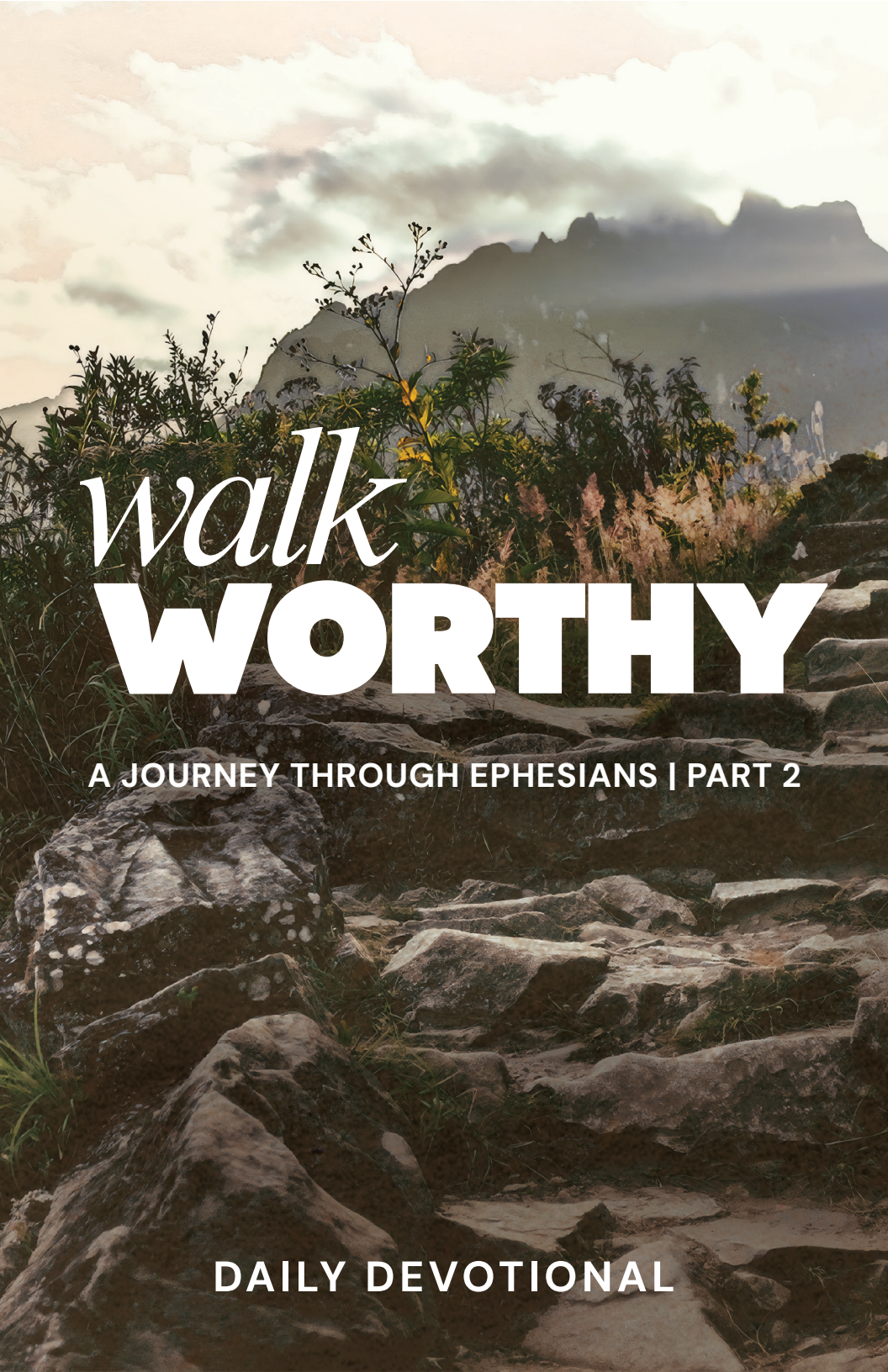

walk
WORTHY
A JOURNEY THROUGH EPHESIANS | PART 2
DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Scripture quotations marked (CSB) have been taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are taken from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version ® (ESV®). Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by Permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version ® NIV ® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. ® Used by Permission of Biblica, Inc. ® All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright 1996, 2004, 2007, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by Permission of Tyndale House Publishers, a Division of Tyndale House Ministries, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Is Jesus truly at the center of your life?

It's easy to let other things take His place. Our schedules fill up, responsibilities compete for our attention, and before we know it, we're navigating life in our own strength. But following Jesus isn't just about what we believe on Sunday. It's about allowing Him to shape how we live every day.

Throughout Ephesians, Paul reminds us that our identity in Christ should transform the way we live. Over the next nine weeks, we'll explore what it means to put aside our old ways, walk in love and light, strengthen our relationships, serve others and stand firm in God's strength. As we celebrate Jesus' birth and enter a new year, we'll be reminded that He is the foundation of it all.

I invite you to set aside a few minutes each day to read these devotionals, reflect on God's Word and spend time in prayer. Don't approach this as another task to complete, but as an opportunity to grow closer to Jesus and become more like Him.

My prayer is that we'll live out these truths together, keeping Jesus at the center of our lives and our church.



Bryan Jones, Senior Pastor

Devotional writings by:

Sandy Grinnell
David Hardy
Crystal Lowery
Paul Macosko
Stewart Mathis
Jeremy Owens
Mark Taylor
Austin Thompson
J.C. Thompson

DAILY PRAYER AND REFLECTION QUESTIONS

"… Our Father in heaven…" **Matthew 6:9b (NLT)**

- **What do You want to say to me today as my Father?**

"… may your name be kept holy." **Matthew 6:9c (NLT)**

- **What do You want to reveal to me about Your power today?**

"May your Kingdom come soon." **Matthew 6:10a (NLT)**

- **Help me make Your priorities my priorities today.**

"Give us today the food we need," **Matthew 6:11 (NLT)**

- **Is there anything specific You want me to do with my time or the people I'm around today?**

"and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us" **Matthew 6:12 (NLT)**

- **Reveal to me anyone I need to forgive or ask for forgiveness.**

"And don't let us yield to temptation…" **Matthew 6:13a (NLT)**

- **Is there anywhere I'm vulnerable to temptation?**

A NEW WALK: FAITH THAT MOVES

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. **Ephesians 4:17 (NIV)**

As a young Marine, I lived on the third floor of the barracks. Every morning, the last thing I passed before heading out to work was a mirror at the bottom of the stairwell. Beside it hung a sign:

Is there enough evidence in the mirror to prove you are a Marine?

That sign got me every time.

If my boots weren't shined or my uniform wasn't squared away, the mirror showed it. Upstairs, I could make excuses. Downstairs, I had to face what was right in front of me. Some mornings, I knew something needed fixing and walked out anyway, hoping nobody would notice. Other Marines usually spotted it immediately. Ignoring the mirror didn't change what they saw. Paul's words invite us to examine our spiritual walk with that same honesty. When he insists *in the Lord*, he speaks with the Lord's authority. These believers belonged to Christ, and their daily lives needed to reflect that identity. They could no longer follow the patterns of a life disconnected from God.

We can know the right answers and still excuse the wrong behavior. We can profess faith in Jesus while our words, attitudes and private choices tell a different story. Where does our walk contradict what we say we believe? The mirror in the barracks didn't make me a Marine. It revealed whether my appearance reflected who I already was. Likewise, obedience doesn't earn our salvation. Ephesians 2:8-10 reminds us that we are saved by grace through faith, and that God created us in Christ Jesus for good works.

God's Word reveals what needs to change. Our response is to trust Him and obey. When Scripture exposes something in our lives, we need to address it rather than walk past it.

APPLICATION: Ask God to show you one habit, attitude or response that contradicts your faith. Choose one concrete step of obedience today, whether that means apologizing, speaking truthfully or turning away from a temptation you have been excusing.

PRAYER: Father, thank You for saving me by grace and giving me a new life in Christ. Help me honestly face what Your Word reveals and give me courage to obey You in today's ordinary decisions. Amen.

A SHARP MIND: RENEWED BY TRUTH

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

Romans 8:5-7 (NIV)

After days of packing, we were finally ready for the movers. One of the few things left unboxed was a video game console to entertain the kids during the chaos. But they weren't as excited about playing as I expected. When I asked my daughter what was wrong, she explained that we had already turned off the internet in preparation for the move. Without that connection, some of the game's content wouldn't work. The console turned on. The controllers worked. But being disconnected limited what they could do.

In the same way, a person can be intelligent, educated and capable while living disconnected from God. In Ephesians 4:17-18, Paul describes thinking that is futile and understanding that is darkened. Such thinking fails to lead us into the life God created us to live. But our problem runs deeper than a missing connection. Romans 8 says the mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God. Left to ourselves, we resist His authority and organize our lives around our own desires. That resistance often sounds familiar: *I deserve this. I need to win this argument. Nobody can tell me how to live.* When those thoughts govern our minds, they shape how we treat people and respond to God.

Through Christ, believers have new life and His Spirit. Ephesians 4:23 calls us to be renewed in the attitude of our minds. As we receive God's truth and obey Him, our priorities and responses begin to change. What influences your thinking most? Consider what you repeatedly watch, read and dwell on. Are those influences helping you submit to Christ, or strengthening the desires that pull you away from Him?

APPLICATION: Replace one period of scrolling or entertainment today with reading Ephesians 4:17-24. Identify one assumption that conflicts with God's truth and take a specific step to change your response.

PRAYER: Father, show me where my thinking resists Your authority. Renew my mind through Your Word and help me follow Your Spirit in my desires, decisions and responses. Amen.

A SOFT HEART: RESPONDING BEFORE YOU BECOME CALLOUS

They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

Ephesians 4:18-19 (NIV)

I got into my daughter's vehicle to move it so I could get out of the driveway. Immediately, I noticed blue painter's tape covering part of the dashboard. Curious, I peeled it back and found the check engine light glaring at me. When I asked her about it, she simply said she didn't want to see the light.

But the light wasn't the problem. It pointed to something underneath the hood that needed attention. Covering the warning did nothing to fix the issue. We can respond to God's correction the same way. Scripture confronts our behavior. A trusted friend raises a concern. We recognize that we need to confess or apologize. Instead of responding, we reach for our own version of painter's tape. It's not that serious. Everybody does it. You don't understand what I've been through.

Paul identifies the deeper problem as hardness of heart. In Ephesians 4:18-19, hardened hearts are connected to darkened understanding, separation from God's life and a loss of sensitivity to sin. What once troubled us becomes easier to excuse and practice. That loss of sensitivity should concern us. When sin no longer bothers us, it doesn't mean the problem has disappeared. We may have simply grown accustomed to ignoring it. Thankfully, God has not left us without hope. Ephesians 2:4-5 reminds us that, because of His great love and mercy, God made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our sins. His grace invites us to confess honestly and receive His forgiveness.

What sin have you started defending, minimizing or no longer noticing? A soft heart is willing to receive God's correction and respond with repentance. Today, peel back the tape and address what needs attention.

APPLICATION: Ask God to reveal one area where you have been ignoring His correction. Confess it without excuses and invite a trusted believer to help you take a concrete step toward change.

PRAYER: Father, forgive me for ignoring Your correction and defending my sin. Give me a tender heart that responds to Your Word and the courage to repent. Amen.

DESIRES UNDER GOD'S AUTHORITY

Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

Ephesians 4:19 (NIV)

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

Colossians 3:5 (NIV)

I was twenty years old when I tasted Alfredo sauce for the first time. It was love at first bite. Before long, I ate it four or five times a week. I poured it over pasta and used it as a dip for breadsticks. Within a month, my jeans were getting tighter, and my jogs were getting harder. Enjoying Alfredo sauce wasn't wrong. But my appetite was making decisions without much consideration for the consequences. What tasted good in the moment was affecting other parts of my life. Our desires can follow that same pattern. We want something, pursue it and gradually become less concerned about what it costs us—or others.

