



49 | DAYS *of* PRAYER

A Devotional Guide



A Note From Your Shepherds

Through James, our Heavenly Father promises that “[t]he prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working” (**James 5:16b**). While this Scripture provides an often-taught truth, your shepherds would like to ask you this question: are you truly convicted that God can and will exert great power because His children pray? Our needs are great, and the needs of others are many. Ultimately, we can “plug in” to the power of God by approaching His throne in prayer. Thus, our prayers, both individually and collectively, must be deliberate and purposeful.

This “49 Days of Prayer” plan encourages an intentional time of united prayer. Our hope is that each day, as every Christian at Madison prays, together our prayers will rise as a sweet aroma of praise and devotion to our gracious, powerful God. Therefore, with one voice we cry, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

This prayer guide also serves as a reminder and an encouragement to take time every day to talk to and to listen to God. Here, you’ll find devotional thoughts, key scriptures, and helpful suggestions to focus your prayers daily. Let the words found herein foster a wonderful habit: praying to a God who longs to hear from us, and who, out of a deep love for us, desires to grant our requests. May the “49 Days of Prayer” plan bring about great spiritual growth to you as an individual Christian and to us as a body of God’s people at Madison. May God bless you in your prayerful endeavors!

- Your Shepherds

A Word of Thanks

We would like to say thank you to the ministers of the Madison Church of Christ for their time in writing these lessons: ER Brannan, Jason Helton, Beto Huamani, Bryan LeMasters, Kyle Massengale, Brandon Pressnell, and Mike Winkler. Special thanks go to Salena Koester and Pam Manasco for their time spent editing this devotional guide.

Who Can Use this Guide?

This study guide is for everyone. Age does not matter, as each day's guide has been written so that those who have limited experience with prayer have a place to begin, and those who already have a steady prayer life will be challenged to grow deeper. To do this, we have designated seven different emphases designed to challenge and lead your heart in a specific direction for that day. Those topics are as follows:

UNDERSTANDING PRAYER (UP) - Monday

BLESSINGS FROM GOD (BG) - Tuesday

DEPENDENCE ON GOD (DG) - Wednesday

MY SPIRITUAL FAMILY (SF) - Thursday

MY COMMUNITY (MC) - Friday

PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION (PT) - Saturday

PERSONAL REFLECTION (PR) - Sunday

How to Use this Study Guide

PREPARE YOUR HEART AND MIND - Commit to an honest pursuit of God's will for your life. Be open to having your desires transformed over the next 49 days as God uses prayer to reveal His will for you.

TAKE YOUR TIME AND FOCUS EACH DAY - Don't rush through this. The lessons aren't long, but they are designed to get you to spend some time in thought about each subject.

SPEND TIME IN SCRIPTURE - Prayer is our way to communicate to God. Scripture is a way for God to communicate to us. Be sure to read the passages referenced in the daily devotionals.

USE THIS AS A STARTING LINE - Each lesson is designed to give you a place to start. They are written to help you direct your thoughts in a particular direction with the hope that you will dig deeper into that specific area of your life. These are challenges as much as they are guides.

The seventh day of each week is set aside for personal reflection. It is designed to allow you to reflect back on the previous days and to take your time of prayer in whatever direction you see fit. The pages on those days have been left blank for you to write down your thoughts.

As we enter into this challenge, it is our prayer that each of us will be brought closer to our Creator and molded more into the image of His son. We encourage you to share this experience with as many people as possible. When the world sees prayer in action, it can't help but take notice.

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Why & When Should I Pray?

We've all heard the phrases "May God's will be done" and "Lord willing." These expressions acknowledge an important truth - God is in control and His plan will unfold as He wills. Because of this absolute truth, some people ask, "If God's will is going to be done no matter what, why should I pray?" What a great question!

Here are just a few reasons why I should pray to God:

- 1) Prayer reveals that my heart relies on God for wisdom.
James 1:5
- 2) Prayer trains my heart in submission to God's will.
Matthew 6:10; 26:42
- 3) Prayer is my sacrifice of praise to God, calling on His name.
Hebrews 13:15
- 4) Prayer frees my mind of anxiety as I make my requests to God.
Philippians 4:6-7
- 5) Prayer has a powerful impact within God's will.
James 5:15-16
- 6) Prayer conditions my attitude to love my enemies.
Matthew 5:43-45

How often? Pray continually. **1 Thessalonians 5:17**

Think about how much your relationship with God will grow if you maintain a prayerful mindset from the moment you wake up until the moment you pillow your head at night. Conversing with God all day long will keep His will as a focal point in your life!

Prayer Thoughts

Today, start your morning off with a greeting of praise to God and a request to give you a deeper awareness of things for which to pray. Keep that prayer open all day, and as events happen around you, offer up prayers for others as you become aware of their needs. Pray for your challenges, your attitude, your family, or whatever God providentially puts in your path. Don't close the prayer until your day ends. Take special note of how this practice helps your spiritual focus throughout your day.

Why & When Should I Pray?

James 1:5 - "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."

Matthew 6:10; 26:42 - "Your kingdom come, Your will be done in earth, as it is in heaven... Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, 'My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.'"

Hebrews 13:15 - "Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name."

Philippians 4:6-7 - "...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

James 5:15-16 - "And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."

Matthew 5:43-45 - "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."

1 Thessalonians 5:17 - "Pray without ceasing."

Salvation & Grace

“Dead, having no hope and without God” are words Paul uses to describe the Ephesians before their conversion (**Ephesians 2:1, 12**). Being without hope, they had no future to look forward to. So bound by sin, they were alienated from God and unable to see the freedom Christ could bring.

This relationship changed when “God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the places in Christ Jesus” (**Ephesians 2:4-6**). When we sinned, we separated ourselves from God (**Isaiah 59:1, 2**). There is no way we could bridge the chasm between us and God. God’s great love moved Him to send His Son to die a horrible death to reconcile us to Him: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (**Romans 5:8**).

Grace is unmerited favor. There is nothing we can do to earn or boast about our salvation; “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (**Ephesians 2:8,9**). “Not of works” does not mean that we do nothing to accept this grace. God does not want anyone to be lost (**1 Timothy 2:4**), yet Jesus said few would find the narrow way (**Matthew 7:14**).

We accept God’s grace when we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and love Him with all our heart, soul, and mind. Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (**John 14:15**).

Salvation & Grace

Ephesians 2:1 - "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins."

Ephesians 2:12 - "You were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."

Isaiah 59:1-2 - "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear."

2 Corinthians 5:18-19 - "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation."

1 Timothy 2:4 - "[God] who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

Matthew 7:14 - "Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

John Newton was captain of a ship involved in the horrible slave trade. A fearful storm at sea caused him to call on the Lord and to leave the slave trade to become a minister in the Church of England. In 1773, to illustrate a sermon, he wrote this enduring song, "Amazing Grace."

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now, I see.

T'was Grace that taught
My heart to fear and Grace, my fears relieved.
How precious did that Grace appear,
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares,
We have already come.
T'was Grace that brought us safe thus far,
And Grace will lead us home.

Seeking God's Wisdom & Guidance

We all want to live our lives effectively. We want our lives to mean something, yet how often are our efforts ineffective, causing us to fall short of our potential? Why is that? Are we depending upon ourselves for the wisdom to guide our lives? The prophet Jeremiah reminds us "... [t]hat a man's way is not in himself, Nor is it in man who walks to direct his steps" (**Jeremiah 10:23**). Solomon issues this challenge: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding" (**Proverbs 3:5**). James, the Lord's brother, reminds us, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously" (**James 1:5-8**). Jesus assures us, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (**Matthew 7:7-11**).

Let's resolve to turn to God, in prayer and Bible study, seeking his wisdom to be better in these areas:

- Leaders at home as husbands and fathers
(**Ephesians 5:25-29, 33; 6:4; 1 Peter 3:7; Colossians 3:19, 21**)
- Keepers of the home as wives and mothers
(**Ephesians 5:22-24, 33; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:4-5; 1 Peter 3:1-6**)
- Children, who choose to obey and honor their parents
(**Ephesians 6:1-3; Colossians 3:20; 1 Timothy 5:1-8**)
- Friends, who are trustworthy
(**Proverbs 17:17; 18:24; e.g. Job 42:10-11**)
- Employees, who are dependable and conscientious
(**Ephesians 6:5-8; Colossians 3:22-24**)
- Christians, seeking to bring glory to God in all that we do
(**1 Corinthians 10:31; cf. Matthew 5:14-16; 1 Peter 2:12**)

Solomon described a prudent or wise man as one who acquires knowledge (**Proverbs 18:15**), acts according to knowledge (**Proverbs 13:16**), and recognizes and runs from evil (**Proverbs 22:3; 27:12; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:22**). Accordingly, let's pray daily for God's wisdom and apply it to every aspect of our lives.

Seeking God's Wisdom & Guidance

1 Peter 3:7 - "Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered."

Titus 2:3-5 - "Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, ... are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled."

Ephesians 6:1-3 - "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise), that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."

Proverbs 17:17 - "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."

Proverbs 18:24 - "A man of many companions may come to ruin but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

Colossians 3:22-24 - "Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ."

1 Corinthians 10:31 - "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

Someone You Know Who Is Struggling

Jesus prayed for those who were struggling with believing in Him, yet there was a prayer he refused to pray regarding their struggles. On one occasion in **Matthew 14**, He “constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. He then went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, He was there alone.” What do you suppose he prayed?

It is likely that His thoughts in prayer turned toward his disciples, for it was at that very hour they were separated from Him aboard a ship that was now in the middle of a 5-mile-wide sea, tossed by the wind and the waves. The last time they were in a boat and navigating difficult seas, Jesus was with them, asleep in the boat. That time He had calmed the sea, but by six in the morning on this day, they were still alone and still far from shore.

Where was Jesus when His disciples were hit by the storm? He was in prayer. It is conceivable that He prayed for them as they struggled and became troubled at the circumstances.

At the break of day, Jesus walked to them on the waters and called out, “*Be of Good cheer! It is I!*”

Why didn't Jesus simply pray for them to have a safe and peaceful journey?

Why did He not just go with them like He had before?

Why did He wait until the morning before coming to their rescue?

Someone You Know Who Is Struggling

It is significant that there was something Jesus would refuse to pray for in **John 17**. This might help us understand His actions on that day. Verse 15 states, *“I pray not that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil.”* It was not Jesus’ desire to make their lives easy or to remove them from the world so as to escape their troubles. They had a great work to do for the glory of God and for the benefit of mankind. Jesus prayed that the Father would keep them from falling to the corrupted influences of the world. They were to pass through the world with its trouble as through an enemy’s country, just as He had done. The experience of the struggles would grow their faith in such a way that they could accomplish great things for God! It is sad to see people give up the struggle and make shipwrecks of their faith (**1 Timothy 1:19**), but it is glorious to see those who pursue Christ during times of spiritual doubt and struggle to grow in victorious faith!

