

21 Days To  
*Spiritual*  
*Renewal*

A Prayer Devotional



21 DAYS OF PRAYER AND FASTING FOR

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# SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

7 DEVOTIONALS & PRAYERS FOR PERSONAL RENEWAL

7 DEVOTIONALS & PRAYERS FOR FAMILY RENEWAL

7 DEVOTIONALS & PRAYERS FOR OUR CHURCH & COMMUNITY RENEWAL

**READ** THE PASSAGE & DEVOTION

**REFLECT** ON THE APPLICATION

**PRAY** THE PRAYER

If you have a testimony that is a result of walking through this prayer devotional please email us with it at

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# INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this devotion is to be a guide for our 21 days of corporate prayer and fasting. We know that renewal and revival are a sovereign work of God. We can't make it happen! However, God has ordained "means of grace" to pour out His Spirit in extraordinary ways to bring renewal to the Church, revival that brings many sinners to Christ, and at times reformation that transforms the very fabric of society. We seek Him because He first loved us and He is worthy of our love and worship. We ask that He may move by His Spirit to convict us of sin and idols, giving us the gift of repentance, rekindle the love and fire of God in our hearts, and give us a love that moves us to share our faith boldly.

May God bring renewal individually, in families, and at Gathering Church. As Jesus is the light of the world, may we be children of light in this world. May it be done for the glory of our Triune God. Amen!

## DAY I, PERSONAL RENEWAL THE HEART

**SCRIPTURE** Matthew 13:1-23; Matthew 15:16-20

One of the things that is so important in experiencing spiritual renewal and continual renewal (Rev.2:4; Phil. 1:3-11) is to understand the importance of the heart in scripture. The heart is simply the center of a person's being, and the source of their thoughts, passions, and decisions. Jesus made a reference to this truth in Matthew 15:19. In Proverbs 4:23 we are encouraged to guard our hearts diligently because all the issues of life come from our hearts. Real change & transformation happen in the heart! We often look at our behavior but miss the root(s) in our heart (James 4:1-3). Only God truly knows our hearts (Romans 8:27-29). Furthermore, we tend to deceive ourselves in believing what is truly in our hearts because sin has the power to deceive us (Jer.17:9). Because only God really knows our hearts, we need to invite His Spirit to shine His light in those dark places where sin and idols hide and thrive. In the parable of The Sower, Matthew 13:1-23, Jesus shared four soils or four kinds of hearts. A farmer knows the importance of the soil condition for growing healthy crops. Here the seed is a reference to the preaching of God's Word and the fruit of the message is dependent on the condition of the heart. First, in this parable is the soil that is hardened and cannot receive. This may be because of the hardness of heart caused by sin and idols in our lives. Satan comes immediately and steals the Word. The other kind of heart is the one who receives the Word with joy but never allows the Spirit of God to water it and cause the roots to grow deep. This soil is rocky and shallow and therefore the seed cannot produce deep roots to withstand the time of testing and persecution that come. Satan often uses trials to cause us to doubt God's word and promises. The third soil is the thorny soil. This refers to the heart that is filled with idols. Worry, riches, and the pleasures of life are all a reference to the idols in our hearts that eventually choke the Word of God from our hearts, and therefore, we bear no fruit. Last is the good soil. This is the heart that receives the Word and allows the Spirit of God to give understanding and bear fruit. This may be through meditation of the Word of God sown in our hearts. I believe that meditation takes God's Word from our head into our heart, so that the gospel preached to us will bear a thirty, sixty, and hundred-fold return. Which soil describes your heart best? Renewal comes as the Spirit changes our heart to look more and more like the heart of Jesus.

### APPLICATION

- Present your heart before the Lord and ask the Spirit of God to show you any sin or idol(s) in your heart. Read Psalms 139:23,24.
- Take a few minutes to be silent and quiet before the Lord. I love Eccl. 5:2 where we are told to listen more than talk in prayer.
- After you hear something from the Spirit confess & repent of any sin or idol. If you don't hear something immediately, don't worry, He will speak in his timing as you continue to seek Him.

**PRAYER** Father, would you search my heart by your Spirit and see if there is anything hurtful and offensive to you. I recognize I am often deceived by my own sin & idols! I need your light to shine where sins and idols hide. I want to have the heart that is good soil for your Word so I may bear much fruit for your glory Heavenly Father. Give me ears to hear your voice and eyes to see your holiness. This is not something I can do by willpower but by the work of your Holy Spirit. So, Spirit who is the refining fire of God, sanctify me that I might bear much fruit. This is not so I will be loved by you because you already love me. Therefore, because I am loved and can never break your love for me by my behavior, let me bear much fruit for your glory Father. I know you do this through pruning & discipline. Help me to receive your pruning & discipline in my life Father. Your correction is not your rejection but your love. Jesus, greatly shine in this world. Jesus, as you are the light of the world, so make us to be children of light (Eph. 5:8). Help me not to be afraid to come naked before you with my sins and idols and never hide from you and cover myself with fig leaves, my own righteousness, like Adam & Eve, because Jesus, you cover me with your righteousness! In Jesus name I pray! Amen

## DAY 2, PERSONAL RENEWAL REPENTANCE

**SCRIPTURE** Acts 3:19; Mark 1:15; Proverbs 28:13

In Acts 3:19 we find an amazing promise of scripture for experiencing renewal in our lives. Apostle Peter is preaching to Jews and makes a promise that if the people repent of their sins, not only will they be forgiven of their sins because of Jesus' death and resurrection, but they will experience times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. This means many times of renewal and refreshing for their journey of faith on this earth. I need to experience times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord because I also have times and seasons of spiritual dryness, lukewarmness and even coldness toward my Savior. Other times I am just weary from fighting the good fight of faith, experiences of disappointments and great losses, doubts, church hurt, testing and tribulations in this life. In these times I have cried to my Heavenly Father, and He has brought renewal and refreshing to my soul. You too can experience renewal and refreshing from the Lord. However, notice it is because of repentance that renewal and refreshing happen. This is not a work we do but a work of the Spirit in our hearts. I have read many books on revival and I belonged to a ministry that emphasized revival. From these I have seen how one of the true marks of revival is "heart repentance." However, there is a big different between gospel repentance and religious repentance. In gospel repentance we not only receive the "passive obedience of Christ, him dying on a cross and taking all our sins, but his "active obedience" as well, His obedient life to the Father. When we sin, we can thank Jesus for obeying where we could not obey the Father. In gospel repentance we look to Jesus for the finished work of salvation and receive the forgiveness He has already given us. In the gospel we don't promise to do better, to be righteous, but rather we receive the righteousness of Christ. In gospel repentance we look to Jesus our savior and not our acts of repentance. Jesus is our salvation!