In Ephesians 4:19, Paul describes people who have surrendered themselves to sinful desires and remain greedy for more. Indulgence hasn't satisfied them. It has strengthened their appetite. Colossians 3:5 calls greed idolatry. We make an idol of something when we give it the trust, devotion or obedience that belongs to God. Approval, pleasure, possessions and control can become so important that we are willing to sin to obtain or protect them.

Wanting respect can become a willingness to belittle others. Wanting comfort can become an excuse to neglect responsibility. Wanting success can become permission to compromise our integrity. The revealing question is: What do I want so badly that I am tempted to disobey God to get it? Paul tells us to put sinful desires to death. That means refusing to feed them and taking concrete steps of obedience, depending on Christ's power. We bring our desires honestly before God and submit them to His authority.

God knows what we need. We can trust His goodness even when obedience means denying ourselves something we want.

APPLICATION: Name one desire that has gained too much control over your decisions. Choose one act of obedience today that challenges its influence, such as giving generously, accepting correction or removing access to a temptation.

PRAYER: Father, reveal the desires I have placed above You. Teach me contentment in Your provision and give me strength to obey You when my appetites pull me elsewhere. Amen.

WEAR YOUR NEW IDENTITY

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. **Ephesians 4:22-24 (NIV)**

During my time in the Marine Corps, we transitioned from the old woodland camouflage utility uniform to a new digital pattern. The uniforms were issued in phases, so for a while, Marines served alongside one another wearing different patterns. Some of us who had worn the old uniform for years were reluctant to change. It was familiar. We knew how it fit and had spent much of our careers wearing it. The replacement required us to let go of something comfortable. Familiarity can make us cling to things we need to leave behind. That is especially true of our former way of life.

But Paul describes something far deeper than changing uniforms. As Christians, we are called to put on a whole new self, born again through faith in Christ. Changing my camouflage left the man underneath unchanged. Salvation reaches into who we are. Paul tells believers to put off the old self, be renewed in their minds, and put on the new self, created to reflect God's righteousness and holiness. God creates this new life. Our obedience flows from His transforming work within us. Yet we can still reach for familiar sinful responses. Under pressure, we lash out. When criticized, we defend our pride. When exhausted, we excuse selfishness. We may say, *That's just who I am.*

In Christ, we must stop using our old identity to excuse our present disobedience. We belong to Him now. The desires that once governed us no longer have the right to direct our lives. Putting on the new self means living from the new life Christ has given us. Through His Spirit, we learn to think differently, desire what honors God, and respond in ways that reflect His character. This transformation reaches beneath what others see to the heart that drives our choices.

Where are you still living as though Christ has not made you new?

APPLICATION: Identify one response that belongs to your former way of life and name its Christlike replacement. Depending on the Holy Spirit, practice that response today: listen patiently, receive correction humbly or serve someone you would normally overlook.

PRAYER: Father, thank You for giving me new life in Christ. Renew my mind and help me stop defending the habits You call me to leave behind. Teach me to live from the new self You have created. Amen.

PUTTING NEW LIFE INTO PRACTICE

… and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. **Ephesians 4:24 (NIV)**

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. **Ephesians 4:32 (NIV)**

I once opened a box containing a new bicycle, expecting to assemble it quickly and hit the road. Unfortunately, something important was missing: the assembly instructions. What I expected to take a few minutes consumed the better part of the day. I had the parts in front of me, but figuring out how they fit together was frustrating.

Being told what to do without being shown how can leave us feeling stuck. Thankfully, Paul doesn't leave Christians guessing. After calling us to put on the new self, he gives specific instructions for how that new life should shape our relationships.

In Ephesians 4:25-32, falsehood gives way to truth because we belong to one body. We address anger promptly and refuse to let it become an opportunity for the devil. Stealing is replaced with honest work—and the goal extends beyond providing for ourselves to include sharing with those in need. Our speech changes too. Before speaking, we consider what will help the person listen. Words that tear down are replaced with words that strengthen, encourage and give grace. Paul also calls us to put away bitterness, rage, slander and malice. In their place, we practice kindness, compassion and forgiveness. These instructions reach into ordinary moments: an argument at home, a conversation at work or a response to someone who has disappointed us. Those moments reveal whether we are living from the new self God has created.

Our choices matter to God. Paul warns us against grieving the Holy Spirit, who has sealed us for redemption. The God who has secured our future cares about how we treat people today. We follow these instructions because we have received grace. Paul grounds forgiveness in what Christ has already done for us: *just as in Christ God forgave you*.

Which relationship most needs evidence of that grace through your honesty, encouragement, generosity or forgiveness?

APPLICATION: Read Ephesians 4:25-32 and identify one instruction you need to practice in a specific relationship. Take that step today: tell the truth, offer encouragement, meet a need or extend forgiveness.

PRAYER: Father, thank You for the forgiveness I have received in Christ. Give me a tender heart and help me reflect Your grace in how I speak, work and treat others. Amen.

LIVE IN THE LIGHT

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Matthew 5:14-16 (NIV)

I love a good story. Whether historical, mysterious or romantic, there's a fundamental theme that drives the action and motivates the characters: good versus evil, light versus darkness. As stories unfold, there's an undeniable thrill when darkness is overcome by light, exposing truth and offering hope. The valiant prince defeats the enemy and claims his bride. Forces of destruction are disarmed, and peace is restored. Stories remind us of a fundamental truth: darkness does not negotiate surrender. Darkness is forced to surrender. At creation, God separated light from darkness because darkness cannot dwell where light exists.

Paul writes in Ephesians, *For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light! For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true.* How, then, do we live as people of light? We pursue holiness by imitating God in everything we do. Just as light expels darkness, holiness casts out evil. When we receive salvation, God gives us the Holy Spirit, the light within us that guides us toward holiness.

Every day offers opportunities to let Christ's light shine through our words, what we listen to, and how we respond to difficult situations. Each requires a choice: will we shine in the darkness or retreat into what sometimes feels more comfortable? God didn't call us to live in comfort; He called us to live in the light. Light exposes lies and dangers hidden in darkness. Living as people of light means allowing goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and forgiveness to become the visible pattern of our lives.

APPLICATION: What area of your life is operating in darkness? If you feel protective of something or choose to keep it hidden, perhaps God wants to shine His beautiful light and reveal His truth there. Ask the Lord to expose the darkness in your heart so you can walk more fully in His light.

PRAYER: Lord, give me an awareness of the darkness I may be harboring. Expose those areas in my heart and life that do not reflect Your light. Call me out into the light so I can live a life that honors and pleases You. Amen.

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. **Romans 12:2 (NIV)**

I remember being invited to a slumber party in middle school. As soon as the bus dropped me off that Friday afternoon, I bounced through the house, half-heartedly finished my chores and hurriedly packed my overnight bag. I eagerly waited by the door until my parents took me to the party.

All my closest friends were there, and we quickly fell into our familiar rhythm of giggles and conversation. Later, we settled into our sleeping bags to watch a wildly inappropriate movie. My best friend slipped away, and when she didn't return, I went looking for her. I found her in a bedroom, listening to music and drawing. The movie made her uncomfortable, and she knew her parents wouldn't approve. I knew mine wouldn't either. I wanted to stay with her, but temptation and the girls down the hall drew me back. Why did I feel that discomfort in my stomach as I walked away?

Years later, I recognize that feeling. It nudges me to pause and consider my choices, warning me when a conversation isn't edifying or a situation doesn't honor the Lord. It's more than conscience, which helps me discern right from wrong. It's the Holy Spirit working within me to transform my heart.

Ephesians says, *Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, expose them.*

We can choose not to participate in conversations or behaviors that aren't good. But the Holy Spirit does something deeper. He transforms our hearts, producing what is good and right in God's eyes. God isn't merely interested in changing our behavior. He wants to transform our hearts, drawing us closer to Him so that His light shines through our lives.

APPLICATION: Think about a recent situation in which you felt uneasy about a conversation, decision or behavior. Did you simply recognize that something was wrong, or did you pause to consider what the Holy Spirit might be revealing about your heart?

PRAYER: Father, search my heart and reveal to me anything that I need to confess. Transform my heart to reflect Yours. Help me to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit so that I can be a light for Your Kingdom. Amen.

THE IMAGE WITHIN

In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. **Philippians 1:4-6 (NIV)**

"He must become greater; I must become less." **John 3:30 (NIV)**

A. W. Tozer said, *For human beings, the whole possibility of redemption lies in their ability to change. To move across from one sort of person to another is the essence of repentance; the liar becomes truthful, the thief honest, the lewd pure, the proud humble. The whole moral texture of the life is altered. The thoughts, the desires, the affections are transformed, and the man is no longer what he had been before.*

Think back to this time last year. Do you look the same? I don't mean physically or circumstantially, but has your character or heart changed?

I recently asked myself this question while scrolling through photos on my phone. My hairstyle hasn't changed, and the marks of age remain, but deeper changes have taken place that no camera could capture. I've been pruned and polished, pushed and pursued by God. He's led me into places I didn't want to go, but He walked with me, teaching me things now woven into my heart. He loves me too much to leave me as I was.

I've walked with Christ for years, yet He continues revealing more of Himself and who He wants me to become. As you draw closer to your Heavenly Father, don't be surprised when your perspectives and desires change. He's molding your heart to reflect His own, bringing light into places you couldn't see before. Your responsibility is to respond. Invite Him to continue His transforming work. It's not about having everything together but continually surrendering every part of your life to Him. Through prayer and His Word, He changes you from the inside out, making your life a reflection of His likeness.

APPLICATION: Are there any areas of your life that don't reflect God's character? Write down one thing He brings to mind and ask Him to show you a practical step you can take this week to respond.

PRAYER: Lord, thank You for loving me enough to continue working on my heart and in my life. Help me to surrender to Your plans to transform me into Your likeness, even when it's painful or difficult. You have saved my life, and I want to look more like You. Amen.

DARKNESS MUST FLEE

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of the light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. **Ephesians 5:8-10 (NIV)**

Have you ever walked through your house with the lights off? You think you know how to maneuver through the room until your toe runs right into a doorframe. As soon as you flip the light switch, the darkness disappears. The position of the furniture doesn't change, and you don't have to take another step in any direction; the light simply changes everything. In a moment, everything that was hidden becomes visible.

Our spiritual lives are much the same. Before we came to know Christ, we lived in darkness, unable to see the fullness of His truth, trying to navigate obstacles and avoid disasters with no direction. But when He brings us into His light, everything changes. In Ephesians, Paul doesn't say we were simply *in* darkness; he says we *were* darkness. When we give our lives to Christ, he flips the switch, allowing us to walk in His light. What a beautiful picture of the transformation that takes place when we belong to Jesus!

Although we have been brought into the light, we still have much to learn. As we draw closer to our Heavenly Father and learn more of His character, He continues to reveal places in our hearts that are still shadowed. Our attitudes, desires, words and responses must change. We may discover pride we mistook for confidence, or selfishness behind what we thought were good intentions. When these things are exposed, we have a choice to either make excuses or invite Him to do His transforming work in us. Our pursuit to look like Jesus begins when we recognize that our lives don't reflect His character, and we willingly decide to follow His example. He desires for your life to display goodness, righteousness and truth. Darkness no longer defines you. You now carry His light.

APPLICATION: Is there an attitude, habit or desire that God is asking you to surrender? Instead of making excuses, commit to taking one practical step to change it this week. The goal is not just to shed light on this area, but to become more like Jesus.

PRAYER: Lord, thank You for bringing me out of darkness and into Your light. Give me the humility to receive Your correction and the willingness to respond. Continue to work in me so that my life reflects Your goodness, righteousness and truth. Amen.

WHAT ARE YOU MAKING ROOM FOR?