There are things for you to accomplish today in the name of Christ. You may know of people in a spiritual struggle against the waves of doubt and fear. Pray for them during their time of fight that they be not overtaken by unbelief and evil but turn to God and believe. Lift them up in the midst of the storm. God will bring peace when it is the right time.

Here is a passage to share with those who are spiritually struggling:

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

My Neighbor

The theme of loving your neighbor is repeated throughout the New Testament (i.e. **Matthew 5:43**; **Romans 13:9, 15:2**; **Galatians 5:14**; **James 2:8**). This is by design, because in **Matthew 22:36-40**, Jesus was asked, “Which is the greatest commandment?” He responded by saying, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and prophets.” It is evident that there is a strong connection between our love for God and our love for others. **1 John 1:20-21** presents the two as inseparable. Attempting to take discipleship seriously without an awareness of these two principles being applied in our lives is foolish and empty. However, to align one’s purpose in life with these two teachings allows us to enjoy the blessing of living beyond ourselves and to live for and like Christ.

When starting to think how you should live out the greatest command, you may ask, “Who exactly is my neighbor?” This very question was asked and answered by Jesus in **Luke 10:29-37**. The principle of the commandment is not limited to our sharing similar circumstances with the other individual (i.e. backgrounds, race, age, gender, or place of residence). As followers of Christ, we should view everyone as our neighbor.

However, for whatever reasons, it seems most of us neglect our actual physical neighbors. Jesus calls us to be proactive in showing mercy and love towards others (**Matthew 5:46-47**). It is our responsibility to be actively looking for ways to connect our neighbors to Christ. This may seem like a daunting task, but the first step is to recognize that you need God to do this. Focus your prayer on asking God for the courage to show love to your neighbors. Write down some ways that you can practically fulfill this. To help with ideas, consider in what ways you would feel loved (**Matthew 7:12**). Then, stay focused and look for the opportunities that God will present. Lastly, continue praying for your heart and theirs.

My Neighbor

1 John 1:20-21 - "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother."

Luke 10:29-37 - "But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?' Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers? He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' And Jesus said to him, 'You go, and do likewise.'"

Matthew 5:46-47 - "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"

Matthew 7:12 - "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

Comfortable Sin

If you've ever gone shopping for furniture, you know that there is a significant markup on the prices. This price reflects how much work and effort go into building a piece of fine furniture. It's not generally a quick and easy process. But there's another reason behind those high prices: comfort. People will pay just about any price for comfort, and furniture sellers know that and capitalize on it. In fact, they make their living off of other people's desire for comfort.

Sometimes Satan takes the same approach. We tend to underestimate the craftiness of the Devil, and in so doing, we make ourselves vulnerable to his wit. Rather than tempting us with what we would acknowledge as "big sins," he uses relationships and culture to make us more comfortable around sin so that we no longer see it as something that separates us from Christ. Think back to when you were a child. Were there certain words that your parents wouldn't let you say? How many times in the last week have you used those particular words? Did you get that same feeling of guilt and anxiety when you heard or used them? Chances are you didn't even notice them. You've grown comfortable with something that you once thought was egregious.

Often times we choose comfort over what's godly. Maybe it's a relationship that isn't healthy and we know that we shouldn't be in it, but because it's comfortable and familiar, we stay. Or perhaps there's sin in our lives that we don't see because it's all around us. Vanity saturates social media, but we don't view it as vanity. Gossip is seen as simply "staying informed." In reality, these mind-sets are mere weapons used by Satan. **1 Peter 5:8** tells us that the devil is "*seeking whom he may devour.*" In other words, he's looking for an opportunity to get his foot in the door of our lives and our relationships. However, Jesus tells us that it's not possible to serve two masters (**Luke 16:30**). If sin has a presence in our lives, we cannot fully serve God.

Sin should never feel comfortable to us. It's the very thing that separates us from our Creator. We must never allow ourselves to forget what sin does to our relationship with God and exactly what sin is. Remember Paul's words in his letter to the Romans: "*For the wages of sin is death...*" (**Romans 6:23**).

Comfortable Sin

For your prayer today, spend some time examining your own life. Are there aspects of your life (i.e. attitudes, relationships, habits) that you've grown comfortable with that might actually be pulling you away from God? Have you found yourself in a constant cycle of a particular sin and you've given up hope of ever overcoming it? Reflect on the verses listed below and recommit to your relationship with God. Ask God to help you cleanse your life of the weights that prevent you from standing before Him with boldness and confidence.

James 1:14-15 - "...but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

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

Galatians 5:19-20 - "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

Hebrews 12:1 - "...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us..."

Romans 1:29-32 - "They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them."

Father God

Father God, just for today,
 Help me to walk the narrow way.
 Help me stand when I might fall,
 Give me Your strength to hear Your call...

Let Your Requests Be Made Known

Use today to pray about the things that are on your heart. Reflect back on the previous six days and make your requests known to God.

Let Your Requests Be Made Known

What Should My Attitude Be?

Luke 18:13-14 - *"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you had to ask someone for help?

If something is not going your way, Jesus encourages you to seek help from God through prayer. Many times we find ourselves in situations where we know we need help, but we are afraid to ask for it. We want others to jump in and help us because we feel that we deserve their help, but again, we are too timid or too afraid to ask for their assistance.

If you find it difficult to ask for help, how would you change that attitude if you wanted to be closer to God? If you need assistance, would you ask Him for it? Do you want God to help you just because He *has* to help you or because you feel that you deserve it?

We should beg God's assistance; we must ask Him. There are situations over which we do not and cannot have control. There are tasks we cannot accomplish on our own. You might start to think of a friend or neighbor who could help you, but the Bible tells us that we should turn to God.

What Should My Attitude Be?

What was the attitude of the tax collector towards God?

What happens when you have the attitude of the tax collector?

If there is something you need, will you ask God?

Is there something about your attitude that needs to change when you talk to God?

Are you ready to ask for God's help now?

Physical Blessings

It's easy to get blinded to the gifts that God provides for us. We often claim these as our own possessions and get so used to their presence in our world that our awareness of their origin becomes a faded piece of the background of our existence. Simply put, it's easy to forget just how blessed we are to have a God who has gifted each of us with many physical blessings.

Physically speaking, how easy it is to fall into the faulty mindset that all that we are, all we have, and all we do are direct products of our own personal development? This mindset can be a little self-absorbed and detrimental to our faith development. Sound crazy? Think about it this way. If I believe that all I am is a direct result of my own personal pursuits, I can look past the God who provided me with the ability to walk, communicate, reason, and make tough decisions. If I believe that all I have is *only* because of my hard work, then I look past the God whose providence has given me physical strength and endurance to complete tasks successfully. If I am tempted to hold on to my personal righteousness as self-made, then I will not feel as indebted to God for salvation. Faith can be minimized because I buy into the faulty concept that "I have made me what I am."

This prayer devotional today is meant to bring back into our conscious awareness the many physical blessings that God provides for us daily. If we really open our minds up to God's provisions in our lives and credit Him for them, we will increase our trust in Him to keep providing for us and develop a deeper gratitude for the One who provides for us.

The apostle Paul addressed the people of Mars Hill with these words about God: "*He himself gives all men life and breath and everything else . . . In Him we live and move, and have our being*" (**Acts 17:25, 28**). God is our source for all the blessings we have in life, both spiritual and physical. **James 1:17** declares that "*every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.*" Giving God the credit for these gifts is another way for us to honor Him in prayer.

Prayer Thoughts

For today's prayer, focus your thoughts on the physical blessings you have been given. Think in terms of comforts, family, health, physical abilities, mental aptitude, food, shelter, and any other tangible things for which you can be thankful. Realizing that God is the giver of these blessings, offer up your gratitude by jotting down a list of things for which to be thankful. Notice how "counting your blessings" can alter the outlook of your day.



Time

Is Valuable

Paul admonished the Ephesians to “make the most of [their] time because the days are evil” (**Ephesians 5:16**). The writer to the Hebrews rebuked their lack of spiritual growth: “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food” (**Hebrews 5:12**). Christ threatened the church at Thyatira with death because they tolerated the wicked Jezebel. He said in **Revelation 2:21**, “And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.”

Is Uncertain

“And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’ But God said, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you.’” **Luke 12:19-20**

Solomon warned in **Proverbs 27:1**, “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.” James reminded those who planned tomorrow to go to a city, stay a year, buy, sell, and get gain that “you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (**James 4:13-14**).

Is Limited

Regardless of how long we live, we know that “it is appointed unto men once to die” (**Hebrews 9:27**).

Psalms 90:10 - “The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.”

The time to respond to God’s demands is now: “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts” (**Hebrews 4:7**).

Have quiet time for God. “Be still, and know that I am God” (**Psalms 46:10**).

Psalms 90:12 - “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

Time

Tips for Managing Your Time Wisely

1. Set specific goals. What needs to be done?
2. Prioritize your “to-do” list.
3. Review your plan.
4. Plan for tomorrow and use deadlines.
5. Keep a weekly and monthly calendar.
6. Allow time for distractions.
7. Define and use your “prime time.”

Tomorrow

*He was going to be all that a mortal should be
Tomorrow.*

*No one should be kinder or braver than he
Tomorrow.*

*A friend who was troubled and weary he knew,
Who'd be glad of a lift and who needed it, too;
On him he would call and see what he could do
Tomorrow.*

*Each morning he stacked up the letters he'd write
Tomorrow.
And thought of the folks he would fill with delight
Tomorrow.*

*It was too bad, indeed, he was busy today,
And hadn't a minute to stop on his way;
More time he would have to give others, he'd say
Tomorrow.*

*The greatest of workers this man would have been
Tomorrow.
The world would have known him, had he ever seen
Tomorrow.*

*But the fact is he died and he faded from view,
And all that he left here when living was through
Was a mountain of things he intended to do
Tomorrow.*

- Edgar A. Guest

The Madison Church Family

The church is God's family (**1 Timothy 3:15**), and every Christian is blessed to be part of that family (**1 John 2:12 plus 3:1-2; cf. Romans 8:14-17**). As a part of God's family, we are often confronted, as individuals or individual family units, with hurdles that are difficult to clear. For example, how many in the Madison church family have experienced physical setbacks, undergone relational or family challenges, felt the sting of death, dealt with events that caused our hearts to ache, faced difficult and life-altering choices, wrestled with financial dilemmas, lived in loneliness, or fought through personal spiritual battles? As we journeyed through these difficult valleys of life, wasn't it comforting to know that others were praying for us? Isn't it a blessing to know that we can comfort others and help them through difficult times by praying for them?

Jesus, during his last night with the disciples, challenged them to "Love one another, even as I have loved you" (**John 13:34-35**). Later that evening, our Lord exhibited his love for them by praying for them (**John 17:6-16**). Paul repeatedly affirmed his love for his brethren by assuring them of his prayers for them (**Romans 1:8-10; 1 Corinthians 1:4-8; Ephesians 1:15-19; Philippians 1:3-11; Colossians 1:3-12; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-6**). Similarly, the Bible repeatedly encourages us to "[l]ove one another" (**1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 4:7-11**). Is there a better way to show our love than by praying for one another (**2 Corinthians 1:8-11**)?

