everyday prayers

2020 DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

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It’s a new year. It’s a new decade! And, our God is doing a new thing!

God is calling out to each of us — and our church — just as the Lord called through the prophet Isaiah: See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? (Isaiah 43:19). The truth is, sometimes it can be hard to see what God sees — that’s where prayer comes in.

Now, more than ever, it’s the right time to take time to pray. As 2019, was drawing to a close, the Lord showed me how essential it was for First UMC College Station to begin the year in prayer. The vision: for us to be on one accord in prayer for the first month of the year.

Please join your church family in using this devotional guide to pray about your own discipleship (that is, how you learn from Christ, follow Christ, and serve Christ). Use this guide to pray for the church as we seek God’s vision in 2020.

Some of the devotional writings are long, some are short. In 31 days, it will all balance out! If you only have time to read the scripture and prayer each day — then, do that. But, I encourage you to take the time to be blessed by the words your sisters and brothers in Christ have shared.

Remember what James had to say about prayer:
Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. James 5:13-16

Prayer is powerful. Prayer is effective. Let’s pray.

Pastor Eleanor Colvin
SERVING OTHERS

For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. (John 13:15)

Jesus said these words to the disciples, after washing their feet. He is viewed as their Teacher, yet He humbly submits himself to perform this task. In terms of service, He gives us the ultimate example, in that we are to remind ourselves daily that because we have been truly blessed by the Father, we in turn should be a blessing to others.

As we begin a new year, let us take time to give thanks to God for the birth of His Son, and let us thank Jesus for carrying out the will of His Father. During this season of Christmas and now Epiphany, we celebrate His coming into the world as the newborn king. However, in spite of the very fact that he was king, Jesus clearly states in Matthew 20:28 that He came ‘not to be served, but to serve.’

Therefore, we should be inspired in this season (and beyond) to serve others, not only with our deeds and physical gifts, but with our spiritual gifts as well. By doing so, we will all be reminded of the fact that the birth of Jesus is a gift that keeps on giving – yesterday, today and forever.

PRAYER

Father God, we thank You for the birth of Your Son, Jesus. Let our words and actions continue to inspire others, all while giving You all of the glory, honor and praise. In Christ’s name we pray, Amen.

- Vernon Moore
CALLED TO FISH

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.  
Ephesians 2:10

Someone most eloquently said, “We are called to be fishers of men, not mere keepers of the fish bowl.” This is what witnessing is all about. Taking Jesus out and sharing HIM with the harvest. Witnessing is a call, and the call to go requires the exact level of love and commitment that Jesus showed on the cross for our sin.

I believe Jesus’ overall objective was not so much to evangelize the world, [HIMSELF] but to show us, convert us, teach and train us with the full knowledge of the gospel so that we could go do as HE came to do. Therefore, it is our duty and reasonable service as God’s Ambassadors to be committed and spread the message of everlasting love to those hurting and in need of a Savior.

Although the harvest is more plentiful than the workers available to work, the Gospel’s knowledge is entrusted to us and commands us to continue fishing, recruiting and sending out to gather the harvest, and not to keep Jesus confined within the four walls of the church. So, we must remain steadfast, unmoving, abounding in and available to the works of the Lord for the continued movement of the Gospel until Jesus comes.

PRAYER

Lord, we’re available to witness of your love and saving grace to all people. We are committed to show others the way to your promised everlasting life. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

- Rose Jones
NOTHING CAN SEPARATE US FROM GOD’S LOVE

What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won’t he also give us everything else? Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God’s right hand, pleading for us. Can anything ever separate us from Christ’s love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? (As the Scriptures say, “For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.”) No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. Romans 8:31-38 (NLT)

We realize that in this scripture God’s love is true. I realize that God allowed his son to die for us. If he let that happen, won’t he give us everything we need to make it in this world?

Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God pleading for my sins and yours. That is LOVE. We ask ourselves, what can we do or say that can separate us from the love of God? Nothing. Verse 35 confirms what we already know. God has unfailing love for his people. No matter the trials and tribulations going on around us, the aches and pains, death, life, angels, demons, present things or things to come, nothing can separate us from the love God has for us.

We will face hard times, but thanks be to God’s love, we know that we are safe in His presence and we have nothing to be afraid of. For if God is for us who can be against us? Through Christ, we are more than conquerors and his love will protect us.

As artist Jonathan McReynolds sings “I’m not lucky, I’m loved.”

PRAYER

Lord God, I thank you for your love for me. And, that your son, Christ, died and was raised for me through your love. Amen.

- Shatner Gooden
GET IN THE GAME

I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. Galatians 2:20

Faith and discipleship are two cornerstone ideas for the Christian faith. Biblical faith is the strong belief in God and in the beliefs of a religion based on spiritual understanding rather than proof. Most Christians have struggled with their faith at some point on their Christian walk. There are scriptures throughout the Bible that speak to the times when followers have lacked faith. God knew it would be a struggle to trust Him completely, especially when there isn’t physical proof of His existence.

Today’s text from Galatians, reminds us that to be a disciple is to be a follower of Jesus, choosing to live by God’s standard, setting yourself apart from the world. This is a call to put Jesus and His will before your own and above anything else. It does require a cost, which to some may be expensive, but the promise and reward of eternal salvation is greater than any other reward.