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. **Ephesians 5:3-4 (NIV)**

When my daughter was preparing to go to college, we spent several hours cleaning out closets and drawers to get rid of the things she would no longer need once she moved. We found old pictures, concert ticket stubs, handmade crafts, stashes of notebooks and stray tubes of ChapStick, among other items that were just taking up space. My daughter didn't realize she had kept all these things. Somewhere along the way, she tucked these things away, made room for them, and then forgot about them. Over time, the clutter accumulated, and what once seemed insignificant began taking up valuable space.

Our hearts can become cluttered in much the same way. We may not intentionally invite sin into our lives, but little by little, we begin making room for things that don't belong. A conversation turns into gossip. A small compromise becomes a habit. Before we realize it, we have grown comfortable with things that should trouble our hearts. Scripture gives strong instructions about what should and should not characterize the lives of God's people. It addresses impurity, greed, careless speech and the danger of being deceived by empty words. Our lives should look different from the world because we belong to Christ.

We must pay attention to what we allow into our hearts and minds. What we watch, the conversations we entertain and the attitudes we nurture all shape us. We can't fill our minds with things that dishonor God and expect our hearts to remain unaffected. Scripture also tells us what should replace these things. Instead of corrupt speech, there should be thanksgiving. Cultivating grateful hearts leaves less room for sin. We honor God not only by what we refuse to embrace, but also by what we intentionally choose to store in our hearts.

APPLICATION: Take an honest look at what you are allowing into your heart and mind. Ask God to help you remove the things that do not honor Him and replace them with things that reflect His character.

PRAYER: Lord, show me anything that I have allowed to take root in my heart that doesn't honor You. Help me recognize the things that influence me in unhealthy ways. Give me the courage to turn away from what displeases You and the wisdom to cultivate what is good, pure and pleasing to You. Amen.

LOOKS LIKE LOVE

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. **Ephesians 5: 1-2 (NIV)**

Think about someone you know whose kindness seems to come naturally. Maybe they are the first to notice when someone is excluded, or they quietly step in to help when needs arise, or they offer grace when everyone else criticizes. Being around this type of person has a way of making you want to be more intentional about how you treat other people. Their actions remind you that love isn't just something we talk about; it's something we demonstrate.

In Ephesians, Paul calls us to follow God's example and walk in the way of love. Our pursuit of holiness begins with our identity. We are not striving to become good enough to earn God's love; we are responding to the love He has already lavished on us. Jesus, the ultimate example of love, gave Himself up for us. He demonstrated His love through sacrifice; He served when others expected to be served, showed compassion to those whom other people overlooked, gave up His own comforts for the comfort of others and willingly laid down His life for us. He loves us enough to carry our burdens and pursue our hearts.

If we are going to follow Christ's example, our love must become more than a feeling or a collection of words. It must be demonstrated in the way we live. Sometimes love looks like forgiveness when we would rather hold onto an offense. Sometimes it means listening patiently when we are tired, speaking truth when silence is easier, or serving someone who may never thank us. These ordinary moments often reveal whether we are truly becoming more like Jesus. Ask Him to teach you to love as He loves. You may discover that His way of love challenges your comfort, confronts your selfishness, and calls you to surrender your own preferences. Don't resist that work. He is shaping your heart to look more like His. As we become more like Jesus, His love should become increasingly evident in us.

APPLICATION: Consider one relationship in which God may be calling you to demonstrate Christlike love. Is there someone you need to forgive, encourage or serve?

PRAYER: Lord, thank You for loving me so completely. Forgive me for the times I have chosen comfort or selfishness over love. Teach me to love sacrificially, even when it is difficult, so that others may see more of You in me. Amen.

FOLLOW THE LEADER

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.
Ephesians 5:17 (NIV)

Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.
Psalm 119:105 (NLT)

My plan is much better than God's, and I'll do what feels right.
I know He says He has good plans, but so far, they are not what I expected.
God, do You care about me? Why is Your will confusing?

Do any of these statements above sound familiar? Many of us have had these thoughts before, and most of us still struggle with them. God's will isn't a formula to figure out. Knowing God's will can be difficult because it requires patience, trust and obedience. Paul's instruction to *not be foolish* can sound daunting, but it's helpful to remember that God almost always reveals His will to us one step at a time.

Whether displayed on a desk, in a car, or on a wall, Jeremiah 29:11 serves as a daily reminder of God's good plans and the hope and future He promises. Yet trusting Him can be difficult when a diagnosis comes, direction seems unclear, or God feels distant. These moments invite us to consider carefully how we live, seek His wisdom and choose our steps prayerfully.

After college, I had the *perfect plan*: a big house, a spouse, a luxury car and a job with a sizable salary. God wasn't part of my plans. I was pursuing success without considering where my choices were leading.

Then COVID hit, and everything changed. Life felt dark, and my spirit felt darker. During that season, I surrendered my life to the Lord, found community and began healing. I learned to slow down, examine my priorities and walk intentionally with Him. Looking back, His plan was better than anything I imagined. His faithfulness taught me that living wisely means trusting His direction above my ambitions. Even in the valley, I can take each step carefully, knowing He cares.

APPLICATION: As you seek God's will, focus less on getting every decision right and more on staying close to Him through Scripture, prayer and faithful obedience. Ask God to make your next step clear, and trust that He can guide you even when you can't see the whole path.

PRAYER: Jesus, thank You for being a caring Father. I pray that as You light my path, You make Your will clear and help me not desire my will over Yours. Amen.

THANK YOU, FATHER

… always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Ephesians 5:20 (NIV)**

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever. **Psalm 118:1 (NLT)**

In September of 2024, parts of the Southeast were hit by Hurricane Helene. It left thousands without power, destroyed homes, caused billions of dollars in damage, and left countless people struggling to access the resources they need to recover. Many people struggled for weeks and months to get back on track. It was one of the worst hurricanes to ever hit this area. God promises us who love Him that He will bring good from anything. During this storm, gratitude was a lesson for us all. Gratitude is simply being thankful for what is good around us. It helps us see God's work in our lives and His faithfulness. When we hear gratitude, we often think of bigger things like jobs, family and health, but what about the smaller things we take for granted, like water, electricity, the ability to go outside and enjoy the sun, food and clothing?

Thankfulness opens our hearts to receive more from God. It shifts our attention from what we lack to what God has given. It shifts our minds from our problems to God's character. No matter whether you are in a storm, in a great season of life or have doubts about the Lord, give thanks! It helps you not only spiritually but also mentally and emotionally. The depression starts to turn from dark to light. The anxiety begins to calm like the sea at dawn. The stress begins to roll off you like water on a rainy day. As we recognize His goodness, we learn to trust His direction, embrace our circumstances and use His gifts wisely. A grateful heart helps us walk faithfully, love generously and live the life He calls us to live.

APPLICATION: Today, write down three things you are grateful for. Afterward, give thanks to the Lord.

PRAYER: Jesus, everything I have is a gift from You. Sometimes, I forget what You have done in my life. Help me to see even the little things in life as blessings and trust that You have my best interests at heart. In Jesus' name, Amen.

OPPORTUNITY ON THE HORIZON

… making the most of every opportunity… **Ephesians 5:16a (NIV)**

"Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt." But Moses protested to God, "Who am I to appear before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?" God answered, "I will be with you. And this is your sign that I am the one who has sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God at this very mountain."

Exodus 3:10-12 (NLT)

Moses almost blew a great opportunity. Moses saw only what he lacked, but God saw what he was capable of. Moses made excuses until finally he decided to do what the Lord told him. God chose Moses to lead the Israelites from captivity in Egypt to salvation in the Promised Land. When opportunities arise, we are often like Moses. We make excuses as to why we can't do something or delay our decision, hoping it will make it easier for us to decide. These are the opportunities God wants us to step into without fear.

I remember when I was presented with the opportunity to serve in ministry. It was a new role, and I was nervous, wondering if this opportunity was really from God. I had already thought of all the excuses for why I wouldn't be able to do it. I felt as though I was too broken and too young to be a leader. Eventually, God reminded me that we are all broken, but in Him we are whole and that He wouldn't call us to do something that He hasn't already equipped us for. Opportunities can be uncomfortable as we look at the sacrifices and what lies ahead. At the same time, they provide opportunities for testimony, growth, and the opportunity to see God's glory.

There is never a perfect time to take an opportunity. Opportunities arise day by day and sometimes hour by hour. When presented with an opportunity, trust that God is with you each step of the way and will guide you on the path to take.

APPLICATION: Making the most of every opportunity means paying attention to where God may already be at work in the ordinary moments of your day. Ask Him for wisdom to recognize those moments and courage to step into them.

PRAYER: Jesus, each day I face opportunities. Show me which opportunities are from You and lead me away from the ones that aren't. Help me to make the most out of each opportunity to glorify You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. **Ephesians 5:18 (NIV)**

"But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you." **John 14:26 (NLT)**

Before Jesus left earth, He told His disciples that He was leaving an advocate for all who accept and obey His commandments. The Holy Spirit stays with us forever. He is our Helper, Counselor and Friend. He lives inside of us to guide, protect and comfort us. The Holy Spirit is oftentimes a forgotten part of the Trinity, who is fully God and fully relational. Following the Holy Spirit and developing a relationship with Him means letting go of the ways of this world. It means not filling ourselves with things that destroy us, but rather with His life-giving Spirit. He desires to lead us away from sin, develop fruit in our lives, and help us to become more like Christ.

A personal relationship with the Holy Spirit takes time. Just like it takes time for a baby to develop in a mother's womb, or a tree to grow from a seed, our relationship with Him is a daily process. This process requires us to yield to what He wants to do in us. A personal relationship with Him is just like any other relationship in our lives. It requires vulnerability, trust, patience and one-on-one time so we can know His voice and learn about Him. Often, we ask Him for guidance and leadership when life is very busy and rushed. But it's in those quiet moments where we hear Him the clearest, and sometimes a voice we never forget.

As time progresses and we stay close to the Holy Spirit, we begin to see the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. As these fruits are developed, our intimacy with Him grows deeper, the world sees a light shining within us, and our walk with the Lord becomes stronger.

APPLICATION: Take a few minutes to pray that you experience the Holy Spirit in a new and fresh way. Pray that your eyes and heart be awakened to what He is doing in your life.

PRAYER: Lord, thank You for the gift of the Holy Spirit. I pray that You fill me with His fruit and help me to discern when He's teaching me. Show me the life You are leading me to and help me commit to following You wherever You lead me. Amen.

TAMED TONGUE

The tongue can bring death or life; those who love to talk will reap the consequences. **Proverbs 18:21 (NLT)**

So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing. **1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NLT)**

On average, the tongue weighs about two to three ounces and is one of the most dangerous threats to our church. The tongue is also one of the biggest blessings of our spiritual growth. The Bible tells us that the tongue gives us life or death. Every day we decide whether to use our tongue for good, to help others grow or for destruction, to tear others down. When we tear others down, it only leads us to shame, guilt and even broken relationships. When we build others up, we connect, grow and show others the love of Christ. As believers, we should aim to be kind, gentle and pure in our speech, whether it's to strangers or our loved ones.

Before coming to Christ, my speech was often filled with profanity, and there was a time when I gave little thought to what came out of my mouth. I didn't fully recognize the pain my words could cause until I said something deeply hurtful to someone I truly cared about. Seven years later, I still regret those words. I once heard our words compared to toothpaste: once you squeeze it out of the tube, you can't put it back. The same is true of what we say. Once spoken, our words cannot be taken back.

Thankfully, God is ready and willing to help us use our words to speak life into others. We can ask the Holy Spirit to guide our speech and examine what is happening in our hearts. As we invite God to renew our hearts and fill them with His life and love, our words can begin to reflect the work He is doing within us.

Starting today, help the next person grow by speaking life and encouragement to them. Our words are powerful and can have lasting consequences. Our words can be the light that helps someone see Jesus in us, or a sword that inflicts permanent wounds—your choice.

Remember, kind words are like honey—sweet for the soul and healthy for the body.

APPLICATION: How careful are you in your speech to others? Do you build them up or tear them down? Ask the Lord to help you speak life to others, even those who wrong you.