Like the prophet Samuel, let our resolve be, "...as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you..." (**1 Samuel 12:23**). Spend your time today lifting up the names of our families at Madison that may be hurting in some way. Ask for God to use you to help them through their current struggle. In the bulletin you can find a weekly updated list of members from our congregation that are sick or have requested prayers.

The Madison Church Family

1 Timothy 3:15 - "If I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth."

1 John 3:1-2 - "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."

John 13:34-35 - "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Romans 1:8-10 - "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you."

1 Corinthians 1:4-8 - "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you, so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

1 John 4:7-11 - "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

Our Culture

Today, we are focusing our prayer on the culture we live in. Webster defines culture as “the beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time.” As you look back through history, you quickly realize that God’s people have always lived in cultures that did not reflect the holiness of God. As Christians living in the United States in the 21st century, we find ourselves in a similar situation. Just one glance at a newspaper or a quick scroll through a news site and you’re sure to find evidence of all kinds of selfishness, murder, envy, and evil. What, then, should be our response? The same as it has always been: look to God.

Noah lived in a time when evil was all over creation day and night (**Genesis 6:5,8**), yet Noah found favor in God’s eyes. Jesus said in **John 17:14-15**, “*I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.*” Here, Jesus does not ask God to remove His followers from the world but rather prays for their protection from Satan. It is from this passage that we get the phrase “we live in the world, but not of the world.”

Today, as we reflect on our culture, let’s not look upon it with judgment, for that’s not our role (**John 5:22; 1 Peter 4:5**). Rather, let us think about different aspects of our culture that can use our prayers.

Celebrities - Famous actors, athletes, and entertainers are some of the most influential people in our culture. Often times we see celebrities in the news and in tabloids without ever really knowing much about them as people. Social media gives us a false sense of relationship because we can “follow” someone without actually knowing who they are. When we find out about a poor decision they’ve made, often times we are appalled at the act without giving any thought to the person who performed it. While we should always be appalled by sin, we should also be thoughtful of the sinner. In your prayer today, go to God on behalf of a celebrity that needs God’s presence in their life. Ask God to help them with the pressures and evil influences that may be in their life. Ask God to provide people that will bring stability and godliness into their life. Lastly, pray that they will turn to God and use their influence to further His Kingdom.

Our Culture

Technology - We live in a truly digital culture now. New technology seems to be created at an ever-increasing rate, and with new advancements come new opportunities for sin. Technology has made communicating with someone on the other side of the world as easy as it's ever been, yet it has created a generation of young people that struggle to communicate with the people in the same room. All of this creates the need for prayer. Pray that our technology will be used to glorify God and spread the Gospel. Pray that our parents will be prepared to face challenges that no other generation of parents has had to face before. Pray that each of us will use technology to transform our culture rather than culture using technology to transform us.

Race - Unfortunately, race has always been a factor in most every culture. Remember back in Jesus' day how the Jewish people viewed the Samaritans? Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well was completely counter to the culture at that time. But it's the Gospel that's supposed to transform culture rather than the other way around. Today, take a moment to examine your own heart and make sure that the way God sees people is the way you are seeing people: as souls. Ask God to help you to "love your neighbor as yourself" so that you won't be found showing favoritism in how you treat people (**James 2:7-8**). Finally, ask God to let our congregations reflect the diversity found in our communities. Ask for His blessing so that the church can be the leader in racial unity through the unity we find in the cross.

Attitude toward one another - It's not very difficult to find someone with whom you disagree these days. It is, however, difficult to respectfully disagree and to have a civil conversation with one another. Riots seem to cover the evening news on a daily basis. Arguments escalate into murders and police confrontations make national news. Human trafficking is increasing in our part of the country and even in our own state. There seems to be a lack of respect for human life and for each other. Martin Luther King, Jr., is quoted as saying, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." This is a biblical truth. Pray that God will help us, the church, to show His love to the world. Pray that our culture will see the love of Christ and be transformed from the inside out. Remember God's words to Paul in **Acts 26:18**: "...so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

Confessing Christ Today

The greatest words that could ever be uttered are the ones that confess Jesus as Lord. The confession Peter made in **Matthew 16:16** forms the basis of belief that leads to eternal life, yet the confession alone falls short in expressing our complete commitment to Him. We see Peter make this confession, only to find the same mouth cursing and denying that very same Jesus. Words are just words without a firm commitment to and conviction of the truth they form. We may say words of truth only to have our lives deny them. Peter's denial at the fire's glow certainly did not conform to the confession made when he was surrounded by other believers. Many times we lose the conviction of our confession when we are alone and among those who scoff at Jesus. Our actions and words begin to betray us. Our once loud confession of confidence is reduced to an empty echo.

Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: *"Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times."* Afterward, he broke down and wept. The Christian's contradiction between action and confession causes much greater pain than any sin could ever inflict. It is such times that we discover what true confession requires. It pierces and presses us to become truly converted (**Luke 22:32**). If we are not conscious of the pain that accompanies a life that denies our confession, we hinder the sword of the Spirit, God's word, from transforming our lives by that confession. Sin dulls our senses. The power of the confession written upon our hearts makes us keenly sensitive to any transgression against our confession. Its infliction of this hurt causes deep pain to the innermost being, *"piercing even to the division of soul and spirit"* (**Hebrews 4:12**). There is no hiding or deception of the heart that can escape its search.

Confessing Christ Today

Peter made the great confession. He denied Jesus three times. Our resurrected Lord found Peter and presented him with three opportunities to voice his commitment of love: “Peter do you love me?” More than likely, it was the most painful question Peter could hear, yet it was most purifying response of Peter’s soul: “You know I do, Lord.” When his actions reflected his admission, his confession became his most prized possession. Peter’s expounded confession would be recorded by Luke as the first message of good news following the ascension of our Lord. Luke would then record Peter’s words that “*Salvation exists in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. When they [their enemies] saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and recognized that they had been with Jesus*” (**Acts 4:12-13**).

Our prayer today is this: may the confession of our lips be boldly shown in our daily lives so that others would recognize that we have been with Jesus.

Read **Psalm 19** at least three times today and meditate on verse 14.

What does **Colossians 3:17** mean to you?

What does the phrase “in the name of Jesus” mean? (see **Acts 4:7**)

In what ways can I confess Christ today?

Other passages on confession: **Romans 10:9; Matthew 10:32-33; Luke 12:8; 1 John 4:15; Acts 8:37**

Let Your Requests Be Made Known

Use today to pray about the things that are on your heart. Reflect back on the previous six days and make your requests known to God.

Let Your Requests Be Made Known

Elements of Prayer

Prayer is complex and simple. It is the root of so many questions and the source of just as many. It is one of the most intimate and deep elements of our relationship with God, yet even little children can participate. Prayer is beautiful in these ways: the bond formed between two people who pour out their hearts to God on behalf of one another, the comfort we receive knowing that people are going before God because both they and God love us, the struggle to find the words to express what is deepest in us but the peace that comes from knowing we have the Holy Spirit's intercession. Because God knows our hearts, we have the freedom to be real and honest because we know He has seen us at our worst and loves us despite our weakness and repeated error. As we seek to better understand prayer, we naturally will explore what prayer should or can consist of. We want to focus on three elements of prayer that we see in Scripture.

Prayer includes *PRAISING* God. The focus is on who God is.

1 Samuel 2:1-2 - *"And Hannah prayed and said: 'My heart rejoices in the Lord; my horn is exalted in the Lord. I smile at my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation. No one is holy like the Lord, for there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God.'"*

Isaiah 25:1 - *"O Lord, You are my God. I will exalt You, I will praise Your name, for You have done wonderful things; Your counsels of old are faithfulness and truth."*

Write out different reasons why God is worthy of praise.

Elements of Prayer

Prayer includes *SUPPLICATION* to God. When we go to God, we are recognizing our need of Him.

Colossians 1:9 - *“And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.”*

Matthew 26:39 - *“And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.’”*

Write out what you need from God.

Prayer includes *THANKFULNESS* to God. Thankfulness is similar to praise, but it is different because the focus is not on who God is, but rather, on what He has done.

Philippians 4:6 - *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”*

Colossians 1:3 - *“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.”*

Write out what God has done for you to cause you to be thankful.

Use what you have written down as a guide for your prayer today. Make sure to focus on individual requests and not general statements. First, spend time in a period of praise to God. Allow yourself to be humbled and encouraged by His greatness. Next, pour out your heart to God for your need of Him in your life. It is amazing that God has invited us into His throne room to share our needs, wants, concerns, and dreams. Close your prayer by expressing your appreciation for God's gifts.

Communication with God

How would you react to talking with God through prayer and not receiving a response? As **Hebrews 11:1** says, God exists, and through our faith in Him, we can please Him. We know that we can talk to Him because we know that He is there for us.

The Word of God encourages us to talk with God and to pray to Him. The same scriptures push us to get to know our God in spite of the fact that many times it feels as though He is not listening to us. When we feel that God is distant, it's easy to lose the motivation to speak to God through prayer. When we believe that He's not hearing us, we think that God has moved Himself farther from us for some reason. But when we read the Bible, when we read about the life of Jesus, we find a story that makes us reconsider and that encourages us. It helps us achieve our goals and have more strength to seek God out through prayer.

Matthew 15:21-27 speaks of the story of a mother who has a sick daughter. They were not Jewish. The mother, with all of the suffering and pain in her heart for her sick daughter, comes to Jesus to speak with Him face to face and to beg for His help. Also, we see her beg Jesus to heal her daughter three times. The first time she shouts at Jesus; the second time she falls at his feet, begging for his help; and the final time, still motivated, she speaks with Jesus to convince Him to help her. Finally, we see Jesus healing her daughter.

To be able to have a conversation with God or to pray to God, we must not only have faith, but a faith that is unwavering, like the faith of the mother who spoke with Jesus. Her faith was strong and unrelenting until she received an answer. Sometimes, even though we do not believe that God will answer us immediately, we have to believe that he will respond, and we must continue praying to God.

Communication with God

What discourages you from praying to God?

What requests have you stopped bringing before Him?

Now that you know He listens, will you be encouraged to go to Him in prayer again, even for those things that you listed above?

Use the remainder of this page to write down your thoughts to God. Write down your

Frustrations -

Triumphs -

Hopes -

Fears -

Use this list and time of prayer to recommit to communicating to God.

Anxiety

What worries you? What causes you anxiety?

There are several thoughts that keep our minds occupied daily. Perhaps we think about how we are going to afford life's expenses, how we will have food to eat as money gets tight, how we will keep clothes on our growing families, or how we will fill our day with activities. A good number of these thoughts are worthy of our attention, but not our worry.

Worry, or anxiety, is a fruitless activity that can cause us to become paralyzed spiritually. Jesus encouraged us to think about how God is in control, and that our trust in Him for our needs in life will help us overcome this temptation. He said, *"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble"* (**Matthew 6:25-34**).