Being a Christian, a disciple of Christ and growing in faith are similar to a participation sport: we cannot just sit on the sidelines and watch. There are some actions that we need to take in order to get in the game.

First, we must TRUST God in everything that we do, in all things. While this may be easier said than done, it is still the first step. God calls us to live a life without fear, stress, worry, doubt or anxiety. When we have faith, it becomes easier to live life as God intended.

PRAYER is another important component in developing and growing as a Christian. We must pray and pray without ceasing, with thanksgiving and by praising His name, during times of trouble and triumph – at all times we should turn to God. READING the word and knowing it for yourself is an essential part of Christianity. How can one live in the way Christ did if they haven’t read the Word to see what that life looks like? The Bible instructs us to study to show ourselves approved.

The last question is also the next step of growing your faith: LIVING like Christ, find out how using step three. Lastly, let your little light SHINE for all of mankind to see!
YOU PREPARE A TABLE BEFORE US

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” Matthew 26:26-28

Growing up in the Methodist church, I believe that Holy Communion is one of, if not the most, sacred sacraments we hold as followers of Christ. It is a reminder of the suffering Christ endured and the amount of love he has for us. How amazing is it that one man took the world’s sins upon himself and died, so that all our souls would be saved? There is no greater love than that.

Holy Communion is an expression of God’s love, but it is also a time where we are given the chance to reconnect with God. I like that even though it’s a fairly quiet moment, it’s also powerful. As hard as we try not to, we all have fallen off track when it comes to our faith journey. During Holy Communion we’re given the chance to confess our wrongdoings and really focus on him so that when we leave, we’re revitalized and ready to continue on our journey.

As a communion steward, I serve because it gives me a sense of purpose. It is an honor to serve God in such a special way. Along with the ceremony itself, the preparation is just as sacred and important. We cannot lose sight of the fact that we’re not preparing the table for ourselves. It’s the Lord’s table. The items placed on it are the physical representations of the sacrifice that Jesus made so that we would have everlasting life in heaven.

PRAYER

Lord, I pray that all we do in remembrance of you is pleasing to your sight and that we never lose sight of you and your word. There’s no love greater than yours. Amen.

- Stephanie Jones
DAY 6

Monday, January 6

SERVING OTHERS

Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. 2 Corinthians 9:13 (NIV)

From an early age, I have felt God’s presence in my life. Even in times when my family was not regularly attending church, I could feel God leading me to make good choices and difficult decisions, including the many occasions I stepped out on faith to participate in experiences far away from my family. Also, God instilled in me a sense of gratitude for the many blessings and opportunities he bestowed upon me and a responsibility to give and share with others and pay it forward by serving others.

When I joined First United Methodist Church a few years ago, I was pleased that the church had a thriving children’s ministry and was anxious to have my daughter Eva participate. Also, I noticed that many people were serving the church members through the choir, children’s ministry, Sunday school, as ushers, etc. I recognized that I could not expect others to serve me or my child if I was not willing to serve also. I am quite comfortable and do quite a bit of service on campus and in my professional networks. But, I really have not volunteered in the church since I was an usher as a teenager.

Since I teach and mentor college students, I decided I would start by volunteering to teach Sunday school. Mind you, I have never taught Sunday school before. To my surprise, I was assigned to teach the elementary kids. Well, I have also never taught elementary kids. I knew I could not decline to serve where God wanted me. So, I just asked him to support me through the effort. I typically prepare my lessons on Fridays or Saturdays. Some mornings the teaching goes well, and some mornings have been quite challenging. At last, I have come to realize that however it goes, I have done the best that I can and that is all that God expects of me.

PRAYER

God, continue to guide and provide me with the courage to serve according to your will. Allow my actions to inspire others who may be called to serve in ways that stretch or challenge them. Amen.

- Karen Butler-Purry
LET LOVE LEAD YOU

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not to your own understanding. Proverbs 3:5

God will move you to places that may feel a little uncomfortable. However, He will provide you support in ways you can’t even imagine. Those plans that God has for your life will take you out of your comfort zone.

One of the greatest challenges you will face in your life is to learn how to love people who may not like you or whom you may not like. To learn how to love people who don’t like you, practically defines the life of Jesus. We cannot display the character of God to others if we do not display love, because God is love.

Sometimes God will speak a blessing to you. Sometimes you speak to the Lord requesting a blessing, and sometimes the Lord will speak a blessing through you. In order for all that to take place in accordance to God’s plan and will, you must do as Proverbs 3:5 says – Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not to your own understanding.

PRAYER

Dear God, Thank you for your grace and mercy that has brought me this far. You didn’t have to do it, but Lord, I’m so glad you did. Thank you for ordering my steps and leading me in the right direction. Because of your direction, I have learned to trust in you, call upon you and lean and depend on you. For all these things, Lord, I say thank you. In Jesus’ precious name, Amen.

- Tasha Williams & Minnie Campbell
JUDGE RIGHTLY

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye. Matthew 7:1-5

Why are some Christians unforgiving, or selectively forgiving? Why do some only fixate on rules of the Old Testament and the 10 commandments, without attending to the first commandment to love God and neighbor?