I like what Pastor Robert Murray M'Cheyne said about this matter:

"Learn much of the Lord Jesus. For every look at yourself, your sins, take ten looks at Christ. He is altogether lovely. Such infinite majesty, and yet such meekness and grace, and all for sinners, even the chief! Live much in the smiles of God."

When we sin, the devil will try to convince us to look again and again and again at our sin, beat ourselves up, doubt and feel unworthy to receive mercy and forgiveness. But again look at the one who cried to the Father "it is finished!" and rejoice in all Jesus has done. In the gospel we receive both the "active obedience" of Christ and His "passive obedience on the cross."

### APPLICATION

- When you sin this week spend more time looking at Jesus and thanking Jesus that his "active obedience" is yours. Therefore, when you sin practice again and again "celebrating" the fact that Jesus obeyed in your stead because He is our representative. He perfectly obeyed and fulfilled the law. Rejoice in His obedience rather than wallow in your sin.
- If you haven't read "Gentle & Lowly" by Dane Ortlund, I would highly recommend you get a copy. This book, more than any book I know, has helped me see and know Jesus' and our Heavenly Father's heart for sinners.
- Read Tim Keller's article on "A life of Repentance: the difference between gospel & religious repentance." You can Google this short article.

**PRAYER** Father, my heart is sometimes lukewarm towards you. Forgive me for believing lies about you and allowing my heart to harden against you. Set me free from the lies of Satan about you, chiefly that you are not a good God. I believe in my head that you are a good Father, but I don't believe that in my heart. Even though I know you love me and delight in me, I functionally live like an orphan rather than your child. Rekindle my heart for you and return me to my first love (Rev. 2:4). When I sin help me to celebrate Jesus' obedience rather than fixate on my sin and wallow in condemnation. Amen!

## DAY 3, PERSONAL RENEWAL SHAME

**SCRIPTURE** Genesis 2:25, Genesis 3:1-24

Ed Welch, a gospel centered biblical counselor, believes and argues convincingly in his book, "Shame," that every human being is plagued with shame. Shame has many layers of armor for self-protection. It effects how humans see themselves, others, and do relationships. He states that from beginning to end, the bible is about shame. In Genesis 2:25 Adam & Eve are naked and having no shame. They felt no shame before God and each other because there was no sin. They had perfect union with God and each other. However, after their fall they hid from God (Genesis 3:1-24) because they felt immediate shame and tried to cover themselves with fig leaves. Some scholars believe they were covered with the glory of God but lost their glory when they sinned. Shame caused them to first cover themselves with fig leaves so others wouldn't see their flaws. Secondly, they hid from God when he called them because they became afraid of Him. Thirdly, they hid as self-protection against being transparent and vulnerable with others. Finally, shame affected Adam's relationship with Eve when he blamed her for his sin. Rejection also entered their hearts. They begin to feel rejection from God (but it was a lie because God did not reject them) and each other. This leads to further self-protection. We self-protect by wearing mask and pretending to be different from who we believe ourselves to be because we fear rejection. We also shame others including our spouses, children, and friends because we are rooted in shame. However, our hope is in the gospel. I have received so much freedom in my own life because of the gospel, and I know you can too. Jesus took on all our shame on the cross. He experienced extreme shame on the cross. He was totally naked and shamed by the people, so he could break the chains of shame on us. This is often a slow process but one worth pursuing as we grow and believe the gospel in our lives. Read Hebrews 12:1-3. Ask God to reveal any shame in your life and free you from it.

### APPLICATION

- We must continue to grow and believe that we are covered with Jesus' righteousness and not our own. This gift of righteousness will slowly but surely begin to break the hold of shame in our lives. Read Philippians 3:1-11. Paul's testimony is that he gladly exchanged his filthy righteousness for the beautiful righteousness of Christ.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you see and fight shame. One of the ways to break shame is sharing your shame with others you trust. You will find, if they also struggle with shame, you are not alone in this battle. Shame is a universal human condition.
- Join a Redemption Group at Gathering to further understand what shame is and how to get free because of the finished work of Christ.

**PRAYER** Father, I confess that I often feel shame and rejection. I confess that I sometimes also shame other people because I feel shame. Deliver me from the chains of shame. Father, help me to remove my mask of self-protection and fear of what others think of me because I am loved by you. I am your beloved son/daughter, and nothing I do, or people say about me can change that. My identity is not shame but a child who is loved, accepted, and delighted in by you. Help me to truly believe this in my heart. Break the chains of shame and help me to be your instrument of freeing others of shame. Amen.

## DAY 4, PERSONAL RENEWAL UNFORGIVENESS & BITTERNESS

**SCRIPTURE** Romans 15:7

One morning I went out for a jog. Shortly into my run a small rock from the gravelly trail I was on found its way into my shoe. The discomfort it caused was mild. I was in a hurry to finish my exercise that morning so I deemed it unnecessary and inefficient to waste time removing the rock from my shoe. However, over time the mild discomfort became a constant irritation and eventually turned into a gate altering pain that I could no longer overlook. I was forced to remove the small pebble or it would have been unbearable to continue jogging. I am confident that if I had left it unattended and continued to run, or even walk, that an infection would have ensued. Perhaps if things had gotten severe enough my leg would even need to be amputated!! This is what happens when unforgiveness sets in. Someone wounds us, whether intentional or unintentional, and we chose to not extend forgiveness. In the moment the wound they inflict may appear mild, but overtime Satan delights to shower gasoline on it. Unforgiveness turns into bitterness and that bitterness pollutes our emotional and physical wellbeing. Eventually our bitterness begins to effect the people around us. What perhaps started as a small pebble becomes an egregious mountain that dominates and suffocates every aspect of our life. Stage 4 Bitterness is the worst disease a person can be infected by. Left unaddressed bitterness can LITERALLY kill us and even kill the people around us. Bitterness brings on the slowest, most agonizing death possible. It is not an overstatement to say that unforgiveness which turns into bitterness is the #1 torture tactic Satan uses on his enemies (which includes all of mankind). What is the #1 medication that addresses unforgiveness that can go septic when it becomes bitterness? The grace of God extended to sinners in Jesus Christ. How do we administer this medicine? 1) We accept in our heart the heinous nature of our sin towards God: We rebelled against God, ignored Him, told ourself and others lies about His wisdom and love, murdered Him in our hearts, and we committed adultery by worshipping things other than Him. 2) We stand amazed at the love and forgiveness we have received in Jesus. Our sin nailed him to the cross. He died willingly so that we could be forgiven. He paid the price for the sin debt we owed. He gifted to us not only forgiveness but also His righteousness. We are accepted by God. Nothing more is owed. 3) We understand that Jesus not only died for our sin, but for the sin of the person who wronged us. Just like Jesus made payment for our sin, He also made payment for their sin. If God does not demand payment from them because of Jesus sacrifice, who are we to demand it from them. 4) We extend to the one(s) who has hurt us the same mercy and grace that has been extended to us in Jesus.