PRAYER: Lord, I pray You help me to be careful in my speech today. Allow me to speak with kindness, gentleness and truthfulness. If someone needs encouragement or prayer, I pray we cross paths and that You give me the right words to say. Amen.

FAITH–DRIVEN DECISIONS

Tune your ears to wisdom,
and concentrate on understanding.
Cry out for insight,
and ask for understanding.
Search for them as you would silver;
seek them like hidden treasures. **Proverbs 2:2-4 (NLT)**

We make thousands of decisions a day. Our lives are based on the choices we make today. We make many of our decisions out of habit, without much thought, or simply because we think we know what's best. While God gives us free will to choose which path to follow, He also wants us to come to Him whenever we need wisdom. If you are like me, you probably think you already come to God often enough with your requests. God is the perfect Father, which means we can come to Him one time or one thousand times, and He remains eager and willing to help us. Coming to God shows humility and trust that He will give us wisdom to make the right decision.

Decisions can be overwhelming, but the good news is that we don't have to make them alone. The Bible points us to God's truth. Praise God for His Word! Community comes alongside us and provides wise counsel. Pick a few trusted, wise people who can help you discern what the Lord could be leading you to do. The Holy Spirit gives us insight into which path we should take. Be still and quiet and allow Him to speak to you. We won't always choose wisely or see how our choices will affect us and future generations. But even when we lose our way, God is more than able to guide us back.

Many of our troubles occur because we base our choices on unreliable authorities: culture ("everyone is doing it"), tradition ("we've always done it"), reason ("it seems logical"), or emotion ("it just felt right"). Rick Warren

APPLICATION: Ask God for the wisdom to make any decision you need to make, both big and small. Ask Him to help you not follow unreliable authorities, but to trust His good and perfect will for you.

PRAYER: Father, as I step into this new day, guide my thoughts, attitudes and choices. May Your Spirit lead me in my choices and help me clearly know where and when You are guiding me. May my choices honor You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

YOUR WAY

And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.
Ephesians 5:21 (NLT)

Then he said to the crowd, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.
Luke 9:23-24 (NLT)

Many times we hear people say, or may even think to ourselves, phrases like: *I did it my way. My way is best. I've got to do what's best for me. Don't let anyone take advantage of you.*

But instead of thinking that way, what would our family, our neighborhood, our church, our nation be like if we put the needs of others before our own? What if we didn't have to win the argument or prove ourselves to be right and the other person wrong? It might seem risky to put others' needs before our own, but the Bible encourages us to do so out of reverence for Christ. What does that mean?

Since I respect, admire and trust Jesus, I want to follow His example of sacrificing my own needs for the needs of others. Since Jesus sacrificed His life for me, I can sacrifice my preferences for the preferences of others. Because Jesus requests that I love my neighbor as I love myself, I want to honor His request by prioritizing others' needs over my own.

Jesus talks often about finding life, real life. He even says that the way to experience real life is to give up our own way, our own preferences. In fact, He says the way to miss out on real life is to try to hang on to our life or to put ourselves first above everyone else. But if we trust our lives to Jesus, allowing Him to guide and provide, we will experience real life. The life of trusting Jesus brings fulfillment when we put others' needs before our own.

Out of respect and reverence for Jesus' example and His direction, and out of trust that Jesus' way is life-giving, let's submit to one another today.

APPLICATION: Ask God to show you an opportunity to put someone else's needs before your own. Consider what life would be like if that happened every day.

PRAYER: Father, thank You for sacrificing Your precious Son to save Your precious children. Give me strength today to sacrifice my own needs for others. Thanks for the life You give when I trust You. Amen.

AS IF, NOT BECAUSE

And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church. As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything. **Ephesians 5:21-24 (NLT)**

And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father. **Colossians 3:17 (NLT)**

Upon reading Ephesians 5:21, where it says we are to *submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*, one might ask, How does that work in my situation? The Bible says that wives can do this by submitting to their husbands as they do to the Lord. But what if the husband is nothing like Jesus?

Submitting to others out of reverence for Christ means putting their needs before our own **as if** they were Jesus Himself, not **because** they are like Jesus. None of us is completely like Jesus; we all fall short of His standard, but because we want to show love and respect to Jesus, we can be moved to share His example of selfless love with others, especially our spouse, who might be the most challenging person to love that way.

I remember a woman who became like a second mom to me. She showed the love of Jesus to others by putting their needs before her own. I experienced firsthand how this person, who had very little money, opened her home to me and many others, providing meals and lodging to house guests while working full-time and raising a child as a single parent. Even as she was fighting the cancer that ultimately took her life, she put aside her preferences to meet the needs of others. Because she trusted Jesus to take care of her, she was able to express His love to others. She loved me **as if** she were loving Jesus Himself, **not because** I was anything like Him. The power of that submissive love is still felt by me more than 30 years after her passing.

APPLICATION: As a wife seeks to put the needs of her spouse before her own, she could ask herself and possibly her spouse in any given situation, *How will our steps draw us closer to God or to each other?*

PRAYER: Father, show us the value of putting others' needs before our own. Help us feel the value of showing love to others as if we're showing love to you. Amen.

LOVE LIKE JESUS

For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault. In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself. No one hates his own body but feeds and cares for it, just as Christ cares for the church. And we are members of his body. **Ephesians 5:25-30 (NLT)**

"This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends." **John 15:12-13 (NLT)**

As Paul continues to explain what it means to *submit to one another out of reverence for Christ* (Ephesians 5:21), he turns to the husbands and says they are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. How did Christ love the church? The next phrase gives us a hint: Jesus gave up His life for the church.

Jesus put aside any fleshly desires so that He could resist temptation. He didn't seek to fulfill His own wants, but He lived to bring all people into an eternal, loving relationship with His heavenly Father. Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus was *tempted in every way, just as we are, yet he did not sin*. Jesus knew that living a sinless life was a requirement for Him to be a worthy sacrifice to die in our place so that we could be made right with God. Jesus loved us by dying to the preferences of His flesh and by living for the purpose of bringing us to His Father.

This passage says that *a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself*. I believe a man who sacrifices his own preferences to help his wife walk closer with Jesus is taking great steps to strengthen his marriage as he seeks to love his wife as Christ loved the church.

APPLICATION: How can I put my spouse's needs before my own today? What can I do to help my spouse or someone else experience Jesus with me and through me today?

PRAYER: Father, show me how to put your preferences above my own. Remind me of Your love for me so I may express Your love to others. Amen.

UNITED INTO ONE

As the Scriptures say, "A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one." This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one. So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Ephesians 5:31-33 (NLT)

Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.

Colossians 3:12-14 (NLT)

How can a man and a woman be united into one? The Bible describes it as a great mystery but relates it to the relationship that Jesus Christ has with His followers. If I am one with someone else, then what hurts them will hurt me, and what benefits them will benefit me. I want to understand their priorities so we can move in the same direction and not pull each other apart.

What can strengthen our oneness with someone? This passage indicates a man should love his wife as he loves himself. If a man treats his wife like he would want to be treated, then he will be kind and considerate to her, and they will be drawn closer. A wife is to respect her husband by showing him that she cares about what he thinks or wants. As partners put each other's preferences above their own, they will be drawn closer together.

Colossians 3 also gives us a list of characteristics we should seek to put on like clothes that will help bind us together with other followers of Jesus. Ultimately, it's love that will bring us together.

APPLICATION: Ask God to show you what characteristic He wants you to put on today. Ask a spouse or friend what characteristic in Colossians 3:12-14 they see in you, and which characteristic would make them feel closer to you.

PRAYER: Father, draw me so close to You that it feels like we are one. Give me your perspective so I can see others the way You see them and treat them the way I would want to be treated. Amen.

PAYBACK

Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude. Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and he will grant you his blessing. **1 Peter 3:8-9 (NLT)**

I really like the idea of being of one mind, or living in harmony, or being in unity, with fellow believers and those who are close to me. But it seems that sometimes our opinions or preferences make it difficult to have unity, even with those we love. How can we move closer to being at peace with one another?

Have sympathy toward each other. Understand that there are issues and challenges each person is facing that may cause them to react in a negative way toward you. Seek to gain their perspective so you can be considerate in your responses.

Love each other like family. Even though others may say or do aggravating things, we are to think of them as brothers and sisters that we're not going to let go of. Even though we may disagree, let's seek to preserve our relationship. Though we're not joined by biological blood, we're a family of believers united by the blood of Jesus that covers all our sins.

What if someone tries to hurt or insult me? Pay them back with a blessing. Consider how God gave His only Son to die for us, to forgive us while we were still sinners. If God forgives me, then He can give me the perspective to forgive others. Whatever we give back to people is what will keep on going, and the results will fall on others. An evil payback will perpetuate dissension. But a kind payback will perpetuate unity.

What kind of world would we enjoy if more of us returned an insult with a kind, understanding compliment? We have a calling from God to do so.

APPLICATION: Ask God to bring to mind someone who has hurt or insulted you. Ask Him to show you what you can say or do to show kindness to them today.

PRAYER: Father, I confess my continual need for Your love and forgiveness, and I thank You for providing it freely. Give me Your heart of love and forgiveness toward others, and lead me to express Your kindness today. Amen.

GOD SHOWED US

God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us. **1 John 4:9-12 (NLT)**

Have you ever had someone tell you they loved you, even when you didn't know them very well? It makes me wonder whether they're truly sincere. It's typically reassuring to hear someone say, *I love you.* But how do we know someone really means it? If someone tells me they love me, but doesn't pay any attention to me, I may have a hard time believing their love is real.

How can I know that God really loves me? Because He showed or demonstrated His love to us. A couple of ways are noted in this passage. First, He wants to give us life with Him forever. If someone wants you to be with them forever, it sounds like they not only love you, but they really like you!

The second proof of God's love is what He did to give us the opportunity to be with Him forever – He sacrificed His only Son, Jesus. Wow, who loves like that?!

As I remember how much God loves me, I receive the motivation and the power to love those around me. Though we can't see God, we catch a glimpse of Him in the love we share with those around us. Let's show God to the world today by experiencing and expressing His love!

APPLICATION: Ask God to show you how much He loves you, then be silent and pay attention to the thoughts that come to your mind. Then ask God to show you someone He wants you to show love to today.

PRAYER: Father, as I listen for You now, please put thoughts in my mind of how much You love me. Thank You for sending Jesus to die for me and making a way for me to be with You forever. Show me how I can express Your love to someone today. Amen.

PRIORITIZING OBEDIENCE

"The eye that mocks a father,
that scorns an aged mother,
will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley,
will be eaten by the vultures." **Proverbs 30:17 (NIV)**

More than likely, this is probably not a verse that you have ever put on your list to memorize. While this verse is striking and dark in its language and metaphor, what the author of this proverb is trying to convey is a point that we should not gloss over. Parents must instruct their children. A principle in the Scriptures is that obedience is connected to our ability to see spiritually.

I believe in this life that there are perspectives on our lives that we will only truly see if we are willing to obey. Our obedience leads to insight in our lives. If you are a parent, it is so important to teach your children to obey and to create many opportunities to see that obedience is a blessing, not a chore.

As our children age, the decisions that require obedience to godly living have amplified consequences. Things like cheating on exams, lying to their siblings or choosing to curse with their words have real consequences when they are young. But when our children grow older, if obedience has not been a priority, seeing this world through God's eyes becomes difficult. Our vision for life is altered if we cannot obey the Lord's directions and instructions.

APPLICATION: Today, can you name an area of your life that the Lord has required your obedience? Do not delay, trust and obey Him today!

PRAYER: Lord, I thank You for the many people in my life who have taught me the importance of obedience. Thank You for the insight I have in this life because I trusted someone wise and obeyed their instructions. Amen.

PROVOKING ANGER

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger… **Ephesians 6:4a (ESV)**

Providing feedback is a skill often taught in our educational system. The ability to provide critical feedback can help you in life. But being overly critical is a burden that can sap a child's strength and vitality.