I recently read an article that suggested some sins are unforgiveable. And yet, the bible tells us of God’s great forgiveness in Micah 7:19 – You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. And Jesus, when asked if we should forgive one another up to seven times, teaches that we should forgive one another – again and again – seven times seventy if needed (Matthew 18:23).

What if we prayed like David in Psalm 51: create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me? What if we spent more time judging the purity of our own hearts instead of others? My prayer: God show us when we are sliding down the path of unforgiveness. Show us where there is unforgiveness in our hearts and in our relationships, and, keep us from that slippery slope of unforgiveness.

We could avoid that path, by remembering God is always with us, helping us fight the temptation down that path. Please do not let some of us Christians continue thinking we are being solid or rooted in faith, when we are actually hardening our hearts, instead of showing grace! And yet, do not let us mislead ourselves into thinking we are showing grace, when we are letting sin take hold! Help us to judge rightly – especially ourselves.

PRAYER

God, please help us daily to see ourselves slipping into unforgiveness or other spiritual bad habits. Please help us pray our way out of slipping – starting by asking ourselves if we are doing what You want over what we want. Amen!

- Jacques Richard
HOSPITALITY AND CARING FOR OTHERS

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. 
1 Peter 4:10 (NIV)

My mother had a benign tumor. Which left her in the same condition as if she had a stroke. After the brain tumor, she was home bound. Often, I would tell her someone had told me to tell her hello. Once her reply was, “they tell you to tell me hello, but they never come see me or call me.” Those words have stayed with me. Those words are what inspired me to visit and do for those with limitations to leave their homes.

Ask yourself how would you want to be treated if you were in any of these situations: homeless, hungry, incarcerated, sick, unemployed, broke, or even visiting a new church for the first time? Now ask yourself, how do you treat a person in any of the above situations? A simple answer can be found in the form of a question: “What would Jesus Do?”

PRAYER

Dear Father in heaven,
Help us to use the gift you have given us. Let us use these gifts to show your love to all. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

- Merilyn Rucker
DAY 10

Discipleship

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 2 Timothy 2:2

Discipleship is important for the life of the church. God commissioned us in the Great Commission to go out and make disciples of men. We as Christians have the awesome privilege of being used by God in the lives of others. We must remember that the Christian faith is not just about your relationship with Jesus, but the Gospel must be shared with others.

Jesus practiced discipleship. His disciples made disciples as well as the early church, which means WE must make disciples and practice discipleship.

Discipleship is a walking together in the way of Christ for a period of time. It is discussing life’s challenges and God’s answers together. Jesus walked with his disciples for three years, teaching and training them. As a disciple, we must be willing to learn and follow Christ, which is not something that happens overnight – but is a lifelong journey.

Discipleship is a process and takes time. It is personal and can be challenging, however it teaches moral values, behavior and builds character. We must embrace our calling and share God’s word with others. Pray, continue to study the bible, worship God and lastly become a true witness of Jesus Christ.

But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give His life as a ransom for many. Matthew 20:26–28

Prayer

Gracious and loving God, I ask that you help us to daily to take up your cross and follow you. May our faith increase in you and our hunger for your word intensify. We love you. In your mighty name we pray, Amen.

- Rhonda Fowler

First United Methodist Church

Rhonda Fowler
GOOD STEWARDS SERVE

*Every good and perfect gift is from above ... James 1:17*

Loving Father, you alone are the source of every good gift. We praise you for all your gifts to us, and we thank you for your generosity. Everything we have, and all that we are, comes from you. Help us to be grateful and responsible.

You have called us to follow Your son, Jesus, without counting the cost. Send us your Holy Spirit to give us courage and wisdom to be faithful disciples. We commit ourselves to being good stewards. Help us to be grateful, accountable, generous, and willing to give back with increase. Help us to make stewardship a way of life.

One way we make stewardship a way of life is through service. Lord, we believe you have called us to follow you with our whole hearts – in all our words and actions. Send us your Spirit to give us the power to serve You faithfully, because we believe that Your disciples are called to proclaim the Good News of God’s kingdom in word and deed. Use us to bless and serve others as you have blessed and served us.

PRAYER

*Lord, send us Your Spirit to open our minds and hearts to the liberating power of your word. Send us Your Spirit to help us serve with grateful, generous and responsible hearts. We make this prayer through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.*

- Ruby & Lawrence Smith
REAL WORSHIP

God is a Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and Truth. John 4:24

Worship is the feeling or expression of reverence and adoration for a deity. Worship and praise communicate love, devotion, reverence and thankfulness to God. Praying is a way of communicating with God through worship and praise.

When I worship God, his spirit draws me closer to him. I worship him because he has done so much for me and he is still blessing me. When I feel down or I am going through things, I get alone and meditate on his word. Singing is a way I praise him, because the words of the songs minister to my soul. Thank you Lord, for your goodness and mercy. My worship is for real.

Worship and praise should be a part of everyone's life, because Christ gave his life for us. It is by his grace and mercy we are still here. If we had 10,000 tongues we couldn't thank him enough. For he alone is worthy to be praised. We need to spend more time trying to please God instead of man, because God knows our hearts. God has blessed us all with gifts, let's use them for the glory of God.