Most of the time, what we hold onto and worry about are the stressors of life. We actually believe we can overcome those difficulties by handling them on our own, with our own will and power. Consider the words of **1 Peter 5:6-7**: *"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you."* It makes sense that God is saying, "Let Me have it. I can help you manage your worry and give you peace." Isn't that what **Philippians 4:6-7** promises? *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

Anxiety

To some degree, our ability to trust God is the remedy for all worries. When we decide to relieve ourselves of that weight, God's power and provision for us can cover those concerns and help strengthen our faith. No matter what challenges you face today or in the future, God can lift your burdens and give you peace of mind like you've never known before. What a blessing to be thankful for in prayer today!

Prayer Thoughts

Worries and anxieties can paralyze us spiritually. Itemize the concerns of your life that keep your mind needlessly occupied and pray for each of them. Give them over to God and trust Him to provide the peace of mind and comfort He intends for you.

Local Ministries

When I think about those who have helped mold my character, I think about Mrs. Thompson, my sixth and seventh grade Bible teacher. I cannot point out a single Bible truth she taught me, but I well remember the way she taught. She and I were from opposite sides of the tracks. She was upper class and I lower-middle class, but I remember the kind way she treated me, her enthusiasm for teaching, and her smile as she talked about Jesus. She made me feel that I was special because Jesus died for me.

Teachers have a great responsibility. **James 3:1** reads, “*My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.*” Teachers are expected to mirror their teaching in their lives. Luke wrote that Jesus “*began both to do and teach.*” First he wrought; then he taught. Paul said, “*Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ*” (**1 Corinthians 11:1**). He also encouraged his young child in the faith, Timothy, to “*be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity*” (**1 Timothy 4:12**). Each week, hundreds of hours are spent in preparation by our dedicated teachers at Madison. They desire and deserve our prayers.

All leaders need helpers. Israel won its first battle as a nation because Aaron and Hur held up the weary hands of Moses while Joshua led the soldiers against the Amalekites (**Exodus 17:10-13**). Elders need helpers to carry out the work planned for the church. Seven deacons were selected by the Jerusalem church to see that no widow was neglected in the daily distribution. This appointment enabled the Apostles to continue steadfastly in prayer and in the ministry of the word (**Acts 6:1-4**).

We have three dozen deacons at Madison who are dedicated to serving in their assigned ministries. Many of these go without public mention but serve such vital functions in helping everything to be done “*decently and in order*” (**1 Corinthians 14:40**). Many are unaware of the work required to have men in place for the worship services to usher, read scripture, lead prayer, and serve communion. All of these servants need our prayers.

Local Ministries

Exodus 17:10-13 - *“So Joshua did as Moses said to him, and fought with Amalek. And Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses’ hands became heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.”*

Acts 6:1-4 - *“Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’”*

Someone once said, “My fingers teach me for whom to pray. My thumb is strongest and teaches me to pray for the strong. Next is my pointing finger that reminds me to pray for teachers. My middle finger is tallest that encourages me to pray for the leaders who are in charge. My ring finger is weakest of all and teaches me to remember those who have constant struggles. Last is my little finger which makes me pray for those whom no one notices and fade into the shadows.”

My Co-Workers

Many of us have a heart for spiritually lost family members, friends, and others, and spend time in daily prayer pleading with God to reach their stony hearts with the Gospel. Specifically, we are frequently in work environments that have little regard for the Lord and His teachings. We find foul language, ungodly discussions, and disreputable behavior exhibited. Should we avoid unbelieving coworkers altogether?

Genesis chapters 13 through 18 may give us some insight to deal with even the most difficult of coworkers. Sodom was one of five large trade cities on the plains at the time Abraham and Lot were in the agricultural business. We find Sodom being plundered by the Elamites due to their rebellion. Abraham enters the fray and frees the cities from the Elamites, returning the wealth to their kings. Only God could be glorified by the good fortune of Abraham even though it was said that “...the men of Sodom [were] exceedingly wicked and sinners before the LORD...” (**Genesis 13:13**).

God tells Abraham that He plans to destroy Sodom. It would seem that Abraham would be justified in agreeing with God, but there is something that bothered him. Abraham states, “I have taken upon myself to speak unto the Lord” (**vs. 27**) and pleads to God to spare the lives of those in the city if there are found 50, then 45, then 30, then 20, and then just 10 righteous men in the city.

While the city was ultimately destroyed, the point is that Abraham had a heart for the lost and would pray for God to spare them. We find the opposite attitude in the lesson of Jonah, who not only prayed for the destruction of Nineveh, but also went to a hillside for a front-row viewing. God was not pleased with Jonah’s actions, while Abraham was called the friend of God.

By praying for those who are spiritually lost, our hearts are softened to their plights, and we see them as Jesus would: “as sheep without a shepherd” (**Matthew 9:36**). When we pray for intervention in their lives, we are more likely to become God’s answer to that prayer as we cry out, “Here am I, send me!” Our eyes are opened to opportunities to present Christ during the day. We cannot determine the outcome, but we can certainly be used by God to answer the prayer. You may be figuratively “one of ten” righteous that God is searching for among a lost community to show his mercy and to sustain life. Consider the words of Paul: “For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building” (**1 Corinthians 3:9**).

My Co-Workers

List 10 people with whom you work who need your prayer today:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Add this thought to your prayer today: *“Merciful God, You are King of Kings and Lord of Lords. You alone are worthy of all glory and praise. Today, I place before you (name each person on your list). Melt my heart to conform to your will so that I may be useful in answering this prayer. I pray this in the boldness and name of Jesus Christ, Amen.”*

Romans 12 - He Who Shows Mercy

He had done everything wrong. He demanded his share of the inheritance before his father died. Driven by a desire to live a life his father disliked, he went into a far country. There, he wasted his inheritance and learned how unreliable fair-weather friends are. Hungry, bone-tired, and ashamed, he went home, hoping to be a hired servant. Justice would say he was getting what he deserved, but a father's love gave him mercy. Mercy is what we all desperately need.

Shakespeare's question "How canst thou hope for mercy rendering none?" is supported by Scripture. **James 2:13** reads, "Judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment." Jesus made this idea very clear in his parable of the unmerciful servant. The master forgave a servant who owed him millions, but the servant had one put in prison who owed him hundreds. The text reads, "Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses" (**Matthew 18:32-35**).

Showing mercy can be costly. "When asked by a lawyer 'Who is my neighbor?' Jesus said a man was going from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves who robbed and beat him leaving him half dead. A priest and Levite saw him but passed by; but a Samaritan saw him and was moved with compassion. He endangered his own life by stopping to help. He bound up the wounds, put him on his beast and took him to an inn. After caring for him through the night he left money with the inn keeper for further care with the promise to pay more if needed. Jesus asked, 'Who proved neighbor to him that fell among robbers?' The lawyer answered, 'He that showed mercy'" (**Luke 10:29-37**).

How can one be cheerful about showing mercy if it is costly? When we are merciful, we are like God. **Luke 6:36** admonishes us to "...be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful." When we extend mercy, we may expect to receive mercy. **Matthew 5:7** reminds us, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy." Paul urged the Ephesian elders, "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (**Acts 20:35**).

Romans 12 - He Who Shows Mercy

Paul, in his salutations to Timothy, used grace and mercy together (**1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2**). Grace is receiving salvation that we do not deserve; mercy is not receiving punishment that we deserve.

Hebrews 4:15, 16 - *“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*

*“Teach me to feel another’s woe,
to hide the fault I see,
That mercy I to others show
that mercy show to me.”
-Alexander Pope*

*“The quality of mercy is not strain’d,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.”
-William Shakespeare*

Let Your Requests Be Made Known

Use today to pray about the things that are on your heart. Reflect back on the previous six days and make your requests known to God.

Let Your Requests Be Made Known

Praying Through Christ

Have you ever thought about what it means to pray in the name of Christ? You probably say it as often as the “sincerely” or “love” at the end of a letter. But is there more to it than that? If we use the name of Jesus, shouldn't it have more meaning than a formal conclusion to a letter?

Yes and yes. In **Colossians 3:17**, Paul tells the church at Colossae that everything they say and everything they do should be done in the name of Jesus. Prayer would certainly fall under everything. But why? Because Jesus is how we have access to God. In **John 14:6**, Jesus says, “*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*” In chapter **14:14-16**, Jesus says, “*Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.*” Does Jesus mean that if we ask for a certain object, outcome, or relationship, so long as we end the prayer with “in Jesus' name,” we'll get what we ask for? Not necessarily.

To ask something in the name of Christ is to take on the nature of Christ. When people are sworn in to an office or take the stand in a trial, they place their hand on the Bible and swear an oath in the name of the Bible. They take on the honest and honorable nature of the Bible. It is much the same for us.

When we pray in the name of Christ, we are asking it with the same character that Christ has. When we do that, often times the content of our prayers changes. As the British writer N.T. Wright put it, “Praying ‘in Jesus' name’... means that, as we get to know who Jesus is, so we find ourselves drawn into His life and love and sense of purpose...When we then ask, it will be ‘in Jesus' name’, and to His glory; and through that, to the glory of the Father himself.”

Praying through Christ is what happens when we live in Christ. **1 John 1** speaks of “*walking in the light as He is in the light...*” When we live in Christ, our prayers will take on the same sacrificial tone that Jesus' prayers did.

Praying Through Christ

When you consider that praying in the name of Christ means that your petitions to God take on the character of Christ, how does that impact your attitude toward and content of your prayers?

Use the remaining space to write down your prayer for today.

Dear God,

*in Jesus' name,
Amen*

The Church

The church is a blessing from God that displays His wisdom, love, and understanding of what we need. Our perspective of this blessing is dependent on our understanding of the purpose of the church in our lives. A simple question can help us to define our perspective: “Are you at war or in a state of peace?” Stop and really think about that question.

There is a special bond among individuals in a group who sacrifice for others, suffer for a just cause, and have a united purpose. This bond is evident in military units, police units, and even sports teams. Can the same be said of your bond with the church? The blessing of the church can be fully appreciated only when the church functions in our lives as God designed it. Together as a body and also as individuals we need to...

*Sacrifice for others
Suffer for the spread of Christ
Have a united purpose*

***Philippians 2:1-11 & Galatians 6:9-10
Matthew 5:10-12 & 2 Timothy 1:8-12
Matthew 28:18-20 & Ephesians 4:11-13***

We must recognize that we are in the wilderness and not the Promised Land. Now is the time to work. If we become stagnant with where we are in our relationship with God and in our relationships with other people, then the church becomes merely a social interaction. What makes the church unique is that it is our source of encouragement, strength, and accountability when we take seriously our position as ambassadors and witnesses of the Gospel.

Reflect for a moment on who has made an impact on you spiritually. Write down some of your church family who have made a difference in your life.

The Church

Whom can you impact? There is one thing for certain: when you gather with Christians to worship, someone is in need. Let that sink in. People NEED you.

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” –Hebrews 10:24-25

Today, be motivated to make a difference. In your prayer, express thankfulness for your brothers and sisters in Christ who have impacted and encouraged you. Conclude with a focus on God using you as an encourager and difference-maker in His kingdom. Include individuals and ministries on which you plan to invest time.