In the second half of the book of Ephesians, there are many tensions between relationships. Fathers do this; children do this. Bosses do this; employees do this. These tensions help us to see the partnership of relationships. Each of us has responsibilities in our relationships. For Fathers, the thing to avoid in their relationship with their children is to not provoke anger.

One time, I remember coaching my son's basketball team, and my son, who is a great ball player, was struggling with his shot. I could visibly see him getting frustrated. In that moment, as a dad and a coach, I had to decide what would help him the most. Unfortunately, I decided to give him some time on the bench. I thought he would find relief for a moment from his bad shooting day and then get back in there and be ready to contribute again. But my son saw it as his dad not allowing him the room to get himself out of the shooting slump.

I mourn the many opportunities I have as a dad, a pastor and a husband, in which I provoke anger in the people around me. While I do not own all of the responsibility for a person's reactions. I do own my tone, words, attitude, consistency and follow-through. May God grant us the ability to speak life and truth into the people around us and not put unreasonable burdens on them.

APPLICATION: Intentionally decide today to make someone's burden lighter. You can do this through your words, your actions, your calendar or your wallet. Watch what God does!

PRAYER: God, thank You for not provoking us to anger. Thank You that You are the perfect Father, and that we can receive from You, who delivers truth and instruction in a way that leads to life and does not provoke someone to anger. Help me to be Your vessel today. I love You. Amen.

PURPOSEFUL INSTRUCTION

…instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.
Ephesians 6:4b (NIV)

Often, as parents, we consider how best to train and develop our children. In some ways, our training and instruction happen based on our own image of how we want our children to turn out. We tend to focus on things like cleanliness, what they eat, what they wear, the hobbies or sports they participate in, how they present themselves, and on and on.

Paul offers specific guidance here that we should be bringing our children up in the Lord's ways. How often, as a parent, are you concerned about the idea of what your child is becoming in the Lord's eyes? How often does His perspective shape your parenting? If your child turned out to be only who the Lord desires for them to be instead of what you want them to be, would you rejoice?

How can we foster this type of purpose in our relationships with our children? I think it begins with becoming the type of person who desires to be the Lord's representative. I believe the Lord wants us to be a model for our children on how to live in that way.

While the things we naturally worry about as parents are important, are we just as concerned about what matters most to God in our children's lives? Learning to walk with Him, finding a community of believers to live alongside, and having their minds renewed by the Spirit of God should be at the top of the priority list.

APPLICATION: Pray and listen for one area that the Lord wants you to focus on with your children or someone else that you can influence. Ask Him what He wants your focus to be.

PRAYER: Father, we need Your help to parent in this world. Help us make sure we prioritize what You prioritize, and help us become the kind of people who bring our children up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Amen.

PROMISED BLESSING

"Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you." **Exodus 20:12 (NIV)**

Paul reaches into the Old Testament law to describe this command in Exodus as the first command with a promise. As a follower of Christ, obedience always brings blessing. That blessing may come in the form of material things in this life, but it may not. The Scriptures describe us as people who are storing up blessings or treasures for ourselves in heaven.

So, when God directly connects a step of obedience to blessing, God's people should pay attention. While I think this command is most often spoken over children when they are young, I think this verse offers a unique perspective on adult children as they honor their parents. What does it look like for an adult child to honor their parents?

I think that speaking highly of them, checking on them physically and emotionally, and making sure their needs are met as they age. God shares that a blessing will follow this type of relationship with your parents.

Not everyone is blessed by godly parents. I think it's important to understand the difference between words like respect and honor. Respect is our internal assessment of a person's character. Honor is our behavior, in either words or deeds, that expresses our heart towards them.

As our schedules continue to crowd out some of the most important things, like our relationships with our family, be a person who prioritizes honoring your parents.

APPLICATION: What is one way that you can honor your mother or father today? Even if your parents are less than honorable, perhaps honor the fact that they are made in God's image or honor the position of the parent.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be obedient to this instruction that Paul gives us in Ephesians. Help me to find ways to honor my parents today. Amen.

PRIVILEGE OF PARENTING

Children are a heritage from the LORD,
offspring a reward from him.
Like arrows in the hands of a warrior
are children born in one's youth.
Blessed is the man
whose quiver is full of them.
They will not be put to shame
when they contend with their opponents in court. **Psalm 127:3-5 (NIV)**

Though learning is found in schools, godliness is often received from the education of careful parents. Richard Baxter

The role of a parent is unique and a blessing according to the Scriptures. Often in the long days of parenthood, the idea of our children being a blessing is crowded out of our minds with the schedules, needs, desires and frustrations of raising Christ followers.

But we must not miss the fact that according to God, one of His richest blessings to give to a parent is children. They are our heritage. God sees your children as arrows aimed at the heart of the enemy. Is this how you view your parenting? Raising children who wage war on the gates of hell is our battle cry as parents!

One of the ways that the enemy gets some ground in this war is by discouraging parents about their children, or the church being discouraged by young people in general. Unfortunately, many of us who are parents are far more skilled about our children's shortcomings than the blessings they provide to us in the Lord. I know I, for one, have been enrolled in the school of gentleness and patience ever since our firstborn arrived on the earth.

As with most areas of our lives, remembering God's blessing is the start of the journey.

APPLICATION: If you have children, write down 1-3 blessings you have received from each of your children. If you do not have children, write down a blessing you have received from the next generation.

PRAYER: Father, don't let us mistake blessings for burdens. You give children as a heritage to parents. You see children as the reward! Help us to do the same. Amen.

PRINCIPLES OF PARENTING

So we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

1 Thessalonians 2:8 (NIV)

Parenting is one of the most difficult responsibilities in the world. You are responsible not only for keeping your children alive but also for educating them, teaching eternal truths and helping them understand how to make an impact in the world.

When things get complex, it's often helpful to clarify and simplify some principles to guide you in accomplishing the goals you have. While the principles in parenting I will share with you today are not exhaustive, they provide helpful support in keeping you aligned with the goal of raising godly children.

First, we should be repentant. As a human being, you will sin. Pride prevents repentance. One of the chief responsibilities that I have as a husband is to be the best at saying I'm sorry. Admitting your faults to your family goes a long way in modeling how to live as a follower of Christ.

Second, be reliable. Do your words and actions align? Do you show up when you say you will? Are you consistent in your involvement in the home? Our reliability provides a consistent example for our children to follow.

Last, be relatable. Notice I didn't say be the most hip and trendy parent. But instead, be able to relate to your children. Do you know what they're interested in? Do they know what you're interested in? Do they understand why you make the decisions that you do as a Christ follower? Being relatable is not a one-way street. You not only should make an effort to get to know your kids, but also you must allow them to know you, both your victories and your defeats.

APPLICATION: Ask the Lord in prayer, *Which of these principle areas should be my priority in the next season?* Write it down and put it in a visible place as a reminder to focus on this area.

PRAYER: God, thank You for allowing me the gift of parenthood. Help me find one area to grow in my life. Help me navigate how to influence others in a way that brings You glory. Amen.

SLAVES AND MASTERS

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. **Ephesians 6:5 (NIV)**

Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them. **Titus 2:9 (NIV)**

When reading the Bible, it is important to know about context. As you read, you need to make sure to look at the context of the text. In the Old and New Testaments, slavery was a common practice. The New Testament was written in Greek and used words to describe both slaves and masters. This might seem like a terrible way to talk about this in today's world, but it was common at the time.

Pastor Chuck Smith describes it as: *Most of us are either in an employer or employee relationship. In the Biblical days, this was usually referred to as a slave-master relationship. What applies to one applies to the other.* This helps explain why the writers used the language they did.

I struggled with this concept when I became a Christian. I had to do research, pray and ask God to show me what this meant in the Bible. Once I learned more about the times and context, it made so much sense to me. It also changed how I viewed my work relationships, knowing what this meant.

The writers of the New Testament were not condoning slavery but using the Gospel to change the narrative and show people that the institution of slavery was bad and needed to change. They knew this would not be an immediate change, but there was one way to change things: through the person of Jesus Christ.

Always remember that you can bring your questions to God. If you are confused or upset by a passage, ask Him to reveal what He is saying. You can also do research and talk to others about it.

APPLICATION: Take time this week to study the context of your favorite Bible story. Try to understand how the context of the people, places and time can change your opinion of what was happening. Ask God to reveal what He wants you to know from this.

PRAYER: Dear Father, thank You for loving us. I pray that as I learn more about the context of the Bible, Your Word will become clearer to me and help me to use it in my life. Amen.

OBEDIENT HEART

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. **Ephesians 6:5 (NIV)**

Respect can be a difficult thing to give to those above us. We sometimes work for difficult people who use tactics that we don't agree with or like, so we lose respect for them. It is something that is hard to get back if we ever do, once it is lost.

When we hear the word fear, we usually think of being scared. According to *Desiring God*, this refers to a *deep respect, reverential awe and a serious awareness of accountability*. This means we need a different thought process when dealing with our leaders.

I have had many times in my life when I've struggled to respect someone I was working for. There were many reasons for this, including moral issues, questionable practices and treatment of others. I saw these as things that weren't negotiable and not worthy of my respect. In these situations, I had to do one of two things. I either had to leave or find a way to go forward, trying to work with that person and grow as an employee.

As I look at this verse, it's clear that we must again examine our hearts and our relationship with Jesus. Are we being sincere in our obedience to Jesus? If we truly are, then we need to make sure that is in our hearts and that we are ready to use it in our daily lives. If our hearts are postured in this way, then obeying and respecting our bosses or leaders becomes easier.

APPLICATION: Pause each day at work and invite God into your day. Ask Him to help you to respect and obey your leadership as you obey Jesus. If you struggle with this during your day, go back to God in prayer.

PRAYER: God, help me see others as You see them. No matter the difficulties I may have with a boss or a leader, help me to respect and obey them. Help me to grow in my ability to do this. In Your Son's precious Name I pray, Amen.

NOT PLEASING OTHERS

Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. **Ephesians 6:6 (NIV)**

We all want people to like us, but it's easy for that to get out of control. When we become people pleasers, it dictates how we live our lives. Instead of doing things for God's glory, we do them for others. It's not necessarily wrong to want recognition, but we must look at our motivations.

I remember wanting a promotion at a previous job. It was something I felt I deserved, so I did everything I could to make sure I was the one chosen for this opportunity. I made sure that every bit of work that I did was as visible as possible. Every day I made sure my boss could see me working hard and getting everything done. My motivations were not where they needed to be. I just kept trying to get the promotion for status and money. I didn't get the promotion because it was clear I was just showing off to impress my boss.

God has given us all gifts. Some of us are great teachers or athletes, while others are writers or accountants. When we use our gifts humbly and honor God with them, then we are living as God wants us to. Our hearts and minds should be focused on God, and from that will come the fruit of these gifts. Others will see how you live and how you work, and this will be a way to show others how God has worked in your life. Then you can share Jesus with those around you.

APPLICATION: As you go about your days this week, check your motivations and your actions. How are you acting at work? Are your actions God-honoring or self-honoring? Make an effort each day to include God in your work and let others see Him shining through in all that you do.

PRAYER: Dear God, thank You for the gifts that You have given me. Help me use them in my work each and every day, not seeking approval from others, but honoring You in all that I do. Amen.

SERVING OTHERS

Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people.
Ephesians 6:7 (NIV)

How do we serve others, both in and out of our jobs? This is something that most people struggle with. The Bible is clear that we are to serve as if serving God. That is easy to read but can be difficult when put into practice in the real world.

When I was in the Navy, I struggled a lot with my superiors. I found it very difficult to work under the conditions they gave me. I was not a believer at the time, so I didn't live as this verse in Ephesians says I should. Looking back through the lens of being a Christian, I know that I was completely wrong in my thinking and my actions.