\*Forgiving those who wrong us does not mean that we fail to acknowledge their wrongdoing. It does not rule out earthly forms of justice or the need for boundaries. However, it does free us from the perceived need to continuously visit judgement and punishment upon them. It also frees us from the consuming narrative that bitterness constructs which can destroy us and the people around us.

### APPLICATION

- Almost every Christian I have met that is dealing with unforgiveness quickly informs me they have forgiven the person who hurt them. Unforgiveness is perhaps the greatest theological truth that Christians know in their head but fail to carry out from their heart. To help, here are some signs that unforgiveness exists in your life and is turning into bitterness: When the person's name is mentioned you immediately have negative thoughts. When something positive is spoken about them you instinctively need to follow up with a negative affirmation about the person. The individual cannot do right in your eyes, even good qualities or gestures you interpret as evil. You avoid them in public. You lack empathy and compassion for them. You see hardships they face as self-inflicted and warranted, inwardly rejoicing in them.

**PRAYER** Heavenly Father, reveal to me where unforgiveness lives in my heart. Make it clear to me people that have wronged and wounded me that I have yet to fully forgive. Also, show me the depths of my sin against you and the depths of your great love for me. As I understand what I have given you (my sin) and what you have given me (forgiveness and adoption) please help me to extend this grace to those who I am harvesting unforgiveness towards. Amen.

## DAY 5, PERSONAL RENEWAL SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

**SCRIPTURE** Luke 18:9-14

No one ever says "I don't need grace!" However, our daily attitude can be such that we do truly believe this in our heart. We see around us an endless stream of people who don't know the "right" way to think, act, or speak. We are adept at quickly assessing where others are not seeing things correctly. Our self-righteousness often hides under the guise of being "wise" or "discerning" or being a "truth-teller." This is why self-righteousness is such a difficult spiritual illness for a person to recognize in themselves. When you tell a self-righteous person they are self-righteous they are quick to explain to you why you have not "rightly" understood them. In fact, they are very aware of what self-righteousness is, they know many people that suffer from it, and they are very intentional to not be like them. Perhaps the saddest part of self-righteousness is that it blinds us from seeing the grace of God, receiving it in our life, and showing it to others. As long as we see ourself as an educated performer (religious or non-religious) it will keep us from seeing our daily need for the abundant grace of God, the rescuing work of the Gospel of Jesus, and as a result the grace of God will not flow to us and through us to others. Instead of looking to your own rightness today, look to Jesus. He alone is righteous, offers us grace, and clothes us in His righteousness.

### APPLICATION

- What do you "pride" yourself in outside of Jesus?
- How are you tempted to look down on others who don't know and do what you know and do?
- What current sins do you struggle with that require you to look to God for grace? If you struggle to identify any this is not a sign of your sanctified state but of your self-righteousness. Ask God to begin revealing to you the daily sin struggles you have.

**PRAYER** Heavenly Father, expose in me the self-righteousness that exists. Forgive me for believing and living as a grace graduate. Help me to see and receive the copious grace that I am in need of and have been gifted in the Lord Jesus. Would you help me to find my "rightness" not in what I know and do but solely in the righteousness that Jesus has clothed me in. As I become a receiver of grace, would you also help me to be a conduit of grace to others. Let it be so!

## DAY 6, PERSONAL RENEWAL IDOLS OF THE HEART

### SCRIPTURE 2 Peter 1:3

Martin Luther once said our hearts are “idol factories.” When I think of this truth, imagery of a conveyer-belt appears churning out one idol after another. Although the conveyer-belt of an assembly line post-dates the day of Martin Luther, I think the imagery still fits. We are constantly looking to things outside of God to give us what only God can provide. On a daily basis we look to people, jobs, money, and other objects to give us the identity, worth, peace, joy, provision, fulfillment, and contentment that can only fully be found in God himself. A child thinks I will be satisfied when I am done with school. A single person believes I will be happy when I get married. A married person tells themselves I will be content when I have a child. A young parent is confident they will be joyful when their child is old enough to be potty trained. An employee rehearses the tune that they will finally be free when they are retired. The conveyor belt moves forward...one idol after another. There are not two categories of people 1) those who worship idols and 2) those who don't. The only two categories of people that exist are 1) those who don't think they worship idols and 2) those who acknowledge they struggle with worshipping idols and continuously turn back to God for what only He can provide. Jesus is the only one who was never guilty of worshipping idols. Jesus offers us another conveyer-belt, a conveyer-belt of grace. Because of Jesus we are gifted the ability to acknowledge the idols we look to, repent of them, and turn again to God for what He alone can give us.

### APPLICATION

- What are you prone to look to for security, contentment, and rest outside of Jesus?
- What good things (your families wellbeing, success at your job, money in the bank...) control your outlook on life, your attitude, and how you treat others?
- If you asked others who know you well what your idols are, what would they say?

**PRAYER** Heavenly Father, forgive me for the things I look to for what only you can give. Will you help me to identify the idols in my life. Will you give me grace to turn away from these idols and turn to you for all things pertaining to life and godliness. Thank you for the conveyer-belt of grace that flows from Jesus. Amen.

## DAY 7, PERSONAL RENEWAL REGRET

**SCRIPTURE** 1 Corinthians 15:3-11

It's natural to look back over your life and wish you would have made different decision or that circumstances in your life would have been different. Perhaps it's a sport you quit too early, a girl you wish you would have asked out or a boy you wish you would have said yes to, a class you should have worked harder in, a job you chose not to take, a relationship you shouldn't have allowed to fall apart, a financial investment you could have jumped on, or a health decision that would have spared you the anguish you currently experience. Regrets are a powerful tool in the enemies' hands. Every person who has ever walked the earth can look back and see missed opportunities that would have benefited them in the present. However, Satan takes these missed opportunities and adds to them condemnation, shame, rejection, anger, bitterness, and hopelessness. When these are added to our missed opportunities we have the perfect recipe for regret. Regrets keep us from moving forward in the present, they resign us to a "never as good as it could be" existence, and they spill out of us wounding the people around us. There are two very helpful truths that help snuff out regret. 1) God is in control of all things. 2) God uses all things for our ultimate good and to show His glory. God is not only actively using the good of our lives, but He is actively using our failures too. Nowhere is this clearer than in the story of the crucifixion of Jesus. Many people had reason for regret. Israel rejected and murdered their King, the disciples abandoned Jesus when He needed them most, and Peter outright denied knowing Jesus three times. However, God was using all of this for the good of the people and for His own glory. God used the missteps that led to the crucifixion of Jesus so that Israel might be able to be saved through a covenant of grace, the disciples might know Jesus as more than a Savior from their circumstances but as a Savior from their sin, and Peter might see his own need for grace and find the tender mercy extended to him by Jesus.