Galatians 6:9-10 - *“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”*

Matthew 5:10 - *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’s sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

Ephesians 4:11-13 - *“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”*

Money

It was just a letter; a letter with lessons. And he received it, read it, and taught it to the church.

When the apostle Paul sent this letter to Timothy, he taught him, among other concepts, that Christians should not love money (**1 Timothy 6:10**). It wasn't that it was bad to have money, but it was bad to love money. When we love money, we think that it is actually ours, and we forget to acknowledge the giver. Even when looking at our material possessions, we forget the source: not from our salaries at work or from a friend, but from God (**1 Corinthians 4:7**). Sometimes, even worse, we think that because we have more material things, we are better than others.

A young person came to Jesus and asked him what he could do to have eternal life (**Matthew 19:16**). The young man told Jesus how he had come to obey God's commandments from his childhood. Jesus told him to sell everything that he had and to come and follow Him. The Bible tells us that the young man became very sad. He didn't follow Jesus; he didn't sell the possessions that he had. It is then that Jesus explains that it is difficult to be rich and enter into the heavenly kingdom. It's not that rich people can't enter into heaven, but it will be difficult for them because possessions sometimes control those people. Because the rich put such emphasis on their material possessions, it is difficult for them to leave those things and stop letting their possessions control their own lives. So now, it begins to make sense what Paul is telling Timothy to teach to the Christians: they shouldn't love their money (**1 Timothy 6:10**). Paul tells the Corinthians that everything we possess is from God.

If what we have is only what is necessary for survival, still who do you think gave you those simple blessings (**Haggai 2:8**)? If we believe that these gifts are from God, then we should manage our money and possessions well, don't you think?

Money

If our money or other material blessings are from God, are they going to be obstacles in our relationship with and worship to God? Are they going to affect our relationships with others? If our money is from God, don't you think he's going to be paying attention to how we use it?

It is in this moment that we can think about praying to God. We should pray to God to help us manage our money well and use it according to his plans for us. Our money shouldn't dictate our work schedule or the number of days we spend with our family. We should pray for guidance in using our money in the most effective way.

Let's pray that God helps us manage well the money that He gives us. Do you recognize where your money and your material possessions come from? Do you need help managing the money that God gave you? Will you begin to pray for God to guide you in using that money well?

Scriptures to Consider

1 Timothy 6:10 - *"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs."*

1 Corinthians 4:7 - *"For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?"*

Matthew 19:16 - *"And behold, a man came up to him, saying, 'Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?'"*

1 Timothy 6:10 - *"nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."*

Haggai 2:8 - *"The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the Lord of hosts."*

Our Shepherds

1 Timothy 5:17 says that elders are worthy of “double honor.” Our church family is blessed beyond measure with a group of men who love us, lead us, and pray for us. These men live good lives and have strong reputations – not just with us, but also in their associations outside our body. For this and so many other reasons, we should be thankful to have them spiritually overseeing our families. It would be impossible to innumerate the sacrifices they make on our behalf, but, certainly, they are many.

Take a moment to pray for each of these men by name. Pray for their discernment in leading us. Pray for their wisdom in caring for all of us. Pray for health that they may remain capable. Pray for their families. Write down a word or two of appreciation for each of them as you pray for them.

David Glenn

Jack Gross

David Hargett

Mark Hester

Tony Hoover

Our Shepherds

Larry Jones

Mark Kelly

Ronnie Missildine

Ed Mobley

Stan Sherrod

John Walton

Roy Wilson

Public Servants

“Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” (1 Timothy 2:1,2).

Civil authority is ordained by God (**Romans 13:1,2**). Each day, thousands of men and women risk their lives to protect us. Our military forces protect us from foreign enemies that would destroy us. History teaches us that freedom is not free. Scores of cemeteries with their rows of white crosses bear eloquent testimony to this fact. Those serving in the armed forces merit and need our prayers.

Our men and women in blue serve in police forces in our nation; they form a thin blue line to protect peaceful citizens from anarchy. These are increasingly becoming the targets of terrorists and criminals. Some 137 officers have been killed in the line of duty this year, a fifteen percent increase over last year. Think of officers you know and ask the Lord’s protection over them in your daily prayers.

Firefighters stand on alert day and night to protect our lives and property. Their dedication was highlighted when planes controlled by radical terrorists crashed into the World Trade Center in New York City. Witnesses told of their mad run to get out of the buildings while they met firefighters who were rushing into the buildings. On that day, 343 brave firemen lost their lives. Similar heroes can be found in stations all across our nation. Pray for our firefighters.

You feel chest pains and you dial 911. Paramedics immediately rush to their ambulances to get to your side. Their quick action can make the difference between life and death. Do we pray for them as they rush through busy traffic to get to the hospital?

Public Servants

Romans 13:1-2 - "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves."

Titus 3:1 - "Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work."

1 Peter 2:13-14 - "Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good."

A Prayer of Blessing for All Who Serve Us in Times of Crisis

"Blessed are you, Lord, God of mercy, who through your Son gave us a marvelous example of charity and the great commandment of love for one another. Send down your blessings on these your servants, who so generously devote themselves to helping others. Grant them courage when they are afraid, wisdom when they must make quick decisions, strength when they are weary, and compassion in all their work. When the alarm sounds and they are called to aid both friend and stranger, let them faithfully serve You and their neighbor. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen."

Spiritual Goal from Col. 3:12-16

A goal is simply “an objective toward which our efforts and energies are directed.” Personal goals are both encouraged in the Bible (**Proverbs 16:9 plus 3:21:5**) and exemplified throughout Scripture [e.g. God’s Plan to Redeem Mankind (**Genesis 3:15 plus Galatians 4:4-6; John 3:16**)]. As Christians, our goals can have multiple layers. For example, our goals can be physical, financial, relational, or vocational in nature. However, the most important goals Christians can set and pursue are spiritual in nature (**Colossians 3:1-4**).

The apostle Paul, when writing the Christians at Colossae, reminded them of their decision to “lay aside” the old self and “put on” the new self (**Colossians 1:4, 2:12 plus 3:5-10; cf. Ephesians 4:17-24**). Part of putting on the “new self” involved having a spiritual mind and pursuing spiritual things (**Colossians 3:1-4**). Included in these “spiritual things” was the pursuit of specific attitudes, actions, and the treatment of others (**Colossians 3:12-22**). One of those “pursuits” or goals was to “[l]et the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...” (**Colossians 3:15**). Jesus said, “These things I have spoken to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world” (**John 16:33**). Too, Jesus promised, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful” (**John 14:27**). How often do we forfeit the peace Jesus has provided by our negative dispositions, poor attitudes, unwise choices, and ungodly behaviors?

Paul assured all Christians, “in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (**Philippians 4:6-7**).

Let’s resolve to set our minds on “spiritual things,” asking God for his help in our pursuit of the peace He has promised each of us.

Spiritual Goal from Col. 3:12-16

Proverbs 16:3, 9 - "Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established...The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps."

Proverbs 21:5 - "The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty."

Colossians 3:1-2 - "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth."

Colossians 3:15 - "And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body...."

John 16:33 - "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

John 14:27 - "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

Philippians 4:6-7 - "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Let Your Requests Be Made Known

Use today to pray about the things that are on your heart. Reflect back on the previous six days and make your requests known to God.

Let Your Requests Be Made Known

The Holy Spirit & Prayer

Words in prayer are expressions from our hearts to God's ear, yet many times words seem to be empty of the true depths of our joy and sorrow we wish to relay to the Father. We are tempted to wonder if God understands the totality of the burden when our words fail.

Reliance on God is sometimes described by a physical action, such as the use of the eyes. Isaiah makes a prophetic statement concerning the eye of faith: "Look unto me, and be ye saved..." (**Isaiah 45:22**). A look often indicates a frame of mind. When a drowning man casts a wild look toward a lifeguard, we know he is begging for speedy assistance. If a suffering patient looks eagerly to his doctor, we know it to be a silent petition for relief. And when a dying loved one fixes a tender look upon his family, they know the melting language and feel his energy give way to acceptance. It is the communication of spirit to spirit that needs no words, no interpretation, no escape. It is a spiritual cry that can only be satisfied by a spiritual response in return. Those that fix their eyes upon God indicate much more than what their lips might utter, and He knows what is expressed beyond sight and sound.

A prayer beyond the physical includes these elements:

1. A ready acknowledgment of Him as Savior (**John 17:23**)
"And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."
2. An eagerness for relief (**Psalms 25:14**)
"The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant."
3. An expectation of deliverance (**Acts 3:4, 5; Matthew 15:22, 28**)
"And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, 'Look at us.' And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them... And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon'... Then Jesus answered her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed instantly."
4. A humble dependence upon Him for deliverance (**Psalms 69**)
5. A complete submission to Him no matter the outcome (**Psalms 39**)

The Holy Spirit & Prayer

It is when we cast a longing eye to Heaven and when our heart cries out unutterable petitions that His Holy Spirit makes provision and reveals our innermost thoughts before the Father's throne. Read Romans 8:18-39 and journal your thoughts below:

Truths to keep in mind when praying:

1. He understands your heart.
2. He knows what is needed.
3. He has the power to deliver what is best.

Today's prayer: Father, I turn my eyes to the heavens and express to you all my burdens, all my worries, and all my anxiety. Though words fail to describe adequately what I wish to say, I know that nothing is hidden from your sight and understanding. I look to you to forgive me of my transgressions, to provide what I need to do your will today, and to sustain me in what is good and right. I know you care for me! I will be patient and wait on You, for in due time all will be at peace. When my earthly eyes close and my words cease, my spiritual eyes will see You this day and I will rejoice!

In the name of my Savior, I pray. Amen.

The Holy Spirit

We pray to God because He is our father and our creator. It's not difficult for us to relate to a father figure because we have fatherly figures. Jesus, the Son of God, dwelt in a physical human body for a time here on earth. There is a certain tangibility which we can relate to in the fact that He took on the form of humanity. But when it comes to the Holy Spirit of God, we often lose our ability to relate and understand. Unfortunately, far too often, we let our lack of understanding become a lack of appreciation.

The Holy Spirit is described as being a gift sent to humanity when Christ left earth to dwell at the right hand of God (*John 14:18-27*). The Spirit is our spiritual helper while we dwell in a physical world. When was the last time you stopped to thank God for His foresight in leaving His Spirit to counsel us after Jesus left? Is it possible that because you may not fully understand exactly how the Spirit operates that you neglect to thank God for His Spirit? Let us never be guilty of allowing our ignorance of God to impact our appreciation of what He has given to us.

On the following page, you will find several verses that speak about the Holy Spirit. Take time throughout your day to day to read each of them carefully. As you pray through the name of Christ, remember that it is the Spirit that interprets our prayers when we don't know what to say. Remember that it is the Spirit that guides us to truth. It is the Spirit of God that allows us to stand boldly before the throne of God without the shame of guilt, but rather with the confidence of Christ.