In our lives, we have to shift our thinking from pride to humility. As employees, we must look at how we approach our work. Are we working as if we are serving God? What does this look like to you? It is easy to fall into a rut or pattern of just doing your job without your heart in it. We can almost get bored and not care about what we're doing.

That's not what we're called to do. We need to be living as if we're serving God. Are you serving God wholeheartedly? If you're not, then it is not easy to be that way in your work or everyday life. Each and every day, we need to serve God in the humblest and most whole-hearted way, putting Him above all else. Jesus calls us to die to ourselves and pick up our cross and follow Him. That means putting off our pride and living for Him.

APPLICATION: As you go through your week, whether you're working or not, look at how you are approaching each day. Are you working or serving as if you're serving God, or just getting by? In these moments, ask God how you can be more whole-hearted and grow closer to Him.

PRAYER: Dear heavenly Father. Thank You for Your love and kindness. Help me to keep my eyes on You as I go through each day this week. May the work that I do honor You and show Your light to others. Amen.

RECEIVING FROM GOD

Because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free. **Ephesians 6:8 (NIV)**

Earthly rewards and accolades are wonderful to receive, but they all pale in comparison to those we receive from the Father. We've all seen famous people who revel in the glory, fame and awards, and it's all about them. I love to see people use their platforms to give glory back to God.

One great example of this was Tim Tebow. He played quarterback at the University of Florida and later in the NFL. He proudly displayed his faith visibly on his eye-black and also in praying before, during and after games. Tim knew that his earthly rewards were nothing compared to what his Father would provide, and that all glory was due to God, not to himself. He has since used that fame to start a charity that helps individuals with special needs.

As this verse says, God will reward us for the good that we do, no matter who we are. We don't all have huge platforms to reach others, but we do reach people. Our good deeds are an outflowing of our belief in Christ. We are not saved by the things we do; rather, the good things we do are because of how Jesus has changed our lives.

How we live our lives and how we treat others matters. Living for Jesus means that we are different than other people and help in times of need. We are called to help others and show them Jesus' love and compassion, no matter who they are. God sees how we do that, and we know that He will reward us, but that shouldn't be the reason that we do the good deeds.

APPLICATION: Look for opportunities to help someone this week. God puts people in our paths, friends or others, who need someone to come alongside them during a difficult or trying time. Take the time to help someone around you who needs it.

PRAYER: God, I thank You for loving me and for giving me the heart to help others. Help me to see those in need around me and to have the boldness to help them and share Your love with them. Amen.

LEADING OTHERS

And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him. **Ephesians 6:9 (NIV)**

Leading others is difficult. You must manage diverse personalities and handle difficult situations. Some workers are easier to love and work with than others, but we must work with them all. There shouldn't be any favoritism or anger in your dealings, but sometimes that creeps in.

I had a job once where my manager played favorites. He had a couple of people in the department who fawned over him, got away with things and didn't have to do as much work as the rest of us. He would walk around at closing time telling everyone what to do and always had at least one of his favorites walking with him, not doing a thing. This did nothing but engender bad feelings among the employees, so most wanted to be in another department. I eventually moved to another department and had a manager that was much easier to deal with.

As leaders, we should always strive to lead like Christ. Some people don't consider themselves leaders, but we all lead in some capacity—at work, home, church or through volunteering. Others are watching how we treat people and lead. Do they see Christ in us, or do they see pride and anger?

God is our perfect example of leadership. He shows no favoritism, loves us, corrects us when we sin and offers forgiveness. Jesus demonstrated this throughout His ministry, investing in His disciples and loving people regardless of who they were.

Our leadership should reflect Christ in ways others want to follow. When people see Jesus in how we lead, we can encourage them to grow in their faith and become Christ-like leaders themselves, influencing others along the way.

APPLICATION: Every day, look around you and see who you are leading and who is watching you lead. Evaluate your leadership to make sure you're not being harsh and are being fair. Use Jesus' example of leadership to help people grow and follow Christ.

PRAYER: Dear God, thank You for Your Son, Jesus. Help me to remember His example each day of my life. Show me those around me who are following my leadership and help me to see them and love them as You do. I pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

"If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" **Matthew 7:11 (NIV)**

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. **Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)**

What's the first thing that comes to mind when you think of Christmas? Maybe it's time with family, favorite music, delicious food or trimming the tree with treasured ornaments. Gift-giving also comes to mind. It can be fun and stressful at the same time. I love finding or making special gifts for friends and family and seeing their excitement when they open them. Receiving gifts is fun, too! But holiday giving can bring worries: What if they don't like my gift? What if theirs costs more? What if I forget someone or don't mail the Christmas cards in time? Oh my! What season is it again? Oh yeah—CHRISTmas!

The most important thing to remember is that JESUS is THE GIFT of Christmas. He is the *reason for the season,* God's gift to humanity, and the Giver of all good things. And He keeps giving good gifts to His children—better than anything we could give or receive.

That's what I want to cherish this Christmas and all year long. Jesus is in first place and the center of it all. The trees, lights, food and music are wonderful, but grace is what it's really about. God's grace keeps coming. It meets us in every shortfall, stumbling and stressful moment. And His gift of salvation outshines them all.

What a Savior. What a Love. What a Gift!

APPLICATION: It's getting closer to Christmas with each passing day. Take some time to open your hands and ask God to help you see the good gifts He has given you.

PRAYER: My generous, loving Father, thank You for Your gifts of salvation and grace. Help me to remember that You are the Gift of Christmas. Amen.

POP–UP CHRISTMAS

…weeping may stay for the night,
but rejoicing comes in the morning. **Psalm 30:5b (NIV)**

Night and day. Peaks and valleys. Sometimes it's smooth sailing, and other times we find ourselves in the depths. In Psalm 30, David cries for mercy and mentions his enemies, death and despair. Then he contrasts that with praise for and trust in God. I can relate to this psalm. I've felt at my end before. I've known the depths of darkness with depression and loss, yet my heart still sang praises to the Lord.

Here's a true story.

I had just moved into my home after leaving a rental with black mold. God provided this home as a place of safety, orchestrating everything and giving me the help I needed while I was so sick from the effects of the mold. It was early December, and although I was mostly unpacked, I wasn't thinking about Christmas. I was exhausted and finally able to rest—and breathe. I hadn't decorated much for years, so when a good friend offered to bring over a Christmas tree and put it up, I resisted. I told her I hadn't had a tree in years, didn't have many decorations, and this would be my first Christmas without both my mom and dad. Being the good friend she is—and I'm sure listening to the Lord more than me—she brought the tree anyway. She set it beside the fireplace, fluffed the branches and plugged it in. Just like that, I had a beautiful reminder of childhood Christmases. Then my sister gave me a lighted swag for the mantel, and suddenly my home was decorated for Christmas.

They have no idea how much joy it brought me to sit there on winter evenings, surrounded by twinkling lights with Christmas carols playing. I never would have done it for myself, but God knew exactly what I needed. He used two wonderful women to bring light into a dark season. There was joy, friendship, family and God. He had been with me through it all, turning my mourning into dancing in so many ways.

You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent. LORD my God, I will praise you forever. **Psalm 30:11-12 (NIV)**

APPLICATION: What has the Lord brought you through this year? How can you help spread His joy to someone this Christmas season? Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you in the who and how.

PRAYER: O Lord, my God, You are my help. You are faithful. I want to dance for joy in Your presence, praising You forever. Amen.

WHITE CHRISTMAS

Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. **Psalm 51:7 (NLT)**

Most of us long for a white Christmas. It just feels more like Christmas when it snows. The last time it really snowed in South Carolina was in 2010 with a big winter storm. I remember a Christmas Day in the late 80s when the weather was like summer. After exchanging gifts, we spent most of the day outside. It was wonderful, but a different kind of Christmas without even a hint of cold.

When snow blankets the world around us, everything gets quiet—all sounds become muffled. And when the snow falls, everything appears clean—like a crisp, white, sparkling sheet of fluffiness. And it's almost blinding when it reflects the sun.

The Bible mentions the phrase white as snow a few times, including in David's plea for the Lord's cleansing from his sin—forgiveness and mercy (Psalm 51). It also appears in Isaiah 1:18 regarding repentance or turning away from sin.

But other verses describe Jesus. Revelation 1:14 depicts the glorified Jesus with hair *white as wool, as white as snow.* Daniel 7:9 presents the Ancient of Days with clothing *white as snow.* That's our Jesus! He is without blemish; He is the cleanser. He is holy, and He makes His children holy, white as snow—removing our sins as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). He saves us and makes us like Himself.

It may not have been snowing on the day Jesus was born, but Christmas brought something far more beautiful than snow. It brought the One who came to cleanse us from our sins and make us whiter than snow.

APPLICATION: Are you wishing for a white Christmas this year? Maybe a white Christmas could simply be enjoying the company of the Holy One who came to make you white as snow.

PRAYER: Father, thank You for Christmas, for the cleansing of sin, and for making me holy. Amen.

TWO KINDS OF GIFTS

"There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved." **Acts 4:12 (NLT)**

"Now he is exalted to the place of highest honor in heaven, at God's right hand. And the Father, as he had promised, gave him the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us, just as you see and hear today." **Acts 2:33 (NLT)**

There are two different kinds of Christmas gifts we give one another. Gifts of need—those we know the other person could really use…like a pair of wool socks, a razor blade subscription, an organic bath towel set or a QT gift card. Then there are gifts of want—those we don't believe the other person would consider buying for themselves… like a special piece of jewelry, a pair of silk pajamas, top-tier earbuds or a gift card to Texas De Brazil.

The Gift in the Manger. The perfect Christmas gift we all need—and desperately. This gift is given by the perfect God: the gift of Jesus. There is no better gift, and none that meets our deepest human need more perfectly.

We live in a broken world where we all fall short of God's glory (Romans 3:23), so we need a Savior—a way back to God and heaven, our true home. God gave His Son, Jesus, as the final sacrifice to cover our sin.

The Gift Within Us. In Acts 2:33, God's gift of the Holy Spirit came poured out through Jesus. This is another wonderful, much-needed gift. The Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our eternal inheritance. (Ephesians 1:13-14) To the believer, He indwells, empowers, guides and comforts. He gifts us new life the moment we believe and produce fruit in a life surrendered to God's will.

Just think of it. God gave us His Son. And both the Father and the Son gave us the Holy Spirit. This is the Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—all wrapped up in a swaddling cloth on a Christmas morning, long, long ago. This is a gift of need…but also a generous gift of pure love.

APPLICATION: Have you accepted God's generosity—His gift of Jesus and the Holy Spirit? We often want so many things at Christmas, but this is the gift we truly need. If you've received it, that's something to celebrate this Christmas season. If not, or if you're unsure, would you open your heart to God's love for you this Christmas—or even right now?

PRAYER: Father, thank You for Your overwhelming generosity, love and forgiveness. Thank You for Jesus. Thank You for Christmas. Amen.

LOOKING FORWARD

"…the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us')." **Isaiah 7:14 (NLT)**

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." **Matthew 2:1-2 (ESV)**

It's pretty much a fact that all kids look forward to Christmas. Being a baby boomer, I recall the Sears Wish Book. When it came in the mail, my sisters, brother and I would huddle around and pore over it page by page. Thick, heavy and smelling of fresh ink, we'd take turns dog-earing the pages that displayed our treasures. It arrived months early—plenty of time to build anticipation and make our Christmas wishes.

Oh, those were the days.

Over 700 years before Christ was born, the people of Israel received a prophetic message from God through the prophet Isaiah that Jesus would come and be born of a virgin. That gave them something to look forward to, and they passed the excitement on to the generations after them.

The Magi who sought out Jesus after His birth knew that a star would lead them to Him so they could worship Him. In Matthew 2:5-6, they quoted Micah 5:2 about the coming King. So, His coming must have been shared with them—passed down from their ancestors—and their anticipation must have grown with every mile closer to the star of David.

We have hope because Jesus has come… and we eagerly await His return. Revelation 19:11-16 paints that moment: the heavens open, Jesus on a white horse, eyes like flames of fire, many crowns on His head. It's amazing, beautiful and humbling—far more exciting than any adventure movie ever made.