### APPLICATION

- What lingering regrets haunt you?
- How has God used these for good in the past or in the present? How might He use them in the future?
- How has God used your missteps to draw you to Himself, help you too look to Him for life, or conform you into His image?

**PRAYER** Heavenly Father, forgive me for becoming mired in regret(s) and in doing so functionally denying that you are in control and using all things for my good and your glory. Help me to have the humility to recognize past failures and to have faith in the knowledge that you have forgiven me and are using them for my good, the good of others, and your glory. Amen.

## DAY 8, FAMILY RENEWAL WAYWARD CHILDREN & FAMILY MEMBERS

**SCRIPTURE** Luke 18:1-8

This parable's main point is that when we pray, we should never give up on our prayers until we have an answer from God. Jesus gives us an example of a widow who did not give up on receiving justice from an unjust judge until she got an answer to her request. We live in an instant culture where everything is received quickly. When we order at a McDonalds or Chick-fil-A we expect our orders to come quickly. Sometimes when we pray, we expect God to answer our prayers quickly. However, often He does not because He is working on those we are praying for and even working His sanctification in our own hearts. It is easy to give up faith and hope after months and even years of praying for wayward children and family members. We desire instant answers to our prayers and allow Satan to discourage us and think God has not heard our prayers. Even worse, that He is not a God who answers our prayers. I prayed for years for my brother Edwin and my dad. I am talking 30 or more years. By the grace of God, I saw both come to the Lord before their deaths. There were many times I felt discouraged and hopeless. But I was reminded of this scripture and encouraged to continue to pray. Remember, it is through endurance with patience that we sometimes receive an answer to our prayers, so continue praying for your wayward children and family members. God hears our prayers, and He will answer in His timing.

### APPLICATION

- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you pray for your children, lost family members, and friends you are sharing the gospel with (Romans 8:26-28).
- As you pray, ask God to give you wisdom on how and when to speak to them. God will open moments. You can join Him on His work instead of trying to force things.
- Ask God to give you "little rocks" to put in their shoes. You know how annoying it is to have a little rock in your shoe. I heard this from an apologist who talked about defending our faith with family members and lost people. He asked God for words or thoughts that would be like little rocks in their shoes. Wisdom from God that will pierce hard hearts and bother their minds and worldviews.
- No matter how your family members are responding to the gospel, keep putting your faith in the one who leaves the ninety-nine sheep to find the one that is lost, embraces and kisses prodigals, and loves even religious types hardened to the true gospel.
- Keep a prayer journal on how the Holy Spirit shows you how to pray specifically for each wayward child or extended family members or friends. This will help remind you God has answered your prayers in the past when you are feeling He is not answering them in the present (Ps. 5:1-3).

**PRAYER** Father give me the heart you and Jesus' share for sinners. Let me see them through your eyes, and not through outward appearance because only you know their hearts. Give me the words to speak with your authority and unction that will break through their blindness and hardness of heart. Spirit, I ask you to help me to pray in line with our High Priest and intercessor, Jesus. Jesus, who is before our Heavenly Father in intercession for our wayward children and family members, give me the wisdom and words to put "little rocks" in their shoes that you use to set them free. Set them free from the blindness and the work of Satan that keeps them from coming to Christ. Father, give me faith, endurance, and patience to keep praying until I see the manifestation of my prayers. Give me the spiritual discernment to see what you are doing and join you and not try to make things happen in my power. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

## DAY 9, FAMILY RENEWAL BROKEN FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

**SCRIPTURE** Romans 5:8

Doing life inside of a family can be complicated. I've heard it said before "We are all saints in isolation." How true this is! Left to ourselves we are patient, kind, thoughtful, controlled, and loving. However, thrust us into community and our sin is exposed. Our temper, jealousy, judgementalism, and selfish desires come to life. Nowhere is this more true than inside a family. Wounded and sinful people doing life alongside one another can easily multiply wounding and sin. As a result, in almost every family there exists broken and strained relationships: Children who don't talk with their parents, siblings who haven't connected in years, cousins who are more likely to punch one another than hug. It may be that some relationships are not completely severed but tensions still exist. Unforgiveness, jealousy, rivalry, anger, and pride lead to cordial encounters that are far from loving. Some families are more dysfunctional than others, but all families struggle with disfunction! Jesus himself experienced wounding from family members. His brothers rejected His ministry and even mocked Him at times. Yet, after His resurrection at least two of them become disciples and leaders in the church (James and Jude). The cross is a pathway to healed relationships! During our 21 day journey towards spiritual renewal we want to take a moment to recognize and pray for estranged and strained relationships inside our families.

### APPLICATION

- Where are severed relationships inside your family? What relationships are not completely broken but are strained? What relationships are ongoing but unhealthy (co-dependency, enabling, etc.)? These broken and/or strained relationships are the fruit of Gospel breakdown. Ask God to help family members forgive as Jesus forgives them, find their identity in Christ and not what others think of them, trust that God is sovereign over wrongdoing and is using it for their good and God's glory, look to God and not another person for their security and fulfillment, love people despite their weaknesses and sin as God still loved us while yet sinners.
- Do you personally have a broken or strained relationship with another person(s) in your family: A person you avoid, have largely negative thoughts towards, consistent conflict with? What does it look like to welcome them as the Lord has welcomed you? How can you move towards them (even if healthy boundaries are needed) and pray for them? Is there unforgiveness in your heart towards them or bitterness that has built up that you should confess to God and release?

**PRAYER** Heavenly Father, would you bring healing to my family. Would you bring peace to conflicted relationships. Will you restore relationships that have been lost. Will you reveal your sufficiency to family members who are wounded and wandering. Please lead me in walking out forgiveness towards those who have offended and harmed me. Show me how I can be an ambassador of your healing in my family and an example of welcoming family members the way you have welcomed me.