The Holy Spirit

John 14:18-27 - “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.’ Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, ‘Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?’ Jesus answered him, ‘If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me. These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.’”

Romans 8:26-28 - “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

John 16:7-15 - “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

Forgive Someone

“Then Peter came up and said to him, ‘Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.” - **Matthew 18:21-35**

Forgiving someone who has hurt you or someone whom you love is not easy. Can you relate to the servant in the parable? God has freed you of your debt by the blood of Christ, but are you holding on to grudges in your heart toward those who have wronged you? The end of the Lord’s Prayer, which is surrounded by verses focused on proper motives, is a text that is sometimes scary. **Matthew 6:14-15** reads, “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” This principle also concludes the above parable about forgiveness. The best way for us to forgive others, especially when we want to hold on to a grudge, is by focusing on the forgiveness that we have received through our Savior.

Forgive Someone

Spend a couple minutes reflecting on the verses below. We serve a God who is patient and whose love steadfast. Today, try to memorize a verse on God's forgiveness.

Ephesians 1:7 - *"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace."*

I John 1:9 - *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

Colossians 1:13-14 - *"He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."*

Psalms 103:12 - *"...as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us."*

As much as we rejoice about and cherish the salvation and forgiveness that we have freely received through Christ Jesus, we must recognize that this new life comes with a new master and a new purpose. It is a life of transformation and pursuit of Christ. To become like Christ is to love like Christ. At the heart of His love is forgiveness.

Today, have your prayer focus on forgiveness. If you are holding onto anger or resentment, what good is it doing for you? Do not let someone else's actions pull your heart and mind away from your loving Father. You need the love, comfort, and strength of God to do this. Go to Him. Pour out your emotions to Him and allow Him to take your burden. Let go of what others owe you so that you can rejoice in His pardon and liberation.

Global Mission Work

Many years ago, Mercedes began to attend a church. That church was called the church of Christ. Along with some of her friends, she arrived at the feet of Jesus and decided to be baptized. Some months later, Emilio began to get to know the church of Christ, the same congregation where Mercedes attended. These young people got to know each other in the first congregation of the church of Christ that was established in Lima, Peru, back in 1950.

Emilio and Mercedes began to know the Gospel through the work of missionaries who were preaching the Word of God in Lima, Peru. After a few years, Emilio and Mercedes were married, and now their children are members of the church of Christ. Their son is a preacher in the church, and their two daughters are faithful members of the church and frequently teach children and ladies there.

Let's think about what would have happened if these missionaries never had the motivation to go to Peru or to another country. What if they went to another city farther away from where Emilio and Mercedes lived? Without their motivation, maybe no one would have been there to preach. Without that motivation, the church of Christ in Lima, Peru, perhaps never would have been established, and Emilio, Mercedes, and their children wouldn't have been members of the church and given their lives to Christ.

Paul asks a striking question in **Romans 10:15**: "*How can they preach if they aren't sent?*"

From the people who live next door to your house to the people who are strangers in the street or in the market or in another city, state, or country, what will happen if there are not brothers and sisters in those locations who listen to God's call to take the Gospel there?

The church of Christ in Madison has worked hard sending and encouraging many of its members to go and share the Gospel, the good news of Jesus. Will you be encouraged to join?

Global Mission Work

Today, we want to encourage you to pray for mission groups that are carrying the Gospel throughout Mexico, Brazil, Namibia, South Africa, Israel, Uganda, Lesotho, Tanzania, Vietnam, Philippines, New Zealand, and the United States.

You'll find listed below some missionaries and ministries that Madison supports.

AFRICA

Ghana - *Michael Segbefia, Stephen Taylor*

Liberia-Bong County - *David Kolleh*

Namibia - *Bennie Isaaks*

South Africa - *Rohan Jones, Peter Manuel*

World Mission Africa - *Barry Smith*

Zambia - *Wilson Siazilo, Greg Swindle*

ASIA & PACIFIC

India - *Jack Nelle Institute*

Korea Bible School - *Bill Ramsay*

Micronesian Islands - *Wayne Parker*

New Zealand - *Chris Herd*

Open Door Ministries - *Demar Elam*

Thailand - *John Davis, Friendship Church*

World Evangelism - *Wayne Barrier*

World Mission - *Jeremy Barrier*

Voice of Truth International

World Christian Broadcasting

LATIN AMERICA

Brazil - *Randy Short, F.H. Gates, Randal Matheny*

Mexico (Guanajuato) - *Les Ferguson*

Peru - *Rodolfo Espanoza*

EUROPE

Hungary - *Curry Montague*

Mid-East - *Philip Ganta*

Romania-Russia - *West Main, Larry Little*

World Evangelism - *Louis Rushmore, Betty Choate*

My Enemies

Prayer is both a privilege and a responsibility. Sometimes it is not easy to pray for those we find it difficult to like and for those who do not like us. However, Jesus said, “Love your enemies ... pray for those who mistreat you” (**Luke 6:27-28**; cf. **Matthew 5:43-48**). When we choose to pray for our enemies, we are truly manifesting biblical love; that is, we are exhibiting a desire for what is best for others, regardless of who they are or what they have done (**Mark 12:30-31**; **Romans 5:8-11**; **John 3:16**; cf. **Galatians 5:13-15**; **1 Thessalonians 5:15**).

“Praying for our enemies” was courageously exemplified by these men:

- Stephen, who, while being stoned to death, prayed for his persecutors, saying, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (**Acts 7:54-60**).
- Jesus, who, while being crucified, prayed, “Father forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (**Luke 23:34**).

When we contemplate the cruelty shown Jesus at Calvary and hear His loving prayer for forgiveness, we begin to understand the depth of love we are to possess and to manifest toward those who mistreat us. Let’s resolve to follow the example of Jesus and pray for all men: not just those we know and love, but also for those who are difficult to love or those whom we consider to be our adversaries.

My Enemies

Matthew 5:43-48 - "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Mark 12:30-31 - "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Galatians 5:13-15 - "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another."

1 Thessalonians 5:15 - "See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone."

Spiritual Goal from Gal. 5:16-25

Jesus often tried to help us see spiritually by using the physical things we clearly understand to make spiritual applications. For example, everyone knows and understands that trees bring forth fruit of their own kind. In other words, a peach tree grows peaches and apple trees grow apples. This is a simple truth; the laws of nature bear this out. Jesus used this established fact to help explain how we can determine what kind of people we are dealing with from day to day. When discussing the behavior of people, He simply said, “You will know them by their fruits” (**Matthew 7:20**). The true hearts of individuals can be seen when we observe their actions, or their fruits. A bad person will demonstrate evil through his or her deviant behavior. A good person can be detected when his or her life yields holiness and goodness.

Paul is very specific in **Galatians 5** when he draws a stark contrast between works of the flesh and fruits of the spirit of God.

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit let us also walk by the Spirit.” - Galatians 5:16-25

As **Galatians 5** reveals, the works of the flesh (sinful behaviors) can be clearly seen in our actions and attitudes. Participating in these types of behaviors reveals that we have given our allegiance to our physical desires over our spiritual goals. The good news is that God reminds us that a heart that seeks God will bear fruits that have no negative consequences. The evidence of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in our lives demonstrates to others that we have put away those works of the flesh and are committed to pursuing goals of spiritual value. For today’s prayer, jot down a few spiritual goals using the fruit of the spirit as a guide, pray over these goals, and live them out!

Spiritual Goal from Gal. 5:16-25

Today, let's diligently seek God's will in all that we do. Let's also make a list of how we can, on a practical level, pursue and achieve His will.

Peace

Patience

Kindness

Goodness

Faithfulness

Gentleness

Self-control

Let Your Requests Be Made Known

Use today to pray about the things that are on your heart. Reflect back on the previous six days and make your requests known to God.

Let Your Requests Be Made Known

Prayer & the Will of God

Jesus believed in the power and importance of prayer in his daily life (**Luke 5:16**). Jesus' disciples, having seen and heard him pray repeatedly, requested that he "teach them to pray" (**Luke 11:1**). In fulfilling their request, Jesus taught them to pray that "[God's] will be done, on earth as it is in heaven ..." (**Matthew 6:9-13**). However, Jesus' desire that God's will be done was not only expressed through his prayers, but lived out in his daily life (**John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38**). This is best illustrated by his prayer and actions in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night of his betrayal (**Matthew 26:36-54 plus Hebrews 5:7-8**). Jesus' submission to God's will was possible because of his complete selflessness. Paul reminds us that Jesus "[h]umbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (**Philippians 2:5-8**).

As we pray, let's put aside our selfish desires and ask God to fulfill His will in these aspects:

- The salvation of those who are lost
(**1 Timothy 2:3-6; cf. Romans 1:14-16; 1 Corinthians 9:16-17**)
- The admonition to live sanctified lives
(**1 Thessalonians 4:3-5; 5:21-22; cf. Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1**)
- The pursuit to bring God glory in all that we do and say
(**1 Corinthians 10:31; cf. Matthew 5:14-16**)
- The serving of others in need
(**Matthew 25:34-46; cf. Luke 10:25-37**)
- The encouragement of those who are struggling spiritually
(**Galatians 6:1-2; James 5:16, 19-20**)

Let each of us resolve to pray, as Jesus taught, "Your will be done" (**Matthew 6:10**).

Prayer & the Will of God

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

John 4:34 - "Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work!"

John 5:30 - "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me."

Hebrews 5:7-8 - "In the days of his flesh, Jesus[a] offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered."

1 Timothy 2:3-6 - "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man[a] Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time."

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 - "For this is the will of God, your sanctification:[b] that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body[c] in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God..."

Matthew 5:14-16 - "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that[b] they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Galatians 6:1-2 - "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

Eternal Life & Hope

We are tempted to think of eternal life and hope in a futuristic sense, yet Christ was resurrected from the dead and presented himself to be alive before several hundreds of witnesses (**Acts 1:3, 1 Corinthians 15:6**). The resurrection does not allow the Christian to trust in a wishful hope or to experience eternal life only at a later time.

Before man received the physical breath of life from the Father, it was purposed that through the resurrection Jesus would bring “*many sons to glory*” (**Hebrews 2:10**). The fulfillment of this mystery brings us into the type of life that is beyond the world’s understanding. It is eternal, having depth of meaning and purpose. To understand and accept His resurrection means knowing God and His power to convey this eternal life to all who obey in faith. God conveyed the very life of the risen Lord in his new creature; it is present with those who have experienced the new birth and received Christ’s life.

Christ arose to a new life, one that He never lived before He came to earth in the flesh. His experiences, suffering, and complete victory over death had never before been done; His life, death, and resurrection made it possible for us to experience a life made free from such things. Thus, he became the “*first fruits of them that slept*” (**1 Corinthians 15:7**). By His resurrection we also obtain a new life, not one to be lived like our past life and certainly not one that is only promised at some point in the future. It is present, eternal, and glorious — just as He is.