Our King is returning for His children. Now that's something to look forward to!

APPLICATION: Will you open your Bible to Revelation chapter 19 like it's a *Wish Book*, taking in the scent of your printed Bible and the treasure of imagining the scene in your own mind?

PRAYER: Father, I look forward to Christmas this year, but even more, I look forward to Your return. Help me live for You and share about Your coming so that it will be passed on to the next generation. Amen.

JOY

Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our LORD. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." **Nehemiah 8:10 (NIV)**

You make known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand. **Psalm 16:11 (NIV)**

Nehemiah 8 takes place just after the people of Israel had finished rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem—a monumental task completed despite tremendous opposition. Yet when they gathered to hear God's Word read aloud, they began to mourn. As they listened and understood what God's Word said, they were convicted by their past sins and the ways they had fallen short.

But Nehemiah didn't tell them to remain in their sorrow. He told them to rejoice—to eat, drink, celebrate and share with those who had nothing prepared. Why? Because *the joy of the LORD is your strength.*

There is a lesson here. God's Word brings conviction, but it doesn't leave us there. It can bring us to our knees in repentance, then lift our eyes toward His presence. His Word gives us strength to move through mourning, to pursue Him, to worship and to live joyfully according to His Word.

I remember a very low time in my life when I was so low that I couldn't believe I'd ever know joy again. Without it, I felt so weak. I didn't feel worthy of joy—or even forgiveness. Yet God was not finished with me. He answered my cry for forgiveness, and little by little, He is returning the joy I thought I had lost. I think of Nehemiah's words often: *The joy of the LORD is your strength.*

APPLICATION: God's Word may bring conviction, but it also points us toward His presence, where there is fullness of joy. When we have confessed our sin and received His forgiveness, we don't have to remain in our sorrow or let our past define us. We can turn toward Him and receive the strength and joy He freely gives.

PRAYER: Father, as I enter this new year, help me spend more time in Your Word. Let it convict, guide and strengthen me, and fill me with the joy of Your presence. Help me remember that Your joy is a gift, not something I must earn. Let the joy You restore in me overflow to others, especially those who have *nothing prepared*. Amen.

WAITING FAITHFULLY

So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today—to love the LORD *your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul—then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and olive oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied.*

Deuteronomy 11:13-15 (NIV)

For the Israelites, rain was a matter of life and death. They depended on the land for their crops, their livestock and ultimately their survival. For much of the year, the ground was dry and barren, so the promise of rain meant far more than a change in the weather—it meant life, provision and hope.

There's a scene in *Facing the Giants* where someone tells Coach Taylor about two farmers who really needed rain. Both of them prayed for it. But one went out and got his fields ready, while the other didn't. That raises a pretty good question: Which one was actually expecting God to answer? They were asking for the same thing, but one was putting some action behind his prayer. He couldn't make it rain, but he could get the ground ready.

God made it clear. Be faithful. Follow my instructions. Do what I've already given you to do.

I think about that when I'm waiting on God. Sometimes I get so focused on what I'm waiting for that I forget there's still something I can do today. I can keep showing up, keep praying and take the next step God has already shown me. That doesn't mean everything will happen the way I want or when I want. But I don't have to see the clouds before I get to work. I can prepare my field and trust God with the rain.

APPLICATION: Today, consider what God has called you to do. Give yourself fully to it, do it with excellence, and trust Him to provide what you need when He knows you need it.

PRAYER: Father, help me wait faithfully when I cannot see what You're doing. Teach me to be faithful with what You've placed in front of me today, rather than worrying about what comes next. Keep my heart close to You and my eyes fixed on You. I trust Your timing, Your wisdom and Your goodness. Help me wait with hope, knowing that You are always at work. Amen.

WAITING IN STILLNESS

For God alone my soul waits in silence;
from him comes my salvation. **Psalm 62:1 (ESV)**

"In repentance and rest is your salvation,
in quietness and trust is your strength…" **Isaiah 30:15b (NIV)**

In Superman comic books, Superman often visited a place called the *Fortress of Solitude*, or *The Secret Citadel*. The fortress was Superman's hideaway—a haven of refuge. Initially located in outer space, then in the center of the Earth, until finally it was established on the side of a cliff in the Arctic. It was in the fortress that Superman rested after all his adventures saving the world. There, he contemplated new ways to defeat the enemy. He found encouragement for future battles by recalling past victories, and he battled his chess-playing robot to develop focus, strength, wisdom and endurance. Superman even went to the Fortress of Solitude to reconnect with his father!

We're all involved in some great things. Being active, productive, and even busy can be good, but the world, our schedules and the demands of others constantly clamor for our attention. Stop for a moment, be quiet and listen to all the noise. *Yikes!* Even the Man of Steel needed to get away sometimes. Scripture gives us the same pattern: rest, withdraw and unplug from the matrix of our lives.

God gave the Sabbath as a gift—a rhythm that helps us refuel, refocus and remember that our lives are held together by Him (Exodus 20:8-11). Even in movement and battle, the Lord went ahead of His people to find them a place of rest (Numbers 10:33-34). As we learn to dwell in His presence, we discover that He is our refuge and resting place (Psalm 91:1-2). Ecclesiastes warns of the emptiness of a restless life, while Jesus offers something different: rest not merely as a pause, but as a way of life for the weary and burdened (Matthew 11:28-30). The psalmist models this by bringing his requests to God each morning (Psalm 5:3), and Jesus Himself withdrew to solitary places to be with the Father (Mark 1:35). Waiting in stillness means intentionally returning to God, quieting our hearts and allowing His presence to restore what life has depleted within us.

APPLICATION: Intentionally create space for another time of stillness and quiet today. It won't happen on its own. Set a time. Find a place. And sit quietly before the Lord.

PRAYER: Lord, I have a hard time being still. My thoughts get going, and I find it hard to just be quiet with You. I pray You would slow my mind, stop the restless thoughts and help me wait in stillness with You. Amen.

WAITING WITH A FRIEND

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.
Galatians 6:2 (NIV)

Oil and incense bring joy to the heart,
and the sweetness of a friend is better than self-counsel.
Proverbs 27:9 (CSB)

Waiting is often lonely. Others—even those closest to us—aren't able to fully enter into what we're experiencing. But isolation is not the answer. Withdrawing is not a good long-term solution.

Years ago, I remember the heartache and struggle of looking for a job. It was a lot more waiting than it was looking. I had done all I could to search ads, make calls and cry out to God for a miracle… but it was hard. The search took several years, and that became one of the most difficult seasons of my life. Looking back now, I realize that one of the things that got me through that season was having a friend who was willing to wait with me. He didn't try to fix anything. He just walked with me and waited with me. Sometimes we talked; other times we were quiet. He was simply present. We all need a friend like that.

Today's Scripture reading reminds us how refreshing a good friend can be. Just like a pleasant fragrance can lift your spirits, the encouragement and honest advice of a trusted friend can bring comfort, clarity and strength when you need it most. A good friend doesn't always have the right words. They don't always have an answer. But they can remind us that we are not alone. They pray when we're tired of praying. They believe when our faith feels weak. They sit beside us when there is nothing left to say. There are seasons when God doesn't immediately remove the waiting, but He sends someone to wait with us. And sometimes, that person becomes one of the ways God gives us the strength to keep going.

APPLICATION: Let someone in on a struggle or burden you've been carrying.

PRAYER: Lord, thank You for the gift of friendship. Help me carry the burdens of others with love, and give me the humility to let others carry mine. Surround me with friends who bring wisdom, encouragement and sweetness to my life and help me be that kind of friend to others. Amen.

WAITING WITH EXPECTATION

I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits,
and in his word I put my hope.
I wait for the Lord
more than watchmen wait for the morning,
more than watchmen wait for the morning. **Psalm 130:5-6 (NIV)**

But as for me, I watch in hope for the LORD,
I wait for God my Savior;
my God will hear me. **Micah 7:7 (NIV)**

A watchman was responsible for staying awake through the night, guarding a city or property and watching for danger. The night could feel long, uncertain and vulnerable. So, the watchman looked toward the horizon, knowing that morning would eventually come.

That makes the image in Psalm 130 quite powerful. The psalmist is saying, *That is how intensely I am looking for God.* There are several ideas wrapped up in the picture: Longing – the watchman deeply wants the darkness to end. Alertness–he's not asleep or distracted; he's watching expectantly. Patience–he cannot make the sun rise any faster. Confidence–he knows morning is coming, even when he cannot see it yet. Hope in the darkness–the present darkness is real, but it is not permanent.

A watchman doesn't wonder whether morning will come; he waits for something he knows is coming. Waiting for God is like a watchman waiting for sunrise. We may not be able to make the morning come any sooner, but we can keep our eyes on the horizon, trusting that the darkness will not last forever. May we be like the watchmen, and also like Micah, who learned to wait with a settled expectation in the trustworthiness and faithfulness of God.

APPLICATION: Try a simple *watch for the morning* practice this week: choose one thing you are waiting on God for, write it down and spend five quiet minutes each morning praying about it without trying to solve it. End by saying, *Lord, I cannot make the morning come, but I trust You while I wait.* Then, at the end of the week, look back and write down any small signs of God's presence, provision, direction or encouragement you noticed along the way.

PRAYER: Lord, help me trust You while I wait. Give me confidence that morning will come. Use this time to deepen our relationship. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WAITING IN THE WILDERNESS

David stayed in the wilderness strongholds and in the hills of the Desert of Ziph. Day after day Saul searched for him, but God did not give David into his hands.
1 Samuel 23:14 (NIV)

Throughout Scripture, we find numerous people led into the wilderness on their journey with God. Sometimes it's a literal wilderness; other times, it's a season of uncertainty, isolation or waiting. So why does God lead us into the wilderness? Sometimes God leads us into the wilderness to test us—He led the Israelites there for 40 years to humble and test them. Sometimes He leads us into the wilderness for a season of initiation and preparation—Elijah fled to the wilderness for a time of renewal and preparation. The opening lines of the book of James explain that hardship is what God often uses to shape our character, developing wisdom and perseverance within us.

For David, however, his wilderness was a place of protection. Today's reading comes during the period when David is on the run from King Saul. David has already been anointed as Israel's future king, but Saul is still reigning and is determined to kill him. At this point, David is hiding in the wilderness of Ziph, moving from place to place and staying in strongholds for safety. Saul is actively searching for him every day, but the key line is that *God did not give David into his hands*. The verse highlights the tension of David's season: he had God's promise, but he was still living in danger, uncertainty and waiting. God had not yet removed the difficulty, but He was faithfully protecting David in the middle of it. These faraway places—often dark places—became God's rescue from the current painful surroundings and circumstances.

May we remember today that the wilderness is not evidence of God's absence.

APPLICATION: This week, write down one situation where you feel pressured, uncertain or stuck. Then ask each day, *How has God sustained me, protected me or kept me going in this*?

PRAYER: Lord, You know I don't like hardship, and the wilderness seasons are exhausting. I long for the mountaintops, but I also know that in the valleys and hard places, You often reveal Yourself to me in deeper ways. Teach me not to rush the wilderness, but to trust You in it, to wait for You with hope, and to recognize Your presence even when the path is difficult. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WAITING FOR DIRECTION

Show me your ways, LORD,
teach me your paths.
Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long. **Psalm 25:4-5 (NIV)**

Teach me to do your will,
for you are my God;
may your good Spirit
lead me on level ground **Psalm 143:10 (NIV)**

Sometimes the hardest part of waiting is not knowing what to do next. *If God would just write it in the clouds!* I've asked God for direction a thousand times throughout my life—which direction to take, whether or not to say yes to an opportunity. Whether to stay in school. Whether or not to move. Should I ask her to marry me? Should I take that job? As we all can attest, answers to these questions aren't always clear.