PRAYER

Lord, I worship you, I praise you and I thank you for your amazing grace. We need you more and more every day. I pray for love and peace of the people in the world. Bless all your people in Jesus' name I pray. Amen! Amen!

- Martha Watson
BEYOND THE WALLS OF THE CHURCH

Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper. Jeremiah 29:7 (NIV)

Have you ever been invited to an event by a friend and accepted with fretfulness? When you arrived, you did not see your friend. Feeling anxious, you continued to look around the room, trying to make eye contact with a least one friendly face. When you finally made eye contact, that person smiles at you and heads in your direction. They greet you with a smile relieving some of your nervousness. You relax, begin to converse and enjoy your time at the event. Eventually the friend that invited you finally shows up.

As believers, our spirituality has to reign outside of the walls of the church. We spend more time in common places, with people with the same interests, in our communities. Our community can be an event, a city, or neighborhood. When we share a smile with a stranger or have a friendly conversation, it benefits us all in prosperity.

Simple ways to building a community outside of the church:

1. Pray daily for people.

2. Treat all people with the fruit of God’s spirit: Love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

3. SMILE 😊

PRAYER

Dear Lord, Open our hearts and minds to love others as you love us. Let your light shine to blind darkness and lead us to your unchanging agape love.

- Cheletia Johnson
DAY 14

Tuesday, January 14

BIBLE/SCRIPTURE STUDY

I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. 
Psalm 119:11

Locate the scriptures in the Bible of your choice in the Old or New Testament, by book, chapter and verse.

Once you locate the scripture, read it and see if you understand what you read. Research the subject/scripture throughout the bible, if possible. You should read other religious books and articles for interpretation of what you just read. Ask your pastor, friends or browse the internet for references if needed.

You need to evaluate what you have read and ask yourself. Is my understanding of this scripture what God is saying or is it what I wanted to hear? Pray and ask God to give you the understanding you lack and the knowledge needed to understand his word.

Having read and interpreted the Bible, you should have a basic understanding of what the Bible says, and what it means by what it says. As we study the Bible, do not stop there. The ultimate goal should be to let it speak to you and enable you to grow spiritually. In your journey/walk with God, open up and allow him to reveal his word to you.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, thank you for your love and always being available for your children. Amen.

- Herbert Booker
BEARING WITNESS

“So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ‘Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?’ They went out of the town and were coming to Him” (John 4:28-30).

This passage in John accounts for a meeting between Jesus and an outcast woman at the well of Sychar as she came to draw water. Jesus, aware of her unpleasant lifestyle, engages her in conversation in order to reveal Himself to her, and to let her know HE knew all about her situation. As He witnesses to her, she sees kindness and the power of love she had never known. At the close of the meeting, she welcomes Christ into her heart.

Afterwards, eager to bear witness of what Jesus had done for her life, she left her water pot behind and ran into the countryside to evangelize to others with her testimony. Her witness was so powerful it caused many to believe in Jesus and all were saved.

There is one thing we continue learning daily in our witness experiences. It is no ordinary task introducing others to Jesus, but it is our call, our duty to go, tell and spread the wonderful message of Jesus’ grace and mercy. The gospel must be shared with all people, not just those who have their lives together. It is also for the outcast, the downtrodden and those who have made shambles of their lives. Everyone must experience how the power of Jesus’ love can forgive and be set free as HE did for this woman in their meeting.

PRAYER

Dear God, we are Your tools, Your Ambassadors. Grant us courage to be faithful, exciting and clear in our witness for Jesus as the Lord of our lives. In Jesus’ name, Amen. – Rose Jones
PRAY CONTINUOUSLY

Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else. Rejoice always, pray continuously.
1 Thessalonians 5:15-17

Each time I’m driving my car and I see a motorcyclist without a helmet, I pray that God will bless them to get home safely. Also, I pray that He will continue to bless them, until they realize the importance of a helmet. There are so many chances every day to pray for others. Every time I hear a siren, I pray that God will help the emergency workers and the people that need their help. At work, I pray for parents who need a better form of transportation.

My prayers are usually short, unless I am crying out to God to save someone or to bring them into the fold, back into the fold, or to heal the sick.

I listen for God’s direction as to what to pray about and for. A song of praise can be prayer, because it is communicating and staying connected to God.

Who can you pray for today?

PRAYER

Dear God, we are Your tools, Your Ambassadors. Grant us courage to be faithful, exciting and clear in our witness for Jesus as the Lord of our lives. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

- Anita Whitley
FOLLOW THE LEADER

The teacher gets the class ready to go outside for recess. She asks them to all line up at the door. She’s chosen a leader for the week and that person will serve by leading them everywhere they go. Ever wonder, what are some qualities of a good leader? I’m thinking for this class of 1st graders, one might be able to follow directions well, being courteous to others and helping one another out, or helping to get everyone to their destinations timely.

So, what about for you or me? Sure, it may vary by position, but the general idea is somewhat the same: Leaders must be able to follow directions as well to lead others; leaders need to be able to get everyone in line (on the same page) and leaders need to assist with reaching their goals (humble themselves and do some of the work too).