## DAY 10, FAMILY RENEWAL THE BLAME GAME

### SCRIPTURE James 4:1-3

Hide and Seek, Hop Scotch, Go Fish, Spoons, I Spy, and Yahtzee are games regularly played by families. Just their mention probably elicits memories from the past. However, there is another game that all families play and have grown adept at over the years. It is the Blame Game. This game dates as far back as Adam and Eve. In Genesis chapter three God confronts Adam and Eve after disobeying. Adam is quick to blame Eve for his sin and Eve is quick to blame God and the serpent for her sin. Ever since, mankind has thrived at blame-shifting. It comes so naturally to us that we actually believe our sinful thoughts, words, and actions are not really our fault at all. When we act in anger, impatience, selfishness, or deception we tell ourselves "this is not who I am." This belief allows us to mark it down as an aberration that is not characteristic of who we are and as a result must be the fault of another. Our sin is perceived as something outside of us that is forced upon us instead of something inside of us. For example, when we explode in anger it is not a person or circumstance outside of us that forced us to act in a foreign manner. Instead, our explosive outburst is a sign that anger lives in our heart and the person or circumstance provided the right moment for it to reveal itself. It is humbling to realize that our greatest problems are not outside of us but inside of us. This realization is also one of the greatest gifts that God can give us. Why? 1) It provides us the opportunity to see and receive the vast ocean of grace we have been gifted in Jesus. A small view of our sin leads to a small view of Jesus. A big view of our sin leads to a big view of Jesus. 2) It opens the door to real sanctification in our life. The goal is not seeing our sin and working harder to do what is right. All this amounts to is working harder to build a stronger cage to contain the sin within our hearts. Real sanctification from the inside out requires confession. Confessing to God and others the sin that lives in us. Confessing to God and others we cannot change ourselves and we need their help. The step of confession will feel like weakness, and some others around us might even perceive it this way, but it is really a sign of strength and a step towards authentic healing and freedom. 3) The outworking of 1 and 2 is that we love others better. Some people say that love is a choice. Yes, at times we will need to choose to love people even when we don't feel like doing it. Yet, the greatest love is that which flows from a heart that is healed and freed from the sin within. We choose to love because we actually love. Only God can heal us and set us free in this way. Thankfully Jesus died with this very goal in mind.

### APPLICATION

- What frustrates you most about members of your family? What are re-occurring points of conflict?
- Believe for a moment that your greatest problems are not outside of you but inside of you. How can you apply this to the frustrations you deal with related to family? This does not excuse their wrongdoing, but it does highlight your own sin battles that are brought to the surface through it. What are the sin battles in your own heart you need to face?
- Confess your sin battles to God. Confess to Him that you are helpless to overcome them by yourself. Confess your need for Him to heal your heart and cleanse it from unrighteousness. Ask him to do such a work in your heart that you will choose to love people because you actually love them!!

**PRAYER** Heavenly Father, out of love for me and those around me please reveal where sin lives in my heart. As you expose my sin please also expose the even greater measure of grace that I have been gifted in Jesus. Cleanse my heart from sin and replace it with a deep love for you, my family members, my church family, and the people in my community and beyond. Let it be so Lord!

## DAY II, FAMILY RENEWAL JEALOUSY

**SCRIPTURE** James 3:9-12

Jealousy is something that we all have experienced at one time or another. It is a human condition of fallen humanity. It is the way the world functions in competition and comparison with each other. Throughout scripture we are told of the damage jealousy does in relationships (Prov. 6:34; Prov. 14:30, James 3:16). We see it in the story of Joseph when his brothers became jealous because he was Jacob's favorite son. Jealousy leads them to betray Joseph by selling him as a slave (Genesis). We see jealousy working in the life of the Corinthian Church, as they compare themselves in their giftings and divide themselves best on who they believe is the best preacher. Paul warns they are destroying God's Church not building His body. In 1 Corinthians 13:4 Paul says, "love is not jealous." However, James' words in James 3:16 is even more alarming when he speaks of jealously bringing every kind of disorder, evil, and that it is demonic (James 3:16). How do we battle jealousy? First, we forgive others like Joseph did when, by God's grace, he forgave his brothers. Second, we find our identity in Christ and not in what others think of us and do to us. This frees us from what others think of us and what we may even think of ourselves when we are tempted to be jealous of others. We are loved and rich in Christ. Third, we pray and bless others who are jealous of us. We refuse to return evil for evil but know that good overcomes evil (Romans 12:21). Finally, perhaps most difficult, start to thank God for the blessings He has gifted others with that you yourself would like to have. This is certainly a work of renewal and the work of His Holy Spirit!!

### APPLICATION

- Make a list of people who you know you have jealousy towards and/or have hurt you.
- Forgive them as Christ has forgiven you. It may be difficult and in some cases surface deep pain and hurt. Ask the Spirit to help you forgive.
- By the grace of the Spirit, start blessing them and praying for them.
- Make a list of people you may have jealousy towards and thank God for blessing them. Do this until you feel released from jealousy and truly experience joy for God's blessing in their lives.

**PRAYER** Father, I confess I have had jealousy towards others who seemed more gifted and blessed than me. May the words of James sink deeply into my heart about jealousy bringing every kind of disorder and even being demonic. Break any strongholds of jealousy over me that are demonic and have captured my heart and bring rottenness in my bones. Give me a spirit of joy and thanksgiving when you seem to bless my brothers and sisters more than me. May I find my identity in you to battle against jealousy in my own heart. May my life bring you glory by building your Church through love and not tearing it down because of jealousy in my heart. Renew, cleanse, and deliver my heart from the spirit of Satan who works jealousy in filling our hearts in comparing and competing with each other in this world. In Christ's name I pray!

## DAY 12, FAMILY RENEWAL A SPIRIT OF CRITIQUE

**SCRIPTURE** Romans 8:14-15

It's easy to have a spirit of critique. To look around and evaluate how all circumstances and people could be better. We are not consciously trying to overlook the good but our eyes can't help but focus on what is out of order, off center, or not quite right. Personally (Pastor Ryan), I excel at this. If there was PhD in critiquing, I would be unanimously awarded an honorary doctorate by the people who do life with me. In one sense this "skillset" can be positive because people like me are constantly "improving" ourself, the people around us, and the organizations we are a part of. However, what we may see as an asset can often have more nefarious origins and outworkings. The sour roots and rotten fruits of our critical spirit are being hyper-aware of what we need to improve in ourself, we are never satisfied with how things are, we believe God see us as mired in flaws that need to be fixed, and we unknowingly make the people in our life feel like they are never enough. We might verbally tell the people in our life we love them but the hundreds of jabbing critiques we give them communicate another message. Sadly, in our effort to "help" the people around us we instead drive them away and leave them feeling insufficient and hopeless. The reason I label this tendency a "spirit" of critique is because I believe it is more than a personal characteristic. I believe it is spiritual in its origin. Why? 1) A person of constant critique will create a culture of constant critique. Eventually, a whole family or organization is hyper focused on what others are doing wrong or insufficient. 2) The critiquing gene can be traced from one generation to another. A parent that is influenced by a spirit of critique gives birth to a child that operates in a spirit of critique. Over time, generations of highly critical people and cultures exist. How do we combat a spirit of critique and reprogram our families, organizations, and cultures? I think the answer is found in another spirit. The spirit of adoption. The more Christians understand and experience the reality of their adoption in Christ a new way forward is forged. Yes, we are saved from our sin because of Jesus, but we have also been adopted into a family. God is now a Heavenly Father and Jesus is our brother. We are welcomed into the presence of God, deeply loved by Him, and He is proud to call us His own. Zephaniah 3:17 tells us that God "dances with joy over us with singing." Believe this today. Because of Jesus God does not see you as mired in flaws that you should have overcome or outgrown by now. Instead, He sees you as His beloved child that He dances with joy over and sings about. Allow this truth to transform the way you view yourself in the eyes of God. Allow it to transform how you view yourself. Allow it to transform how you view the people around you! Allow it to transform the culture around you, the family you live in, and generations of people to come.