David's prayers won't unlock some magic box that has answers to all our questions. But what they do show us is the posture to have while we wait for clearer direction. David waited with humility. He was open to learning about the ways of God. He seemed very confident in asking God for help. And my favorite part of those verses is the prayer: *May your good Spirit lead me on level ground.* David's desire to follow God's direction and not take matters into his own hands is a great example for us. Maybe you can relate—when I don't hear what I want when I want, I often rush ahead and lose the intimate connection/communion with God.

As I meditate on David's heart toward God, it occurs to me that maybe waiting for direction is more about intimacy than it is about answers. Maybe God wants a relationship with me more than He wants to tell me what to do or where to go. May we wait well. Seeking Him. Talking with Him along the way. May we keep in mind that where He is taking us is into deeper intimacy than it is a location or an answer. Yes, seeking a yes or no, a here or there, is important, but not even close to how essential—and beautiful and life-giving—it is to know God.

APPLICATION: Set aside ten quiet minutes today with no agenda other than being with God. Instead of asking Him for an answer, talk with Him, sit in His presence, and pay attention to what you notice about His character, His nearness and His love while you wait.

PRAYER: Lord, while I wait for direction, help me seek Your presence more than an answer. Draw me closer to You, teach me to recognize Your nearness, and help me trust You with whatever comes next.

OFFENSE OR DEFENSE

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.
Ephesians 6:10-11 (NIV)

God is our refuge and strength,
always ready to help in times of trouble. **Psalm 46:1 (NLT)**

When you woke up this morning, whether you realized it or not, you woke up in the midst of a battle. There are cosmic forces at war, and the devil has positioned himself against you and the Church. This isn't to alarm you, but to make you aware. Awareness is key; without it, we can easily lose today's battles.

With awareness of today's battles, we can be on the offensive. When we forget the fight we're engaged in, we fall into the enemy's traps; we forget our position and what we've been given to fight with, and we're forced to play defense.

The good news is that you have everything you need to engage in the fight. God has promised His strength (Psalm 46:1) to those who ask for it, and His armor is available for your protection (Ephesians 6:10). In His strength, and with His armor, you WILL be victorious.

But, like any good soldier, you need to suit up and strengthen yourself before the fight. And this starts with remembering that you're in a fight so that you can approach today from a position of offense. A soldier who enters the battlefield either unarmed or unprepared is in danger. But a soldier who is both prepared for the battle and armed with God's provisions is assured of victory.

APPLICATION: As you start this day, remember this: you are stepping onto a battlefield. The battle is real, but so is God's strength, and His armor is available for you to wage war with. Ask God to give you His strength and provide His protection so you can fight offensively and not fall back when the battle comes.

PRAYER: Dear Father, as I begin this day, remind me that I'm stepping onto a battlefield. Thank You for not letting me go alone, and for supplying all that I need for today's battles. Please give me Your strength and empower me to fight with the weapons You provide. Remind me that with Your help, I am more than a conqueror, and the victory is Yours. In Jesus' name, Amen.

STAND FIRM AND ANCHORED

Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. **Ephesians 6:11 (NLT)**

Do you remember playing tug-of-war as a kid? In this game, two teams would hold onto one rope and tug back and forth, trying to pull the other team across a line in the middle. If you wanted to win, you would join the bigger team with the strongest anchor person. The biggest, strongest team could hold its position without giving an inch to the opposing team – because every inch is critical. One shift in momentum could give the whole game away!

In the Scripture verse above, Paul implores the Ephesians to put on all of God's armor so they can stand firm against all the enemy's strategies. At this point in his life, Paul was very familiar with Roman soldiers and the gear they used daily. One piece of that gear was their spiked sandals. Their spiked sandals let soldiers dig in and stay firm no matter what came their way. This *digging in* is the imagery Paul had in mind as he described how to stand firm against the enemy's strategies.

When we think of standing firm in our faith, we're not just standing up passively; we're actively digging our feet in the dirt. We're holding our ground; we're positioning ourselves to keep the enemy from gaining even an inch. Anchoring ourselves to the Truth of who God is and what He says gives us the weight and resistance needed to keep the enemy from gaining an inch of ground in our lives. Arming ourselves like this gives us an active stance against the enemy's tugs.

APPLICATION: Consider the difference between standing up and standing firm. Understand that, like in a tug-of-war, opposition will be actively trying to pull you off balance today, and the only way to win is to dig in and remain anchored in what you know to be true. Dig your feet into the dirt as you walk around today, knowing God has supplied everything you need to stand firm in Him!

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for supplying all that we need to withstand the enemy's attacks. Thank You for being our anchor, our provider and our source of strength. Help us lean into You more, remember all that You supply us with, and actively dig in so we can withstand any attack of the enemy. We can't do it in our own strength, but we can do it in Yours. We trust You for this. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THE FULL ARMOR

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. **Ephesians 6:13 (ESV)**

Some mistakes you never make twice! When my wife and I were newly married, we lived in a house with a few mystery hedges outside it. I have never been one for understanding different types of plants; I just knew the overgrown hedge outside our window needed trimming so we could see out of it again! So on one particularly hot day, I grabbed my trimmers and started trimming our plant monstrosity down to something more manageable. After a few hours, a lot of sweat and multiple piles of trimmings, we could see out the window again.

Later that evening, my arms and legs started to feel uncomfortably itchy – and the next morning, my arms, legs, face and everything not covered by my T-shirt and shorts were inflamed with, you guessed it, poison ivy. My clothes protected parts of me, but anything beyond their coverage was exposed to and affected by the toxic chemical.

In this Scripture, the Apostle Paul alludes to the need to protect ourselves from something far more dangerous than poison ivy—the enemy's multifaceted attacks. Because the devil is so devious, his attacks can come in many forms and require all kinds of protection. Thankfully, the spiritual armor God provides covers you from head to toe! Paul is saying: put on the FULL armor of God—and leave no piece of God's protective covering out.

The Greek verb Paul uses for *take up the whole armor of God* is *analambano*, and it conveys a sense of urgency. Like a military commander instructing his troops before a crucial battle, Paul is saying something like, *Do it now!* or T*ake quick action…there's no time to lose* as you put on God's complete, total and impenetrable armor.

APPLICATION: As you start this day, envision yourself putting on God's full armor, covering yourself from head to toe. Remind yourself that the enemy's attacks are unpredictable, but you've been given head-to-toe protection from whatever he may throw at you.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for giving me head-to-toe protection from whatever the enemy would attack me with. Your armor is complete, effective and impenetrable. In Your armor, please cover me, protect me and keep me ready for whatever may come my way today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WHO YOU'RE REALLY FIGHTING

For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. **Ephesians 6:12 (NLT)**

But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won a victory over those people, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world. **1 John 4:4 (NLT)**

Someone cuts you off in traffic. Your car gets broken into. A loved one gets bullied. The list goes on and on of the things that can anger us. At first glance, what do all these things seem to have in common? It's people, right? People drive erratically, people steal other people's property, and people use words that hurt. Well, to an extent, that's true. But Paul wants us to know that something deeper is going on.

In this Scripture, Paul reminds the Ephesian believers that our true enemies are not people. They are the enemy's spiritual ranks fighting against you. From the adjectives used to describe these spiritual forces, we learn they are numerous, powerful, evil and clever. They aim to oppose all that is good, Holy and right—and they want nothing more than to kill, steal and destroy God's work in and through you.

But God gives us a promise in 1 John 4:4—that we need to cling to before, during and after each battle that will come your way today: *the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world.*

People aren't our enemy. The rulers and authorities in the dark, unseen world are—and they're defeated foes who know their time is short. Our war isn't with people, but IN people, over who will control them. That's why the Gospel of Christ's power to break the enemy's bonds is so important!

APPLICATION: Remember, your battle is not with other people but with the enemy who is fighting for control of people. Ask God to stir a heart of compassion for those under the enemy's control, and pray that they come to know Jesus and be set free from the enemy's power.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for the precious promises that remind us that no power in the seen or unseen world is a match for Your mighty strength. Help us to live in that strength and victory today, no matter what comes our way, knowing that You are greater and stronger, and that You are fighting with and for us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

TRUTH FIRST

Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness. **Ephesians 6:14 (NLT)**

If you were heading into battle against a fierce enemy, what would you grab first—a weapon, a shield or a bulletproof vest? Few of us would choose a belt. Yet that's exactly what the Apostle Paul names as the first piece of spiritual armor we must put on. Why would something so ordinary come before every other piece of armor? Ever wonder why this is? Why is Paul so adamant that the *belt of truth* comes first? To understand this, we must consider how Roman soldiers dressed for battle. A soldier's uniform was a kilt-like skirt with a long tunic overtop. They then used a wide leather belt to hold everything in place and provide a band to tuck their tunic into so they could run, fight and move around with agility. All other armor would go on top of this. Without a belt, everything else would be ineffective. Putting on their belt was a soldier's way of saying they were ready to enter battle. They couldn't fight without it.

Think of the spiritual implications of this. Paul seems to be saying you aren't ready to do battle until you've first wrapped yourself in truth. Reminding ourselves of who God is, what He has done, and what He has promised us grounds us, empowers us and keeps us from falling for the enemy's lies.

The belt of truth isn't an offensive weapon; rather, it's for your protection. Knowing the truth protects you from the enemy's lies—one of his greatest weapons. We must preach the truth to ourselves so we don't fall prey to the enemy's deceitful whispers. Then we're ready for whatever battles come our way.

APPLICATION: Right now, consider a struggle you're facing—an area of weakness, a point of frustration or a failure you're trying to overcome. Identify three biblical truths that speak to that struggle. They can be full Scripture verses or simple statements such as *God loves me, God is sovereign, and God wins.* Commit these truths to memory by writing them on a sticky note, setting them as your phone's wallpaper, or placing them somewhere prominent so they can penetrate your heart and mind.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, Your Word is true. The Bible reminds me that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life—and I need Your truth to overcome the enemy's lies. Please remind me of all that I have in You when tested by today's struggles. Help me saturate my mind with what's true, and seek Your Truth first today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

STAY ALERT

Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere. **Ephesians 6:18 (NLT)**

"Keep alert at all times. And pray that you might be strong enough to escape these coming horrors and stand before the Son of Man." **Luke 21:36 (NLT)**

We didn't know much about German Shepherds when we were offered a full-bred, 8-week-old puppy a few years ago, but we soon learned how unique these pups were. Known for their strong instincts, intelligence and loyalty, German Shepherds have been specifically bred for years to assess threats and serve as guardians. They are watchful, alert and fully *on duty* when triggered. That's why many police forces use these breeds for their K9 units.

One trigger that immediately puts our pup *on duty* is attaching his leash to his collar. As soon as the leash is fastened, he goes into full protective mode, and nothing escapes his attention. When he's leashed up, he's fully aware of everything happening around him.

This image comes to mind as I read the second half of Ephesians 6:18. After describing the spiritual armor the Christian needs to put on, Paul explains that each armored soldier must stay alert and persistently prayerful. Like my pup, who's been triggered by his leash, we need to stay alert and watchful after putting on our spiritual armor as we step out into today's battlefield.

One of the enemy's greatest weapons against us is distraction. Whether it's phone notifications, social media, the pace we move or even our own feelings, the enemy wants to keep our attention off God and unaware of the devil's tactics.

But through alertness and prayer, we cling to our vital connection with God, who strengthens us and helps us to stand firm.

APPLICATION: Identify one distraction that keeps your attention off of God. Maybe it's turning off notifications on your phone or deleting an addictive app. Every time you remember that distraction throughout the day, take a minute to pray that God strengthens your connection with Him instead.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for strengthening me for today's battles. I believe You are with me, protecting me, and will help me stay alert and strong through any temptation or distraction that comes my way today. I cannot do it in my own strength; I need Yours. Remind me how sweet it is to walk in Your presence and help me to stay alert to You all day long. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Brookwood Church
580 Brookwood Point Place • Simpsonville SC 29681
864.688.8200 • brookwoodchurch.org