Servant leadership within the church is to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up (Ephesians 4:12). This means, with Christ being the head of the church, the entire church body is served in the act of providing leadership. So, a servant leader seeks to invest themselves in the lives of people, so that as a whole, the church community is challenged to grow to be more like Christ. This is demonstrated in the leader’s willingness to give of themselves to meet the needs, but not necessarily the wants, of people. Like a good parent, the true servant leader knows the difference between the needs of spiritual children and their selfish wants and desires.

The bottom-line is that we don’t emulate the examples of the world; our example is Jesus, who came as a servant. Therefore, our mission is to serve one another, to give of ourselves. Christ came to give His life. We are to give of our lives not only in service to Him but to our fellow man, including those in the church and outside it.

Servanthood is not about position or skill. It’s about attitude. Leaders seek ways they can add value to others and the primary way they do it is by serving them.

PRAYER

Gracious God, we come to say thank you for being our best example as a “servant leader.” Help us to serve your people willingly and to the best of our abilities. Because of your grace, mercy and love for us, we want to show that to all we come in contact with. Teach us to lead your people in closer relationship to you. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

- Wendi Peterson
REDEEMED AND RESPONSIBLE

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. Genesis 2:15

The Question: Who wants to work with God?

When answering this question, think about stewardship.

Stewardship is the belief that people are responsible for taking care of the world. God gave the human race the task of taking care of the world in Genesis. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it (Genesis 2:15). This scripture shows us the trust God has in us to be responsible for everything God created.

People must maintain and use wisely the gifts that God has given us. Not just financial blessings that have been given to us, but also the Spiritual gifts (prophecy, serving, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership and mercy). God wants to collaborate with us. What a blessing to have the opportunity to work with GOD! He has worked with us since creation, through redemption and continues to work with us through sanctification, as we become more and more like God.

Who wants to work with God? My answer: I DO!

PRAYER

Lord, thank you for the trust you place in us as caretakers of your world and all of its resources. If anyone is unsure of what their gifts are, please reveal to them how you have blessed them and show them how they might use their gifts in your service. Help us to appreciate our gifts and to use them well. Amen.

- Tonya Carter
I HAVE GOD

The Lord is my Shepherd, I don’t need a thing. Psalm 23:1 [MSG]

One scripture that I go to often is the 23rd Psalm. I especially like the Message translation: The Lord is my Shepherd, I don’t need a thing. I like the part where it says I don’t need a thing, because often times you feel like you have to keep up with the Joneses – have what someone else has or do what someone is doing. This scripture says that’s not the case.

Early in December, I was playing in a basketball tournament and suffered a concussion. At first, someone just bumped into me a little too hard. Later in the game, I fell. And then, other players fell on me. Life can really pile things on us sometimes. Doctors said that because I have had several concussions in past – I should not play basketball anymore.

Recently, with everything I’ve been going through, this verse helps. I’ve lost basketball, which has been a part of my life for 10 years. I’ve lost a lot of friends – and so there is a lot of loneliness, you could say. But Psalm 23 assures me that I don’t have to worry about a thing. It’s a friendly reminder that no matter what I go through, I don’t really need those things in the end. I have God, and everything else is just a bonus.

Some days it’s harder than others to take comfort in the verse. The Lord is my shepherd, I don’t need anything. I know that’s how it should be. I shouldn’t long for the other things that seem to make me happy – but I do, because I’m human. I guess it all goes back to having faith, which is hard – especially when you can’t always see who you’re having faith in. I heard someone say once that when you take a test in class, the teacher doesn’t talk. So, God isn’t always going to speak when we go through things in life; but, he’s there.

PRAYER

Thank you for always being there for me and for always giving me daily reminders of your presence. I thank you that you’re always with me – even when it’s hard for me to see. Help me to be humble and to keep the faith and to spread your love to others around me. Amen.

-Audrey Whitley
I WOULD RATHER BE A DOORKEEPER

Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. Psalm 84:10

I love to usher! I’ve been serving as an usher for over 40 years. Knowing this is my calling, has brought me much gratification.

Serving as an usher during worship service brings me joy because I know I am serving God’s people. Assisting the Pastor, passing out programs, helping people find seating and assisting with Communion are all fulfilling. It warms my heart to know that a person trusts me to comfort them when their heart is heavy or when they and feel the need to release their pain or happiness in any way they see fit.

When the Spirit stirs someone’s emotions, as an usher, I simply want to be there for them - to give them a tissue if they need one, to give them a hug should they want one, to clear the hallway if they need to walk their emotions out, or just to provide a quiet place should they want to meditate alone with no disturbance.

Serving others in this way is a joy. I am glad to be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord.

PRAYER

Lord, I pray that I would continue to have the passion to serve as you would want me to serve. Bless our church with love for one another. Amen.

- Ann Cashaw
Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. 2 Corinthians 13:11

In this passage, we are reminded that God desires togetherness for His children - in everything. We are encouraged to love one another, because He first loved us. As we grow to love one another, we learn to lean and depend on one another.

That is not to say, however, that there will not be moments of conflict. We are individuals with different personalities, different interests. Therefore, it is quite natural for moments for conflict to occur. However, we must understand that all conflict is not bad conflict, and in the process of attempting to resolve a situation, we will find that one person’s weakness may be another person’s strength. Hence, the opportunity to lean and depend on one another.