### APPLICATION

- It's hard to self-assess your own critical spirit or even the culture of criticism that you may live in. There are three ways you can expose this.
- 1) Pray and ask God for revelation.
- 2) Ask other people if your disposition is hyper-critical. \*Don't criticize them for being honest with you!
- 3) Look for fruits that can indicate a spirit of critique: being a perfectionist, never being satisfied, consistently barking "suggestions" at the people around you, ongoing irritation with yourself and those around you concerning what they are doing wrongly.

**PRAYER** Heavenly Father, reveal to me how much I am loved by you. Teach me and lead me to experience the fullness of the adoption I have in Jesus. As you do this transform the way I view myself and the people around me. Be delighted to replace a spirit of critique with the spirit of adoption and allow a spirit of adoption to permeate my family, church, and community. Let it be so!

## DAY 13, FAMILY RENEWAL PEACEKEEPER VS PEACEMAKER

**SCRIPTURE** Colossians 1:19-20

I've never met a person that didn't want peace. I have yet to hear a person pray for strife, disunity, animosity, stress, chaos, or war. Even those who go to war do so for the ultimate purpose of having peace. Peace is, in itself, a good desire. After all, Jesus is the Prince of Peace. However, the way we go about seeking peace is often not godly. God calls us to be peacemakers, but our natural default is to be peacekeepers. What's the difference? That's a great question! We often confuse them and think we are following God's calling to be a peacemaker but in reality, we are being a peacekeeper. Peacekeeping can take two forms. Some peacekeepers avoid conflict at all costs. Their true goal is not genuine peace but a lack of conflict. When conflict brews they disappear, acquiesce, and appease. Their motto is "Let's get along to keep going along." They believe they are losing a battle to win the war but in reality, they are just allowing the war to rage on unhindered. The other form of peacekeeping is not passive at all but aggressive. When something is not going an individual's way and conflict begins to brew, they stomp out the conflict through dominance. These peacekeepers thrive on "putting people in their place." If someone disagrees with them, they shut down the opposition by bullying the opposing party through aggression or skillful articulation. Skillful articulators may not bend their opponent into submission through physical or emotional aggression and manipulation but instead calmly "logic" them into submission. The peacekeepers bullying can be carried out aggressively or calmly and calculated. Both serve the same purpose...to shut down the opponent, get their way, and eliminate conflict. Peacekeeping is very different than peacemaking. Peacemaking does not value "lack of conflict" but health and unity. Ironically, for relationships to become healthy and unified conflict is a necessary part of the process. Passive people have to stand up. Aggressive people have to stand down. Identifying the source of the conflict and working together (unified) to see it healed in the goal. Jesus desired to see us made spiritually healthy. Jesus desired to see us unified with God. To accomplish this, He stood down and allowed the creation to crucify him. He also stood up to sin, death, the wrath of God, and to the assault of Satan. Jesus was the truest of Peacemakers. Being a peacemaker like Jesus will push us outside of our comfort zone, require us to value health over the lack of conflict, and put aside our selfish desires for comfort, control, and personal fulfillment.

### APPLICATION

- Is your default peacekeeping through passivity or aggression (emotional, verbal, physical)?
- Examine the relationships in your life. What relationships are unhealthy? How may conflict be necessary to get to true health and unity? To be a peacemaker will you need to stand up or stand down?
- Sometimes we fail to be a true peacemaker because we are fearful of losing a relationship or losing another self-perceived need. What does it look like to trust God and follow Him despite our fear?

**PRAYER** Heavenly Father, forgive me for being a peacekeeper instead of a peacemaker. Help me to value health and unity in relationships over a lack of conflict. Help me to know when to stand up and when to stand down. Help me to be a peacemaker even when it costs me something personally, just as it cost Jesus His life to make peace between you and me. Amen.

## DAY 14, FAMILY RENEWAL CHURCH INVOLVEMENT

**SCRIPTURE** Romans 16:1-16

Life is busy. God isn't only in a church building. More time with my family is needed. I can listen to Christian podcasts and worship music on my own. I still read my Bible and pray. Christians can be hard to deal with. Relationships are messy. I had a bad experience at a church. Christians are hypocrites. Leaders fall. They ask for your money. They want you to serve. It gets too political. ...These are just a sampling of reasons you can rationalize not going to a church and not being actively engaged in it. Although each rationalization may be accurate, they do not erase the calling and need to be a part of a church. When God saved us into a relationship with Himself, He also saved us into a relationship with the Church. To be in relationship with The Church requires being involved with A Local Church. Although it is tempting to believe we can be a thriving Christian who functions independently of a local church it is merely an allusion. It is in community that we grow, serve others, learn to love, and live on mission. This is the reason Satan likes to isolate us from the flock of God. In doing so he keeps us ineffective in our faith. He is ok if we obtain more Christian knowledge as long as we aren't utilizing it on the playing field of the local Church. Satan loves autonomous, pious, isolated, self-sufficient, professing Christians. The truth is that God has made us interdependent on one another. The believers in our local church are an expression of God's grace to us. As we do life with them we learn to forgive as Christ has forgiven us, we learn how to ask for forgiveness when we hurt others, we learn to consider others more important than ourselves, we learn how to persevere with one another, we learn what's it like to be truly known and still loved, we learn how to maintain unity, we learn humility and submission, we learn to rejoice with those who are rejoicing and weep with those who are weeping, we learn we can accomplish more for Christ together than alone, and so much more!!! Imagine seeing a person running around by themselves on a football field. When you ask them what they are doing they reply "playing a game of football!" As absurd as their behavior and perception of it may be, equally absurd is a Christian who perceives themselves as knowing and living for Jesus independent of a local church family. Remember, Jesus himself gave His time, resources, affections, giftings, and HIS LIFE all for the Church. Jesus loved the Church and spent Himself for her. Being conformed into the image of Jesus means loving and being spent for the people in our local church.

### APPLICATION

- Are you currently attending a local church? If so, have you become a member? What does it look like to serve others in the body? Have you built deep community where people know you better than you know yourself?
- If you're not actively involved in a local church what are your reasons? Although they might be true, in what ways do they serve as convenient excuses?
- If your struggling with having enough family time, the good news is that church offers you not less family time BUT more family time! When you were adopted into the family of God you not only gained a Heavenly Father but a multitude of siblings! It's time to do life with them!

