” America’s culture tends to reflect the humanist poem, “Invictus,” in which the poet said, “I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.” We say, “Captain, your ship is sinking!” However, we desperately need guidance that only God can give. It comes in the form, according to Proverbs, of wisdom, instruction, understanding, prudence and discretion. These words describe God’s total direction for how to live under His lordship. In essence, wisdom is seeing life from God’s perspective.



IN PRAYER

- » *Petition that you and our church family chooses “the fear of the Lord” and “the knowledge of the Holy One” (Proverbs 9:10) that we may “keep His commandments” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).*
- » *Pray that we will have a holy dread of displeasing God that replaces the flipency of our culture toward the sacred.*
- » *Ask God to reveal His glory and holiness to you in a fresh way.*



Human tendency is to go from one extreme to the other. We must beware of a pendulum swing with emphasis on the love of God replacing healthy respect and awe of God. May we be like the Hebrew midwives, who were more concerned with obedience to God than bowing to Pharaoh (Exodus 1:21).

My Reflections

DAY 2

Proverbs 8:13-21, 32-36

In the daily "quiet time," the believer watches and prays, waiting before the Lord. This is the only way consistently know the flow of God's favor. He is calling us to intimacy with Him. Utilizing these simple devotionals, praying the scriptures back to God and literally using them as specific prayer requests allows us to walk in wisdom.



IN PRAYER

- » *As often as possible, pray for God's guidance of the Pastor Search Team as recommendations and resumes of potential pastors are examined. Pray that the Lord will help them sort through names in order to zero in on God's man. The issue is not what we expect or demand, but how the Lord chooses to work in His will. It is always "good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).*
- » *Pray for the Search Team to ask wise questions that detect the character, heart, gifts, talent and potential of a possible pastor. Ask God for Spirit-led discernment in their information gathering, regular discussions and evaluations.*



To find the right pastor, we must be the right kind of church which continues to call out to Christ, "Will You not revive us again that Your people may rejoice in You?" (Psalm 85:6). Revival is restoring something to its true purpose and nature. It is to truly come alive to God's blessing. May this be true of us!

DAY 3

Proverbs 10:1-14, 17, 23

There was a saying in the World War II era, "Loose lips sink ships." In other words, some secrets should not be divulged; some words should not be spoken because of the damage they can do. How we speak creates an atmosphere for good or evil, for blessing or blasting, since "death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21; 21:23; 22:11).



IN PRAYER

- » *Concerning our church, pray that we will walk in spiritual, moral and financial integrity and that all of our ministry leaders will have an authentic Christian walk in private as well as in public.*
- » *Ask the Lord to produce the fruit of love which can cover all offenses and hurt feelings. He wants to prevent strife and guard our lips from divisive speech.*
- » *Pray that truth and honesty always guide us. Adrian Rogers wrote: "It is better to be divided by truth than united in error. It's better to be hated for telling the truth than loved for telling a lie."*



Remember the admonition of King Solomon that "lips will feed many." This is because we "know what is acceptable and edifying." To edify is to build. "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17).

My Reflections

DAY 4

Proverbs 11:1-31

While “an abundance of counselors” who speak the mind of the Lord may challenge us in many areas, the most difficult arena to receive truth is in the realms of the material and financial.

Our church is characterized by the core values of *Truth...Love...Community*. All of our ministries could fall into four categories: Gathering, Growing, Giving and Going. We **gather** in worship, fellowship and Bible Study. We **grow** through discipleship, education and in various ways of equipping to be like Christ. We **give** in sharing our financial resources, as well as serving with time, talents and gifts. We **go** to the lost in evangelism and missions.

The Lord calls us to be a sword that is sharpened on both sides. A godly Scottish pastor once challenged a young man in his ordination service to the ministry: “Be as holy as a saved man can be, a sharp, clean sword in the hand of the Lord.” However, many of us tend to be one-sided; we may be sharp in service but dull in giving, or sharp in study but dull in praying. To cut through the thick jungle of the wrong values and beliefs of our culture, we must be informed by the “two-edged sword of the Word of God” which is “living and active” (Hebrews 4:12). The bottom line is not affordability but the will of God when it comes to ministry.