As long as we keep God in the details (and it must be emphasized that He is to be the head, and not the tail), we have a foundation that is strong, built on love, because we know that God is love. Therefore, we can go forward with one another, conducting ourselves in the manner of the lyrics of a song that says: ‘I pray for you, you pray for me, I love you, I need you to survive’...

PRAYER

Father God, touch our hearts and minds that allow us to provide love, as well as to be loved. Allow us to feel your presence in all that we say, and in all that we do, for You are love. In Jesus’s name we pray, Amen.

- Vernon Moore
THE BLESSING OF BIBLE STUDY

“And all that believed were together, and had all things in common.”
Acts 2:44

Studying the Word has changed with the new age of social media, Bible apps, online sermons and Bible studies, etc. But nothing can take the place of studying and worshiping with fellow believers. In Bible study, not only do you get to study the scriptures, you can also apply them to everyday life. Hearing different perspectives of scriptures, enables you to realize that some things in life are commonplace. The experiences, hardships, struggles and even triumphs are not just your own. Everyone goes through things in life and being able to share with others while studying God’s Word can bring clarity, joy, peace of mind, and the sense that you are not alone. Acts 2:44 reads, “And all that believed were together, and had all things in common.”

With busy schedules and busy lives, attending Bible study and even Sunday morning worship can seem pressing. But what better way to begin the week! Praise and worship, prayer and a Word from the Lord; that in itself can turn a dark night into a brighter day. But, you have to bring something to get something. Being in community with other believers and to fellowship in God’s House should be a foundation of our Spiritual Journey.

When nothing else can see you through, there is always a scripture (or two) that can turn your situation around and give hope to an otherwise hopeless situation. But, if you are not studying His Word, you may not know what scripture speaks to your situation. II Timothy 2:15 reads, “Study to show thyself approved unto God…” Don’t let someone else speak over your life, know the Word for yourself. Have faith that God is always present, and he desires us to be in His Presence.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, thank you for all that you are doing in our lives. Help us to have that desire to study your Word and to worship and fellowship with others as we build Your Kingdom here on Earth. May we realize that in your Word, there is power, grace, and a roadmap to Eternal Life. Give us that hope through prayer and faith in You that your Word is sufficient. Bless our Pastor and our entire congregation, as we grow together in our Faith and Love. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

- Bobbie Johnson Smith
SERVING HUMBLY

In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 5:16 CEB

Sometimes, serving humbly does not give a great first impression in some people’s minds—because humble leaders can be seen as weak. People may say “that’s ‘just’ a servant” or “that’s not a real leader.” The reality is that it is not necessarily, nor always, “just” that easy to serve! And, it may take a longer time to recognize that the one who serves truly is the one to follow.

Ultimately, people want to follow someone who knows what they are doing! That is, many will follow someone who can do the job and not just someone who “talks a big game.” That longer-lasting 2nd impression, which true service offers, can be more important than the so-called 1st impression!

We are called to humbly serve. This does not call for any special title or honor or reward for this—because it is a part of following God! Another part of following God, is leading others in the ways of God, because true leadership develops other leaders. One lesson of our Advent study (Advent: Humility Leads the Way) reminded us of the power of humility, and that “real power gives power away.” Leaders enable and empower others, strengthen them and show them that they too can do things. Leaders show others that they too have the power to do!

This year, teach by letting someone else try. Teach by showing someone else how to do. Remember: Give someone a fish, and you feed them for a day. If you teach someone how to fish, you feed them for a lifetime (of for as many days as they want to keep eating fish)! Remember that servant leaders light the way for others, by letting their light shine.

PRAYER

Lord, help us to serve as you served. Help us to lead as you led.
Remind us that your way is the way of humility; your way is the way of servant leadership. Help us to walk in your path. Amen.

–Jacques Richard
STEWARDSHIP

Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless— not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. Titus 1:7-8

One way to define stewardship is “utilizing and managing all the resources God provides for the glory of God and the betterment of His creation.” The essence of stewardship is managing everything God brings into a believer’s life in a manner that honors God.

One writer outlined four principles of stewardship – the principles of Ownership, Responsibility, Accountability and Reward.

Ownership: The 24th Psalms says, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.” Stewardship shows our obedience in taking care of everything God has placed under our control.

Responsibility: We are called as God’s stewards to manage what belongs to God. While God graciously entrusted us with the care, development, and enjoyment of everything he owns as his stewards; and, we are responsible to manage according to God’s desire and purposes.

Accountability: A steward is one who manages the possessions of another. We are all stewards of resources, abilities and opportunities that God has entrusted to our care, and one day each of us will be called to give an account for how we managed what the Master has given us.

Reward: The faithful stewards who do the master’s will with the master’s resources can expect to be rewarded incompletely in this life, but fully in the next.

PRAYER

Loving Father, we praise you for your gifts to us, and we thank you for your generosity. Everything we have, and all that we are, comes from you. Send us your Holy Spirit to give us courage and wisdom to be faithful disciples. We commit ourselves to being good stewards. Help us to make stewardship a way of life. In Christ’s name we pray, Amen.