**PRAYER** Heavenly Father, forgive me for my tendency to isolate myself from the family of God. Reveal to me the asset of grace that has been extended to me in a local church family. Conform me into your image, becoming a Christian that loves and lives for my siblings in a church family. Amen.

## DAY 15, CHURCH & COMMUNITY RENEWAL SERVING THE BODY

**SCRIPTURE** Philippians 2:1-11

It is such a remarkable statement when Jesus says that He did not come “to be served but to serve.” Jesus who is both God and man bows in humility and washes His disciples’ feet (John 13:1-17). He even washes the feet of Judas who will betray Him. He teaches His disciples if they want to be great in the Kingdom of God, they must take the same attitude of servanthood (read Matt. 20:20-28). Who has ever heard of a Great King making such a claim! History is filled with kings, military leaders, prime ministers, presidents, and CEO’s of companies whose attitude is to be served rather than serve others. The term “servant leadership” has been made popular in leadership books. However, it seems that the motive is often more to get people to serve the leader and the mission of the company, more than purely serving people for their good and well-being regardless of buying into the mission. In this passage in Philippians Paul is remembering Jesus’ words told to him by the other disciples. Nevertheless, Paul has experienced Jesus serving him in grace and love and transforms his heart to be like Jesus through the partnership and serving of others (Phil. 3-5). Paul sometimes calls himself a bondservant of Christ (Phil. 1:1). He has become a bondservant of Christ and to others because of the one who serves him and serves others through him in love. When we serve in the Church and use our gifts to build His Church (1 Cor. 12) we help the body of Christ grow into the maturity of the full stature of Christ (Eph. 4:13-16). Every gift is needed and is important in making this happen. Imagine a church where there is 100 percent of God’s people serving each other in one way or another and not just 20 percent. This would be a mark of renewal. It brings great joy to our Father’s heart when our attitudes are more like Jesus in serving others than being served. These are the ones who are the greatest in God’s kingdom. May God our Father give us grace to serve our families, our Church, and others outside the Church.

### **APPLICATION**

- Confess & repent, if you have liked more to be served than serve. Present your body as a sacrifice and bondservant and serve others because of the mercies of God (Ro. 12:1,2).
- Spend some time meditating, sanctifying imagination, reading the story of Jesus washing not only the disciples’ feet but yours (John 13:1-17). Include yourself in the story. Would you have reacted like Peter? Ask the Spirit to help you experience the heart of love in Jesus washing His disciple’s feet that you may have his heart to serve others.

**PRAYER** Father, we confess that we have not had a serving heart like Jesus. We enjoy being served more than serving others. Help us to think of others more than we think of ourselves. We confess and repent that we have been more like the world than a child of the kingdom. I ask you to transform our hearts to be more like Jesus who joyfully served His Father, others, and even His enemies, so that others may know your love and kindness through us as your body on earth. Give us a heart to serve the widows, orphans, and homeless in our community for this is true religion (James 1:27). Amen!

## DAY 16, CHURCH & COMMUNITY RENEWAL SPIRITUAL WARFARE

**SCRIPTURE** Ephesians 6:10-18

Scriptures makes it clear that Christians are in a spiritual war between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. We war against our flesh, the world, and Satan. All three are described in Ephesians 2:1-4. The flesh is that part of us that wants to rebel against God. The world is simply the fallen world whose god is Satan. Because we live in a secular and materialistic world, we sometimes forget there is an invisible spiritual world where there are evil angels under the rule of Satan opposing the purposes of God. In Ephesians 6:12 Paul reminds believers they do not fight flesh and blood, just humans, but principalities and powers and rulers that are not discerned by our natural eyes but spiritual eyes. However, we don't fight alone but with brothers and sisters. We have seen enough videos where lions separate a young baby doe from the herd and it becomes unable to defend itself. This is what Peter warns us about, the lion who is seeking to devour God's people (1 Peter 5:8). We are more protected when we fight together in unity than when we fight alone or divided. Satan wants to destroy our local churches, families, and individual lives. Paul gives three main points here in this passage to fight against these demonic forces. First, he tells us to fight in the strength and might of God. We fight from our identity and who God is in us. Because Jesus is seated in the heavenly places far from all principalities and power so are we (Eph. 2:6). We also depend upon the Spirit to empower us to resist and stand against the devil in the victory Jesus has already won on the cross (Col. 2:15). Secondly, we are encouraged to put on the whole armor of Christ (Eph. 6:11-17). There are two main interpretations of this. One, Paul is using the Roman soldiers with armor to describe being equipped for war. Each armor piece represents a specific truth of the gospel. For example, the sword is the word of God. We know that soldiers are given gear and weapons in war. Imagine going to war against a fierce enemy heavily loaded with machine guns, tanks, grenades, rockets, and bombs, and you just have water guns. God has not left us unequipped for this spiritual war. According to 2 Corinthians 10: 3-6 we have been given mighty weapons for fighting this spiritual war. Even though I think this is a good interpretation, I think Paul is speaking more about us putting on Christ, reminding ourselves, that the one who crushed the serpent's head, lives in us. This to me fits more the context and the whole book of Ephesians. John refers to Jesus in 1 John 4:4 when he states "greater is he that is in me than he that is in the world, the devil. Last of all, Paul tells us that we must pray with all kinds of prayers in the Spirit. It is the Spirit of God that helps us pray effectively in times of spiritual warfare. In fact, prayer is communication with our head, Jesus. In the Iraq war one of the strategies of the American military was to disconnect the communication of Iraqi soldiers with their headquarters and commanders. Satan tries to attack us also in our communication and communion with the Triune God. He wants us to be cut off from his voice and fight in our own strength. Prayer keeps us in communication with the commander in chief who has already defeated Satan and knows his strategies. Let us live in constant communion with the chief commander of the armies of God, Lord Jesus!

### APPLICATION

- Ask God to give you discernment to know whether you are fighting your flesh, the world, or demonic forces. Each one has different strategies and prayers to fight.
- Take appropriate scripture promises that apply to your circumstances and use them to fight against Satan's attacks, accusation, and lies. When Jesus was tempted by Satan, he said, "It is written."
- Above all, remember that the "serpent crusher" lives in you through His Spirit. He has already crushed the head of the serpent. Be encouraged as we face spiritual warfare, knowing Jesus already has brought victory and one day when He returns we will experience its fullness. Read Rom. 16:20.

**PRAYER** Father, thank you for not leaving us helpless and unequipped for spiritual warfare. Remind us that we have mighty weapons to tear down strongholds and every thought that is against the obedience of Christ. We are stronger as a body when we fight together and not alone. Help us to not separate ourselves from your body when we are attacked through depression and difficult times. Holy Spirit our helper, empower us to resist and stand against the devil. Amen!