IN PRAYER

- » *Ask that our church will continue to give generously in areas of need, but also particularly in regular tithing to the General Operating Budget and giving to the Kingdom Missions Offering.*
- » *Pray that God will meet the financial needs of First Baptist Academy and other worthy ministries.*



The only thing that we can one day carry to Heaven is what we have already sent on and given away. When wealth is divided to ministries, it multiplies. In other words, on a farm a crop is not produced by seeds stored in a barn but by seeds sown in the soil.

DAY 5

Proverbs 18:1-24

We rejoice that “the Name of the Lord is a strong tower which we may run into and be safe.” It is through that Name that we ask for provision and protection. The ancients understood the need for a strong tower and a walled castle, but we go to our Refuge joyfully singing, “A mighty fortress is our God.” We are able to “find help in time of need at the throne of grace” (Hebrews 4:16). Revelation pictures the Lamb, the Lord Jesus, upon that throne. Christ is called the Lamb 26 times.

It is called “the throne of grace” because God is the author of that favor (1 Peter 5:10). The Holy Spirit is “the Spirit of grace” (Hebrews 10:29). No wonder that 12 times in the Bible it speaks of “the grace of our Lord Jesus.” It marked His character and is revealed in His life, death, resurrection and ongoing intercession for us.

Our “boldness to come to the throne of grace” means that we find freedom to tell anything to and share everything with God, like Hezekiah spreading a threatening letter “before the Lord” (Isaiah 37:14). God wants us to articulate our fears and desires.

A throne was in the place of the palace where royal answers were given and needs discussed. We are a child of the King and not a roving beggar. We don’t cry for crumbs or settle for leftovers, but ask as royalty, as “joint Heirs of Christ.” We come with humility and not “a crushed spirit,” with the knowledge that God has made room for us and makes time for us. So what is keeping you from talking to Him today?



IN PRAYER

- » *Confess and repent of any sin that causes separation between you and Jesus.*
- » *Boldly tell God your specific needs and claim His help and sufficient grace (2 Corinthians 12:9).*

DAY 6

Proverbs 23:10-28

God has called us to “not move an ancient landmark,” which not only applies to boundary stones but also to eternal principles. As someone noted, “If we do not learn from the past, we are doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past!” God has erected “stop signs” and “yield the right of way” reminders in His Word and in history.

In the book of Judges there were five occasions when things were so bad that “misery found a voice to cry out to God,” as Walter Kaiser wrote. The professor pointed out that the five instances of evil and wickedness had “grown like weeds” in Israel and stirred the people to have a deep yearning for deliverance. Tragically, they continued to recycle sin, apostasy, oppression, desperation, repentance and deliverance.

They “did evil in the sight of the Lord” and abandoned Him for the sake of other gods (Judges 2:11, 12). Predictably, the Lord’s anger was kindled because of their spiritual declension, which resulted in foreign dominance. But in His mercy God would raise up a judge to lead them to military victory, but only after they had repented and sought the Lord.

Sixteen major revivals are recorded in the Bible, so God longs for us to meet His criteria (2 Chronicles 7:14). Even today those of us who are “called by His name” must cry out to Him in humility, repentance and prayer: “Do it again, Lord!”



IN PRAYER

- » *God always uses leaders like the one described in Judges 3:10 - “the Spirit of the Lord was on him.” Like the ancient Hebrews, have you “inquired of the Lord” to know His will (Judges 1:1)?*
- » *Pray for revival in America and repentance in churches.*
- » *Pray that “times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” that encourage our local Body (Acts 3:20).*

DAY 7

Proverbs 31:10-31

Men and women were created equally in the image of God to uniquely display the character of God (Genesis 1:27). As such, women are important to the family of God. The work of God is uniquely accomplished by every believer - male and female alike - obediently following the call of God. Our church places high priority on maturing and mobilizing women.