- Spencer Caldwell
DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

DAY 25

Saturday, January 25

WORSHIP & PRAYER EMPOWER THE FAMILY

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. James 5:16

Worship is a time to be intimate with God. Worship could be in a form of song, dance or just the raising of the hands. A song can be used as an association of something that happened in the past or present. It can remind you of something negative, sad or happy – same as with dance or the raising of the hand(s). It is all a heart-felt intimacy with God and letting him know you are serious and want to be closer to him. O, how you adore him, and love to be in his presence.

Prayer is a time to talk to God. It’s a time to let him know what you’re feeling and thinking. Although he knows everything about you, he wants your humbleness. He wants you to confess or express your feelings toward situations. Come to him with thankfulness and gratitude for what he has done for us. Prayer is a time to humble ourselves and to let God know that he is the greatest and we will put nothing before him – just as he will never leave or forsake us.

Prayer is essential in our families. There are times we are challenged. Whether it be day-to-day turmoil, rebelliousness (children) or infidelity in our marriages. We have to look to God as the only one that can fix our problems. If you humble yourself in prayer and confession, God will hear our concerns and show you a way of fixing things. We might not always have faith, but faith comes through believing in the word of Jesus Christ. The devil is there to cause havoc in our lives, it is up to us to turn to God and praise him for that havoc, because that makes us stronger in our faith in God. Therefore, we can move forward with great positiveness.

Marriage is a challenge. No two people think the same. All marriages have disappointments and some more than others. In order to overcome those challenges and disappointments, you have to pray individually and as a couple. God needs to hear your humbleness separately as well as together. So, when things look bad and you’re ready to give up. He steps right in and fixes any issues you have. When he finishes fixing things, you will look back and say “…That really wasn’t that bad.”

PRAYER

Dear God, we thank you for being a forgiving God and for your love and mercy in helping us through rough times and the daily challenges of life. Amen.

– Charlotte & Dean Moore
THE PRIVILEGE OF COMING TO THE TABLE

Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. John 6:35-38

What does Holy Communion mean to me? “Togetherness” or “sharing” spiritually in the promises of God through Jesus Christ. We come together and partake in Jesus’ flesh and blood, so that we will have eternal life. We ALL are not just welcome in his house – the Church – but we are also welcome to his table – Holy Communion. John 6:36-37 reminds us that we are always welcome, and God will never reject us.

When preparing Holy Communion, I tend to get a heavy heart. It’s hard not to think about how God gave his only Son to suffer and die on the cross for us. His body was beaten and broken for us. His blood was shed for us. Yet, peace still comes over me in all I have prepared. I’m reminded that God gave his only Son to save our soul. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood will have eternal life; and you will never hunger of thirst again; all who eat my flesh and drink my blood remain in me, and I in them (John 6:54-56).

I first began to serve, because someone asked me to, and because a family member did it. I didn’t serve as much at first. Sometimes, I didn’t serve at all. Then, the more I served, the more I experienced gratification doing so. I had acknowledged God’s will by serving. It wasn’t just something to do in the church if and when I felt like it. I continued to serve abidingly. Because, as Jesus said: I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do what I want.

PRAYER

Father, as we come together in your house, and take part in your Holy Communion, create in us a clean heart, so that when we leave and go into the world, we can encourage one another daily with your words. Amen.

- Sashi Smith
THE LIFESTYLE OF STEWARDSHIP

Give me all that is mine. Store it so that there will be food in my house. Do this. And find out what I will do, says the Lord Almighty. You will receive so much blessing that you will not have enough room for it. It will be like rain that I pour out of the sky. It will be like rain that covers the ground with a lot of water. Malachi 3:10

Stewardship is a lifestyle that reflects who we are and what we believe. It goes beyond the mere sharing of one’s resources, but we are asked to share ourselves, our time, our abilities, our ministry and our relationships. Stewardship is really a call to be a holy people.

Early on in my church life, I was not as obedient to God. I thought just coming to church was enough. Now, I try to give by devoting my time with teaching Sunday school, volunteering to work the football parking ministry, working as a member of the church finance team, etc. I’m obedient now.

God has asked that we apply the 10-10-80 rule. This means out of every dollar, all he asked is that we give the first 10% to Him, the second 10% to others and we can keep 80%. Seems pretty fair to me. This certainly takes spiritual growth and maturity. I’m tithing because of all the blessings I’ve received from God. I’m also growing deeper and deeper in my faith.

I have been a member of this church for 22 years, and for a large portion of that time, I’ve seen us cheating/robbing God of tithes and offerings. As a result of this, I’ve seen a constant struggle in the church finances, membership, outreach and community service. In the last few years, I’m seeing the church being blessed by God, and I believe it’s due to the positive change and turn around in giving.

We’re stewards, not owners of the life that God has entrusted to us. And, we’re called to give back to God through our time, talents and treasures.

PRAYER

Father God, strengthen me in all my areas of weakness. Help me to know and trust your word. Please help me to be a better follower in your kingdom. Help me to be a beacon of light for someone else. Let them see your light in me. Amen.

- Michael Hubbard
PRAYER WORKS

Rejoice always, pray continuously. 1 Thessalonians 5:15-17

1 Thessalonians 5:17 says pray at all times. To me, that means no matter what you are doing or what you are going through you can always pray. For example, in 1 Kings 18:26-39 Elijah is asking God to show him he is in Israel. His prayer was answered when God sent fire to the altar and burned the meat. That showed God was in Israel. That shows God will give you a sign. Might not be at the same time you ask, but he will give you one.