Neither should our hope lie in some doubtful future existence. **Galatians 3:27** asks, “*Do we not know assuredly that all who have been baptized into Christ have already been clothed with Christ?*” This knowledge of having Christ presently brings the assurances of things yet to be. We now know the power and effect of His resurrection whereby we purposefully “walk in newness” of this eternal life (**Romans 6:4**), yet we are determined and are assured to see the day when we will receive a glorified body like His (**1 Corinthians 15:52**), meet our Savior in the air, and be forever with Him (**1 Thessalonians 4:17**).

Eternal Life & Hope

The Holy Spirit is given as a down payment, which is God's pledge and assurance to us (**Ephesians 1:14-16**). It can be said that the Holy Spirit is expressed in our lives as we experience eternal life. It is the Spirit that continues to infuse the atoning power of the cross with our daily walk until we see Jesus face to face. Our walking by the Spirit (**Galatians 5:16**) is the eternal life of the here and now. It is the exhibition of an assured hope of our bodily resurrection fit for eternity with God.

While Jesus prayed to the Father, He said, *"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent"* (**John 17:3**). Resolve and pray today to know Him more.

What are the causes of hope, and how can I grow in hope?
(**Romans 15:4 and 13**)

How does the Bible describe the Christian hope?
(**Hebrews 6:19**)

Read **Colossians 1:27**. In what ways do I show Christ in my life and exhibit the hope of glory?

Consider these prayerful words today: *"When Christ, who is my life, appears, then I also will appear with him in glory"* (**Colossians 3:4**).

Personal Insecurity & Guilt

Edmund Burke is credited with saying, “The only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.” That’s true. Often times we let our own fears and insecurities be the voice that either guides or limits our actions. One of the most underestimated weapons of the devil is his ability to affect our confidence.

2 Peter 3:9 tells us that “God is not slack concerning His promises.” When we read in **1 John 1:7**, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin,” we can take confidence that He is telling the truth. The Spirit that God has given to us is one of boldness (**2 Timothy 1:7**), not one of fear or insecurity.

Guilt can be crippling. When we let guilt linger in our lives, we allow it to control our relationships, our decisions, and even our daily tasks. Paul said in **Romans 6:16** that if we present our bodies to sin, then we become enslaved to that sin. The same goes for guilt. If we do not respond to guilt, then we let it linger and take up residence in our hearts, becoming slaves to it. Guilt is meant to lead us to repentance (**2 Corinthians 7:10**). It’s not meant to be ignored.

Perhaps you’ve found yourself in a spiral of insecurity. Perhaps there are times when you feel like you add little to no value to the lives of those around you. It’s in those times that we need to desperately remind ourselves of God’s view of our lives:

- He sent His son as payment for our debt (**John 3:16, Romans 5:7-9**). You don’t typically see someone sacrifice anything for someone who they don’t believe has value.
- He gave us His name to wear (**Romans 8:17, Ephesians 1:5**). There’s no greater sign of love and appreciation than sharing a name. It means you are family.
- God’s presence brings with it confidence (**1 Samuel 4-7**).
- Feed your relationship with God rather than feeding the lies that Satan has sold you (**Colossians 3:1-4**).

Personal Insecurity & Guilt

When you feel insecurity growing in your heart, go back to your relationship with God. Our true identity is in Christ. There is no lack of confidence in Him. He has stood in the face of the Devil more than once, He's encountered temptations just as we have, and He has overcome death. Spend time today asking God to increase your godly thoughts. If there is guilt in your heart, commit to repentance and make your heart right with God.

2 Timothy 1:7 - "...for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."

Romans 6:16 - "Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?"

2 Corinthians 7:10 - "For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death."

John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

Romans 5:7-9 - "For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God."

Romans 8:17 - "...and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him."

Ephesians 1:5 - "...He predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will..."

Colossians 3:1-4 - "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."

The Next Generation

The future generation matters to us. It matters because this generation includes our children, grandchildren, Bible class students, neighbors, nephews and nieces, and the children who sit around us during worship. We care about them and ultimately worry about their future. We are concerned about the struggles they will face as a nation, family, and church.

Among the worry there is hope: hope because we have seen their hearts and their love for others, hope because of their talents and opportunities to make a difference, hope because of the promise of Christ's faithfulness and presence. But what do they need to remain faithful to God and His gospel? What traits must they possess to be committed and loving spouses and parents? List some of your top characteristics below:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

2 Timothy 2:1-2 - *"You then my child be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."*

How will they learn the traits that you listed above? A better question is probably this: will someone teach them? If you are claiming Christianity, then you are defining what it means to follow Christ faithfully. By your actions and words, are you displaying what you deem vital for the next generation? We need to be intentional with the time that we get with people younger than us are. We must be open and transparent so that through our weakness they can see the impact and necessity of God in our lives.

Let your prayer today be like the psalmist (***Psalms 71:18***). May we focus on our legacy and example so that we give God the glory (***Matthew 5:14-16***) and allow Him to use us to teach the future generation about His righteousness.

The Next Generation

Psalm 71:18 - "And even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me, Until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to all who are to come."

Matthew 5:14-16 - "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Hebrews 13:7 - "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith."

Proverbs 27:17 - "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."

Our Country

No matter what political movement or party you support, the truth of God's word written thousands of years ago still applies today: "Doing what is right makes a nation great, but sin will bring disgrace to any people" (**Proverbs 14:34**).

America has been blessed in so many ways. Early Christian influences in our country helped build a foundation on spiritual principles. However, over time, much of our focus as a nation has turned to pleasing ourselves, looking past sinful behaviors, dishonoring God with our language, and, in general, pushing God out. The words of **Proverbs 14:34** coupled with the warnings of **Isaiah 5:20**, "You are headed for trouble! You say wrong is right, right is wrong, darkness is light, and bitter is sweet," alert us to the reality that we are moving away from God. Now is the time to pray. Now is the time for action.

Prayer Thoughts

For today's prayer, focus your heart on the needs of our country. Consider each of these ideas below and offer up petitions to God on behalf of our nation and the world.

- For our collective hearts to turn toward God.*
- For leaders who are bold in godly principles.*
- For morality based on righteousness as defined by God.*
- For programs to assist the poor, hungry, homeless, and sick.*
- For Christians to impact local communities deeply.*
- For the Bible to be honored as God's word to us today.*
- For the Church to rise up in influence.*
- For safety of loved ones, peace worldwide, and protection of our military.*
- For unity and love, disregarding labels of division.*
- For patience as God works through us.*
- For prosperity in order to share with those in need.*
- For freedom, religious and otherwise, to advance.*
- For prayer to be welcomed back in our schools and civic organizations.*
- For Jesus to reign as our King.*

Our Country

Dear God...

*in Christ's name,
Amen*

Spiritual Goal from 1 Corinthians 13:1-8

How difficult is it to reach goals that you have set?

It is normal for us to plan our time to be able to accomplish certain tasks on our “to-do” lists.

When we were working in Peru, we received an invitation to go and participate in a conference and seminar in another part of Peru. The goal was to be able to take a group of ministers and leaders of the church to a city and stay and preach for a week. Exhausted after 12 hours of traveling on a bus, we finally arrived to the city, very close to the church building. “Very close” is an expression that is used to help you understand that there isn’t much distance between two places, but in this area of Peru, what is “very close” actually isn’t as close as you would believe. To arrive at the church building, we had to walk all morning long. The car could only take us a certain distance, and the rest of the trip was on foot, walking a long time. The church building was not “very close.” Just the same, we gave thanks to God despite the altitude sickness, and we were very excited to arrive at the place that was our goal, the church of Christ in Turushmalca.

It is good to make goals or objectives to be able to know where we want to go or how we want to reach a certain place. Sometimes, these goals are going to cost us a lot to achieve them; other times, they won’t be as difficult. But when we are wanting to reach certain goals, the Bible teaches that we can accomplish much as long as we focus on our objectives.

If you have already reached many of your goals, that’s great. If you haven’t reached all of them, there’s never been a better moment to start trying than today!

Spiritual Goal from 1 Corinthians 13:1-8

What about praying to be able to achieve a spiritual goal? Do you believe that you can achieve one of the fruits of the spirit as Paul tells us about in **1 Corinthians 13:1-8**? It's probably likely that your answer is yes, but you must start motivating yourself to try to reach that goal.

What would be the fruits of the spirit that you hope to achieve in your life right now? Check all that apply.

- to be patient
- to be kind
- to speak truth
- to bear others' burdens
- to believe the best in all people
- to have hope
- to persevere
- not to be envious
- not to be conceited
- not to be rude
- not to be resentful
- not to be glad with sin

Will you motivate yourself to pray to God so that you can reach the goal of utilizing that spiritual fruit in your daily life?

Let Your Requests Be Made Known

Use today to pray about the things that are on your heart. Reflect back on the previous six days and make your requests known to God.

Let Your Requests Be Made Known

How God Answers Prayer?

Praying is not easy. We speak to an invisible God who gives no audible reply. If we will not listen to God, we cannot expect Him to listen to us. Empty prayers are said to be abominable to God (**Proverbs 28:19**). John expressed confidence that God answers prayers because “we keep his commandments and do what pleases him” (**1 John 3:22**). This confidence is strengthened when we always ask according to His will (**1 John 5:14**).

We must be prepared to allow God to answer our prayers in His own time and in His own way. God may answer our prayers in one of three ways.

First, He may give us an immediate “yes” to our requests. King Hezekiah of Judah received a stunning message from the prophet Isaiah: “Thus says the Lord: ‘Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live’”. Hezekiah’s reaction was immediate: “Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the Lord.” God’s answer was immediate as well: “And the word of the Lord came to Isaiah, saying, ‘Go and tell Hezekiah I will add to your days fifteen years’” (**Isaiah 38:1-5**).

Second, God may require us to wait. Daniel perceived from his study of Jeremiah that the seventy years of Judah’s captivity were completed. He prayed to God for his people and was heard but had to wait three weeks for an answer. Gabriel, who brought his answer, had to fight with the kingdom of Persia for three weeks (**Daniel 10:12-14**).

Third, he may say “no.” God had to refuse His own Son when he prayed, “Take this cup away from Me” (**Mark 14:36**). We are assured God heard Him. **Hebrews 5:7** tells us that “[He] was heard because of His godly fear.” Christ reacted to the Father’s “no” with this statement: “Not what I will, but what you will.”

When we are confident that God loves us, knows what is best for us, and has power to do anything, we can pray with the wish “not my will but thine be done.”

How God Answers Prayer?

Proverbs 28:9 - "He who turns away his ear from hearing the law, Even his prayer is an abomination."

1 John 3:22-23 - "Whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight."

1 John 5:14-15 - "This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him."

Isaiah 38:1-5 - "In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, 'Thus says the Lord: 'Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.' Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the Lord and said, 'Remember now, O Lord, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what is good in Your sight.' And Hezekiah wept bitterly. And the word of the Lord came to Isaiah, saying, 'Go and tell Hezekiah, Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will add to your days fifteen years.'"

A Christian Soldier's Prayer

(Found on a CSA casualty Gettysburg)

I asked God for strength, that I might.

I was given infirmity that I might do better achieve.

I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.

I asked for health, that I might do greater things.

I asked for riches, that I might be happy.