God will lead us to a new Senior Pastor. No married pastor can truly be what God wants him to be without the support, blessing, prayers and encouragement of his spouse. Similar to my wife, Janet, she will have significant gifting of her own and varied interests unique to her, with a desire to utilize those as a good steward of God's grace.



IN PRAYER

- » *Pray for your family that the Lord will "build the house of the righteous."*
- » *Intercede on behalf of the wives of our pastoral staff team who are "the crowns of their husbands." Pray for them in their various roles, whether as mothers of children in the home or of those who are grown, whether as grandmothers or mentors. Ask that God would use them greatly as they partner in ministry with their husbands.*
- » *Pray for the wife of the future Senior Pastor and that she will truly sense the leadership of the Lord. Pray that the prospective pastor's "heart will trust her and will have no lack of gain, as she does him good and not harm all the days of her life."*
- » *Pray that all of the women in our church not be discouraged by the idealized portrait in Proverbs 31, but be inspired to wear "strength and dignity as clothing" as they apply the biblical principles in practical homemaking.*

My Reflections

Devotionals from
John

DAY 1

John 1:1-18

Benjamin Franklin spoke about the matter of being an author: "Either write something worth reading, or live something worth writing about." In essence, Jesus inspired the entire Bible and He "interpreted in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). Jesus did not write an actual book. He never built a business, founded a university or won a military campaign. He did infinitely more. John wrote his Gospel which is not only "worth reading" but magnifies that Life worth writing about.

John describes Jesus with names and titles: "the Word, God, Life, the Light of men, the Son of the Father, Christ and the Lord, the Lamb of God, Rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph and the Son of God and the King of Israel." This month of daily devotionals is enabling our understanding and a closer walk with Jesus.

Jesus is the most Balanced Person in the universe - "full of grace and truth." We become more like Jesus as we draw "from His fullness to receive grace upon grace." Where do you need His grace today?

It is a temptation among humans to become imbalanced through the following process. We discover the **essence** of truth. It is then typical for us to **emphasize** a unique Bible insight. If we are not careful, we can then begin to **exaggerate**, then to move into outright **error**. The error is often **evangelized** to others. This is how cults begin.

Doctrinal balance is achieved when scripture is allowed to interpret scripture and when personal experience is interpreted in the light of revealed truth. Focus on Jesus.



IN PRAYER

- » *Praise Jesus' person with each of His names and titles.*
- » *Ask that God would make you more like Jesus, as you receive "grace upon grace," both in the forgiveness of sin and the enablement to live with discernment to avoid the ditches of imbalance.*

DAY 2

John 1:35-51

"Come" is a key concept in the Christian life. The Bible even ends with the Spirit's invitation to come to Heaven and to come as the spiritually thirsty. After all, Jesus is coming again (Revelation 22:17-20).

Jesus called His disciples to "come and follow Him." When they questioned Him about His residence, He replied, "Come and you will see." So they did indeed come and saw much more. Later Jesus would give the great invitation, "Come to Me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). The very fact that you are reading this devotional guide is your response to His appeal to come into His presence. May we continue to come day by day. May we "come and see" all that He has for us.

When Jesus called Nathanael to follow Him, He revealed unique and thorough insight into Nathanael's character. Nathanael was greatly impressed when Jesus told him that He had "seen him under the fig tree." This was an expression like our modern term for prayer being "on your knees." As the God-Man, Jesus had heard and seen him in his quiet time. No wonder he exclaimed, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus then referred to how Jacob experienced God at Bethel in his vision of angels ascending and descending on a ladder to Heaven. Jacob declared that "surely God was in that place" (Genesis 28:16).

Come to Him, call on His Name and have access into Heaven itself.