Something that happened to me like this is when I made the game winning shot. At the beginning of the fourth, we were down by ten and in the huddle, I was praying we would come back and win. The first 6 minutes were rough, but the last 2 were when God answered my prayer and we started to come back. With 30 seconds left, my teammate hit a 3 to tie the game. Then with 10 seconds, we got a steal and my teammate passed me the ball to make the game winning shot. My team won the championship.

PRAYER

Dear God, thank you for all you have done. Thank you for even letting us talk to you at any time. Keep doing what you are doing and just thank you. In your wonderful name I pray, Amen.

- Justin Gooden
TRUST THE PROCESS

*But make up your mind, not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourself. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. Luke 21:14-15*

Sometimes learning valuable lessons about God means learning to just “trust the process.” In my faith journey, I have observed the following process:

- Receive a Revelation – this is when God plants a seed in your spirit.
- Test the Spirit – ask questions about where the thought came from. Is this the spirit of truth or spirit of lies?
- Reject any seeds planted by the spirit of lies.
- Cultivate/Nuture all seeds planted by the spirit of truth. How does one cultivate good seeds? Righteous thoughts that are grounded in Biblical teaching will help nurture the seeds God has planted.
- Walk by faith and not by sight. This is the time to activate your faith to position yourself to be “in the right place at the right time.”
- Labor to produce a bountiful harvest. The seeds that have been planted will need water, sunlight and protection.
- Give the first fruits back to God.
- Give Thanks and Praise (it is righteous to give our thanks and praise).
- Testify to demonstrate the process. Your testimony may help others learn that faith comes by hearing, and then they may learn to trust the process for themselves.

PRAYER

*Precious Lord, I have received a new revelation! I believe it is from you - for the betterment of your kingdom. Lord, show me how to test the spirit for this revelation to help remove my uncertainty and my hesitation. Provide me with the confirmation that I have, indeed, received a divine relation from you and only you. When it comes to opportunities to glorify you and magnify your name, I will trust the process for doing things according to your grace. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

"The process can be long and hard - but it can be trusted."

- Seaborn Carter
DAY 30

Tuesday, January 30

FAITH

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead. James 2:26

As we enter into this new decade, what has your faith journey revealed about you? As we journeyed through Advent Season, I learned that I had to identify and silence all distractions, so I could make room to hear from God. In a disconnected world, we don’t realize the subtle pull of distractions from school, work, relationships, kids, time restraints, and finances. We have become conditioned to the distractions, which harms our ability to listen and think carefully, to be still, to meditate, or to simply go to God in prayer. Distractions shift our attention from something of greater importance to something of lesser importance. And yet, God may allow distractions to strengthen our self-control and develop our self-discipline. James 1:3 says: know the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

I pray we have all taken small steps to grow together in faith during this 31 days of prayer. Perhaps we were intentional in sharing our faith and about growing in faith. Perhaps we simply value our faith more as we near the end of this journey. Daily incremental steps are key to developing a recognizable mature faith-based relationship with God. You know that I like to exercise. Our faith is no different from our bodies. If we don’t exercise it, it won’t go strong. If we are not intentional about our faith training, we won’t have the strength we need when tested. God helps us build our faith and exercise our faith, as we learn to develop the discipline to go to God for ourselves. Developing a recognizable mature faith means having a real relationship with God.

Being intentional about your faith today will lead to living your best life for all your tomorrows. The commitments we choose to make in your life shape our path through this world.

Are you living a life with a faith that will be recognized? Does (or will) anyone recognize your faith in the places you spend the most time? (Such as school, work, or among friends and family.) Let’s commit to growing in faith, as we take the time daily to go to God in prayer -- silencing all the noise.

PRAYER

Lord, I will run to you. I pray that your perfect peace would guard my heart and that You would provide me with a quiet focus and calm tranquility within my soul. Guard my mind and guide my thoughts, I pray, and prevent me from worrying about what may or may not happen. Instead, keep the eyes of my heart focused upon Jesus and my ears ever open to His leading and guidance. Amen.

- Pam Carter
DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

DAY 31
Friday, January 31

WORSHIP

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us and not we ourselves; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. Psalm 100: 1-4  KJV

Mommies and daddies get so excited to see their children dressed up and singing or dancing their little hearts out on the day of a performance. And, children love to see their parents out in the audience smiling and beaming with joy. For these proud parents, it doesn’t really matter that each note isn’t quite right or that each move isn’t in sync with the music. They are simply happy to witness their children using their gifts to the best of their ability.

Such is the way that God, our father, views the worship and praise of his children. It doesn’t matter whether each note is perfectly in pitch or whether every hand clap is right on time. What matters is that with our whole heart, we lift up a praise and give thanks unto the Lord. Unlike the children performing for their parents, worship is not a show for us to watch. It is something we can all engage in using the gifts that God has given us. Just as parents delight in the singing and dancing of their children, so does our father in our expressions of praise and worship.

PRAYER

Dear heavenly father, I know that you are worthy of all the praise and glory. Humble my heart, and show me how to use all of the gifts that you have given me to praise and worship you. Amen.

- Ashleigh Williams

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