I was given poverty, that I might be wise.

I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men.

I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.

I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life.

I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.

I got nothing that I asked for but got everything I had hoped for.

Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.

I am, among all people, most richly blessed.

Stewardship of Family & Talents

James reminds us that “[e]very good thing given and every perfect gift received is from above ...” (**James 1:17**). Without debate, our families are a precious gift from God (**Proverbs 19:14; Psalm 127:3-5; cf. Titus 2:4-5**). As we realize the indescribable blessing of our families, let us “[d]evote [ourselves] to prayer” (**Colossians 4:2; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18**), asking God to guide us and to grant us the wisdom we need to be faithful stewards of our families.

The Bible offers numerous examples of parents who sought God’s guidance and courage to succeed as families:

- Manoah, the father of Samson, humbly prayed that God would “... Teach [them] what to do for the boy who is to be born ...” (**Judges 13:8-14**).
- Amram and Jochebed, the parents of Moses, courageously disobeyed the decree of Pharaoh and hid Moses, “... Not [fearing] the king’s edict” (**Hebrews 11:23 plus 24-26**).
- Hannah, the mother of Samuel, vowed that she would “... [g]ive him to the Lord all the days of his life ...” (**1 Samuel 1:11 plus 21-27**).
- Joseph and Mary, the earthly parents of Jesus, accepted the stewardship of parenting Jesus so that He [increased] in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man” (**Luke 2:52; cf. Luke 2:21-52**).

As we strive to be trustworthy stewards, let’s resolve to pray, asking God to equip us to do the following:

- Love our spouses, to the degree that Jesus loves his church (**Ephesians 5:25-29; Colossians 3:18-19; Titus 2:4-5; cf. Acts 20:28**)
- Communicate to our mates and families how much we cherish them (**Ephesians 5:29**)
- Nurture our mates, striving to learn how we can meet their needs (**Ephesians 5:29; 1 Peter 3:7**)
- Love and raise our children “[i]n the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (**Ephesians 6:4; cf. Colossians 3:21; Deuteronomy 6:4-7**)
- Care for those in our extended families effectively (**1 Timothy 5:3-8; e.g. Ruth 1-2**)

We love our families. Let’s decide to rely on God’s help to be the husband, wife, parent, or child that we want to be. After all, we all want to prove ourselves faithful stewards of the families God has given us (**1 Corinthians 4:1-2**).

Stewardship of Family & Talents

James 1:17 - "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 - "Pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

Ephesians 5:25-29 - "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church."

Ephesians 6:4 - "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

1 Timothy 5:3-8 - "Honor widows who are truly widows. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God. She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach. But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

1 Corinthians 4:1-2 - "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful."

Righteousness

One of the first prayers we learn begins with the words “God is great. God is good.” There is a deep mystery revealed in those simple sentences. We know the greatness of God from the very beginning of the Bible. We see His power to create things from nothing and then to give life to the flesh. We see not only his power to create, but we also see His power to destroy and to work His will beyond nature itself—walking on water, feeding the multitude, healing the sick. But His greatness would mean nothing without His righteousness and goodness revealed as well. It was God’s goodness that caused Him to be merciful to Adam and Eve. While His righteousness demanded man with sin to be separated from His presence, it was His goodness that provided the promise of reconciliation and His suffering and sacrifice to offer Himself in our place.

It can never be said that man could ever supply a righteousness equal to the task, nor could man’s goodness ever reach the standard of God to recover from the fall. All who followed the first Adam would commit transgression. The second Adam, God’s only Son, would then come to earth to provide what man could never offer on his own behalf, a pure and spotless human life as an offering. In doing this, God not only revealed his greatness of power, but He also revealed His goodness and righteousness in the ultimate way possible: He gave Himself without reservation or conditions. While we were yet in our sin, Christ died for us (**Romans 5:8**).

Man could not know true righteousness or engage in personal goodness without both of these being revealed by God through the gospel of Christ. In the gospel is righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith (**Romans 1:17**). By hearing the gospel of Christ, faith can be had (**Romans 10:17**). Thus, it is by the gospel that faith enters the heart to produce the righteousness of God in man. It is through this act of greatness and goodness of God that man can be seen as right in His sight.

Righteousness

Isaiah 64:6 - "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away."

What does this passage reveal about our attempts to reach God in our own efforts?

Romans 5:8-11 - "But God proves His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Therefore, since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from wrath through Him! For if, when we were enemies of God, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life!"

How does God see Christians? How should we respond this week to God's righteousness shown through the work of reconciliation?

How does seeking God's righteousness first (**Matthew 6:33**) help us to do the good works mentioned in **Ephesians 2:10**?

Prayer for today: "God, you are truly great and are infinitely good. It is by your righteous nature that we have the opportunity to be called your children. We know it is not of our own doing that this is possible. We draw reliance from your word, which revealed to us the standard and deliverance of goodness. We keep this word in our hearts and display it to others. Our hope and trust is in you, our God of Righteousness!"

Unity & Harmony

Psalm 133 - *“Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.”*

How long have you or your family worshiped at Madison? What brought you here? Many of the families that worship at Madison grew up here, yet many of our family have moved to the area from another place. When you scan the auditorium on Sunday mornings, you will quickly realize that we have multiple countries, states, cultures, ages, and even opinions represented. Despite our many differences, we enjoy a tremendous amount of unity and harmony. That doesn't happen by accident.

Unity most assuredly comes at a cost: sacrifice. There must be leadership that sacrifices time and energy. There must be submission from those who follow. And there must be trust and communication between both groups in order for everything to work in harmony.

Unity does not occur by accident. It must be sought after and maintained. We each have a responsibility to pray for unity and to be an active part of unifying the body. This means that we hold each other accountable in love (**Galatians 6:1**), we make relationships right before we worship God (**Matthew 5:23-24**), we submit to one another for the right reasons (**Ephesians 5:21**), and we outdo each other when it comes to doing good (**Romans 12:10**).

Unity & Harmony

Proverbs 6 lists a person who sows discord as one of the things that God hates. This means we must often check our own hearts to make sure that our intentions are to glorify God rather than to win an argument. We must be willing to have the mindset that Paul did in **1 Corinthians 8:12**: *“Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”*

Can Madison have more of an impact united or divided? How important is the unity of the Madison church to you? Spend today’s prayer time on asking God to continue to bless the unity found at Madison and to maintain the harmony found here as we continue to grow.

Galatians 6:1 - *“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”*

Matthew 5:23-24 - *“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”*

Ephesians 5:21 - *“...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”*

Romans 12:10 - *“Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.”*

Those In Authority

God wants to have a relationship with His creation, but a relationship is not only based on love but also on obedience (**1 John 4:10, 1 John 5:3**).

It was time to get ready for work; just another normal day for Carlos. He went to work, and in spite of having a difficult job, he always completed his tasks fully and then began helping others. He was bilingual and also helped to translate when his supervisors asked him to.

One night, they asked him to translate that one of his coworkers was going to be fired. He had to translate the words of his boss. It was not a task he was happy to complete.

Many times, God puts us in difficult situations so that we can learn. Many times, we don't want to be in these hard situations. Sooner or later, we will find ourselves in moments in which we have to make decisions that affect our lives or the lives of others. We are sometimes put in a situation of authority without being an authority figure.

Now, imagine all the decisions that a real authority figure has to make. The responsibility is even greater when these decisions affect many people.

This great responsibility is why God encourages us to respect authorities that we have in different areas in our society (**Titus 3:1**). God also encourages us to pray for all of those in authority. Many of them may or may not believe in God, but God is not necessarily asking us to consider that in our treatment of them. God is not asking us if we like the authorities or if we dislike them; God is encouraging us to respect them. Even if you don't like them, you should pray for them; no matter what the authorities believe in a religious sense, they need to make wise decisions. And if wisdom comes from God through prayer (**James 1:5**), then shouldn't we be praying for wisdom for our leaders and other authority figures so that they make the best decisions possible?

Those In Authority

How can we pray for our neighbors who work as authorities or leaders?

Which leaders or authority figures do you know or have a relationship with?

- A police officer
- A judge
- A state representative
- A mayor
- A president

Today, we encourage you to pray for a leader in your area.

Are there any authority figures that cause you to worry? Can you pray for them?

Continuing in Prayer

Before praying, please read **Philippians 4:4-9** and **Colossians 3:1-3**.

Philippians 4:4-9 - "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."

Colossians 3:1-3 - "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

The focus of the prayer today is for us to grasp the importance of where we place our thoughts. It is for us to recognize the importance of continually communing with God (**1 Thessalonians 5:17-18**). It is for us to be honest with ourselves in that we cannot handle and control life. Daily, we need to be seeking God's wisdom, guidance, and fellowship. If, before using this devotional guide, your commune with God was sparse, do not return to your old habits and rob yourself of the blessing of fellowship with God. Today, let us seek God for strength and focus. Let us establish plans to make sure that tomorrow we do not get caught up with our responsibilities of life and forget our need for and the blessing of spending time with God.

Let Your Requests Be Made Known

Use today to pray about the things that are on your heart. Reflect back on the previous 48 days and make your requests known to God.

Let Your Requests Be Made Known

Answering the Prayer of Jesus

During the Last Supper, with the hour of his death approaching, Jesus took time to pray for us. Jesus prayed that our faith moves us to be so unified with Him that we find ourselves in Him just as He is in the Father (**John 17:20-24**). One of the greatest doctrines of the Bible, one that is at the heart of the Gospel, is that we are in Christ, Christ is in us, and our lives are His life.

In the first chapter of Ephesians, we are told of the wonderful gifts that are found in Christ such as all spiritual blessings (**v. 3**), adoption as his children (**v. 5**), His grace (**v. 6**), redemption and forgiveness of sins (**v. 7**), and an everlasting inheritance (**v. 11**). When we are in Christ, we then become the glory of God in showing His power to save!

The Bible tells us that having faith, confessing Christ as Lord, and repenting of wrongdoing lead us toward salvation (**Romans 10:10, 2 Corinthians 7:10**). But what act of faith places us into Christ where salvation is found? Please read **Romans 6:1-4** and **Galatians 3:26-27**. What act of faith places us in Christ?

It is by obeying the command of Jesus (**Mark 16:15-16**) to be immersed in water that one takes part in His death (dying to self), His burial (immersion), and His resurrection (coming out of the water), uniting us with Christ to begin a new life. When faith leads us to obey Paul can say of us, "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (**Colossians 2:12 and 3:3**).

He then lives in us (**Galatians 2:20**). When God looks at us, He sees Jesus because we are in Him. The righteousness of Christ has been imputed to us, and the life we live now is Christ living in us. When you think about your life, think Christ. All Christ, all the time. Serve Him, obey Him, and let Him direct your steps. Most of all, love Him (**1 John 4:19**). You CAN answer the prayer of Jesus and heaven will rejoice!

We are here to assist you in any way as you desire to grow in faith and answer the prayer of Jesus. Please contact the Madison Church of Christ, and we will be at your service!

"Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (**Hebrews 7:25**).

My Notes

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