IN PRAYER

- » *Dedicate a place and time for prayer each day.*
- » *Ask God to "open my eyes that I may see wondrous things" (Psalm 119:18), that you would see where God is at work in the life of our church family and community.*
- » *Pray that you would have ears to hear His voice calling you in service and obedience. Respond whole-heartedly, "Speak Lord, Your servant is listening."*
- » *Trust Christ to call and use modern day Nathanaels to follow Him and meet Him in prayer.*

DAY 3

John 3:22-36

While John the Baptist was the forerunner of the Messiah who was to “prepare the way of the Lord” in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, it took awhile for the transition to be understood. John knew well that Jesus must “increase and he must decrease.” The issue for the Lord is not what group we are with or who our favorite teacher is but whether Jesus is increasingly being recognized as Lord in every part of our lives.

Having recently been in the wedding of my son, I was greatly aware that I was not the center of attention. Frankly, neither was my son, the groom. The bride, in her radiant beauty, “took center stage.” Of course, the bride needed a bridegroom. The radiance of the bride shines greater light on the groom.

Our job is to magnify Jesus. Our joy will be complete, just as John explained. We will be a witness to what we have “seen and heard” as we “bear testimony.” God will reveal more and more of His truth through His Word as He “gives the Spirit without measure.”

As we call a new pastor to our church in God’s time, he must increase and I must decrease. It will be time for Joshua to replace Moses. In Numbers 27, God gave Moses His transition plan. The new shepherd of the flock will be “invested with authority,” recognized and honored by “all the congregation of the people.” The sheep must have a godly shepherd, “in whom is the Spirit” (Numbers 27:12-23). I will rejoice as we all commission him before the Lord. There will be no jealousy or rivalry, as we embrace this new pastor that God has for “such a time as this.”



IN PRAYER

- » *Ask the Spirit to search your heart and see if you are making much of the Name of Jesus? In what ways and areas do you need to decrease? Ask God to show you and help you make the necessary changes.*
- » *Intercede on behalf of the man God is preparing to come as our new pastor. Pray for a peaceable transition of leadership that is marked with humility, honor, and integrity. Ask that God would begin to prepare the church he is currently leading for their own season of transition.*
- » *Pray that all of us can “prepare the way for the Lord” in His coming to take His Bride to Heaven.*

DAY 4

John 5:1-47

At the pool of Bethesda, Jesus healed a discouraged man who laid by the pool as a paralytic for 38 years. He asked the invalid a question which all of us must answer, "Do you want to be healed?" Do you and I really want to be changed or revived? The question will always be followed by a command to "get up and walk." Even as we have been sharing in these devotional times, soul-searching questions must be asked, followed by actions of obedience and faith. The man would not have known if he had truly been healed if he had not attempted what seemed to be the impossible. Believing Jesus' Word was the trigger for the power.

Jesus concluded this experience of blessing only to encounter the blasting by the "Jews who were persecuting Jesus." Jesus answered that His "Father was working," from the beginning "until now."

Jesus' spiritual mode of operation was to "do nothing of His own accord, but only what He saw the Father doing." We live our lives in the same dependency and sensitivity.

You may be shaken up because you don't think that God has shown up in His working. You may not see it or sense it, but He is actively at work.



IN PRAYER

- » *Ask God to show you where He is at work! Pray that you can follow the example of Jesus, and join Him in it.*
- » *In this season of transition, pray that many "hear the Word and believe..." Pray that we would see many individuals and families walk in obedience to God's call to salvation and baptism.*



"With great power the apostles gave witness" (Acts 4:33). Jesus was alive and let loose in the world, which enables us to be "burning and shining lamps." Shine on and get in on what He is up to!

DAY 5

John 11:1-44

We often struggle with God's time and timing. When the word came to Jesus that His friend Lazarus was critically ill, He delayed in going to him. He could have spoken a word of healing as He did with the Centurion's servant and healed Lazarus from afar. For the greater glory of resurrection from the dead, He waited and did not reveal His ultimate purpose until later. Even Mary and Martha struggled with frustration over His delay.

When we go through the "dark night of the soul," it is hard to wait on the Lord and remember that He does not operate by our stopwatch. He sometimes seems to be late or completely "Absent Without Leave." As Warren Wiersbe wrote, "When you are in the furnace, His eye is on the clock and His hand is on the thermostat." He is in charge. The fire purifies the gold. Your pain is your gain.



IN PRAYER

- » *What heartache or disappointment do you carry today? Roll this burden on to the Lord, and know the nearness of His presence. "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted..." (Psalm 34:18).*
- » *Ask God to show you how the furnace you are in right now is used by Him to purify your heart? Ask God to give you opportunities to "comfort others with the comfort you yourself have received" (2 Corinthians 1:4).*
- » *Ask that God would use our church as both a lighthouse to the lost, and also a haven for the hurting. May many know the hope of Christ because of the love and compassion we show.*



In this marvelous passage, we see the ultimate "sign" that proves that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God (John 20:30, 31), as recorded by John in his Gospel. He is "the resurrection and the life."

DAY 6

John 17:1-26

In this High Priestly Prayer, Jesus prayed not only for His disciples of that day but for all of us who believe in Him throughout the ages. We are grateful to be the people whom the Heavenly Father has given to Him.

As God, Jesus knew that this small group of followers would become a massive movement of righteousness. Though the church is not mentioned by name in John's Gospel, it was clearly in the Lord's mind in John 17 and was powerfully spreading by the time the Gospel was written. Most likely, by the time John wrote, the Romans had already destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. "The mother church" was dispersed, and the Gospel spread throughout the empire.

Jesus' prayers would be answered. He was passionate that we become one in unity. You may become discouraged by the many denominational interpretations and churches. Some have good reasons for what they believe, and others are just simply off base. There are many reasons why churches disagree over doctrine. Pray for true oneness.



IN PRAYER

- » *Pray this prayer for those in your Bible and Life Group, your group in Men's or Women's Ministry, or your Home Bible and Life Group. Personalize Jesus' prayer.*
- » *Pray that God would protect us from any sort of division, from within or without.*
- » *Pray for there to be a oneness of heart and mind among the Pastor Search Team. Ask that God would open and close doors that would lead us to our next Senior Pastor.*



Jesus knew in His omniscience that there would be differences of opinion, but we can be one on the common ground of Christ. There is no schism in His mystical body, since He is the Head and we are the members. The universal church is without blame or blemish as the Bride of Christ. She is not homely but heavenly, and being perfected for Heaven particularly because of the glory which He has given to us.

DAY 7

John 21:1-25

As we come to the completion of this study, as well as the end of John's Gospel, we are struck by Christ's amazing practicality. He cooks breakfast for His fisher followers who have toiled all night with no results. He graciously challenges them concerning their love for Him. He even gives one-on-one time to Peter who had denied Him.

The middle eastern shepherd would break the leg of a sheep that habitually strayed but then carry that sheep on his shoulders until healing was finished. Jesus, the Great Shepherd, presses on the raw nerve of Simon's memory, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He asked this question three times, based on Peter's three denials the night of Jesus' trial. Jesus probes where it hurts, but wants Peter to realize that he really does care for Him. However, his love is more of a friendship than sacrificial cross-kind of love.

Regardless of Peter's failure at the fire or his limitations in theology, Jesus still commissioned him to feed His lambs and His sheep. He did not want Peter out of the game for long. Like a good coach after a costly turnover in a football game, He sat him down to settle him down, so that he might get his head and heart back in the conflict. How is He restoring You?



IN PRAYER

- » *Confess any sins to Jesus and receive cleansing.*
- » *Recommit to His commission.*
- » *Praise God for His work and faithfulness in the past that gives confidence for the future.*



Like Peter, we can be distracted by what other disciples do. Jesus wanted Peter to take His eyes off John and to follow Him. To paraphrase His challenge to Peter, "Peter, it is none of your business what I do with John; you keep on following Me for the rest of your life." May we all take our eyes off others, away from our struggles and "look to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2).

My Reflections

*"The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous
and his ears toward their cry."*

//Psalm 34:15//

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