## DAY 17, CHURCH & COMMUNITY RENEWAL RIVALRY

**SCRIPTURE** Philippians 2:1-11

Perhaps one of the most deceptive and misaligned attitudes amongst members in a local church is rivalry. We feel the need to be more recognized, gifted, accomplished, and acclaimed than other church members. Rivalry is deceptive because we tell ourselves we are merely concerned with correct theology, effective discipleship, healthy accountability, biblical ministry philosophies, or reaching the lost in our community and abroad. Rivalry is misaligned because it contradicts our calling to consider others better than ourselves, do nothing out of personal ambition, honor those who serve alongside of us, walk with the humility of Christ, and live with the recognition that “we are what we are by the grace of God,” not as a result of our personal efforts. The spirit of rivalry is often at the center of church factions and splits. This same spirit doesn’t just exist inside of local churches, but it can exist between local churches. Church members and leaders are quick to contrast their faithfulness and correctness against that of other local churches. Growing churches view their success as a validation of their correct theology and practices unlike the plateaued or shrinking churches near them. Conversely, the plateaued and shrinking churches view their attendance struggles as a validation of their faithfulness and correctness versus the “compromising” churches that are growing. It seems as if local churches are more concerned with supplanting one another than supporting one another. At the very least they perceive one another as competition, at worst the enemy! What is at the root of our rivalrous spirit? There are many possibilities: wounding, unforgiveness, misplaced personal worth, selfish ambition, and jealousy, just to name a few. Ultimately Satan is the answer. He would rather our emotion and energy be directed at tearing down one another and exalting self rather than glorifying God and reaching the lost. If your reading this your temptation may be to think “Preach it pastor Ryan! Christians are so guilty of this and it’s about time they started acting correctly!” However, such a response is not a sign of your innocence but of your culpability. As long as “others” are the one with the problem you will not only continue to live in your comfortable delusion, but you will continue to operate in a spirit of rivalry. As long as you view yourself as outside of the problem you will not make headway. Yet, when you see you are a part of the problem progress can be made. Jesus is the only one who has never operated in a spirit of rivalry. He lived for the glory of God, not the glory of self. He was willing to make himself the lowest so that we might be lifted up from our lowly state. He was satisfied with the approval of God and did not need the approval of man. This is what made Him a sufficient sacrifice for the rest of us who struggle with rivalry. It is also what makes Him the perfect sanctifier to transform our deceived and misaligned hearts.

### APPLICATION

- In what ways do you see a rivalrous heart at work in you towards other Christians in your church or towards other churches in your community? How are you prone to talk yourself up? To talk others down? Where are you jealous of other Christians or Churches? How are you being more competitive than cooperative? In what ways do you view yourself as an onlooker to the problem versus a participant in the problem?
- Ask God to reveal the rivalrous spirit in you that is prone to live under rocks that on the surface appear chivalrous. Confess these areas of rivalry to God. If appropriate, confess them and ask for forgiveness to the person(s) whom you have been rivalrous towards. Ask God to create a clean and contrite heart in you that sincerely loves other Christians, considers them better than himself/herself, and finds joy in co-laboring alongside of them.

**PRAYER** Heavenly Father, please forgive me for the rivalrous spirit that exists in me towards others in my local church and other Christians and churches in my community. Help me to consider others more significant than myself. Teach me to delight in honoring others above myself. Create in me a heart that not only loves other church members but is in love with them! Let it be so!

## DAY 18, CHURCH & COMMUNITY RENEWAL FEAR OF THE LORD

**SCRIPTURE** Hebrews 12:28,29

In the Old Testament the fear of the Lord is an important and often mentioned theme. There are too many scripture references to cite here. However, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge & wisdom of God (Prov. 9:10). Those who fear the Lord hate evil (Prov. 8:13). In Exodus 20:18-21 Moses and the people of God both encounter the presence of God at Mt. Sinai and greatly feared. However, the fear of Moses and the fear of the people were different kinds of fear. Moses' fear of the Lord caused Moses to want to see more, not less, of God's glory and beauty. The people's fear of God was more like Adam who hid because he was afraid of God. Instead of wanting to draw nearer to God they asked that Moses draw near to God and become a mediator between God and them. The kind of fear of the Lord we need is not the kind where we hide and run but the kind of fear that cries out, I want to see more of your Glory. It is to be so awed by the majesty, holiness, and splendor of the beauty of our Triune God that we want to see, behold, and experience more of His "manifested presence" in our lives. Also, in Church gatherings His fear gives us a deep longing in our hearts to fully experience the "beatific vision" now as we wait to see Jesus face to face (read 1 John 3:2,3; 1 Cor. 13:12; Rev. 22:4-6). We rarely hear messages today on the fear of the Lord. When we hear messages on the fear of the Lord it is more law than gospel. Romans 1:25 tells us that the people did not fear the lord, therefore, they suppressed the true knowledge of God and exchange His glory for idols. The fear of the Lord is not just mentioned in the OT but also in the NT (2 Cor. 7:1; Phil. 2:12; Rev. 15:7). In Hebrew 12:28,29 we are told to worship God in reverence (fear) and awe of God because He is a consuming fire. Every renewal and revival has experienced a fresh filling of the fear of the Lord in their hearts by His Holy Spirit. May we pray and call upon the heavenly Father to fill us afresh with the fear and awe of His great beauty so that we may desire and hunger more and not less for God!

### APPLICATION

- Pray for God to fill you and Gathering Church with the fear of the Lord and deliver us from the fear of man.
- Read Acts 5:1-10. What brought fear on the people of God and even unbelievers? What was the result of God's people fearing the Lord?
- If you want to grow more in understanding the fear of the Lord, I highly recommend reading Michael Reeves book, "Rejoice & Tremble."

**PRAYER** Triune God, may we see your glory and beauty that we may fear you. Father, we are told over and over that you are an awesome God (Ps. 95:3-5). Show us how awesome you really are so that we may tremble and bow before you in true worship. Cause our hearts to love you more than anything in this world as we see your beauty. Fill us with your fear that we may hate evil and not sin against you by loving what you love and hating what you hate. Because we fear you, may our joy, happiness, and satisfaction rest in you and not the pleasures and spirit of this world. We ask that you fill our church with fear that desires and hungers for more and more of you. In His name we ask! In His name!

## DAY 19, CHURCH & COMMUNITY RENEWAL GRIEVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

**SCRIPTURE** Ephesians 4:30-32

In this passage the apostle Paul encourages believers not to grieve God's Holy Spirit. We know from scripture there may be other ways we can grieve the Spirit. Here grieving the Holy Spirit is in reference to how believers are mistreating one another and not walking in love. Paul calls them to maintain the unity of the Spirit because they are one body in Christ and one with the triune God. Therefore, they are to treat each other with humility, gentleness, patience, and bear with each other in trials. In renewal, the Spirit starts speaking to our hearts about our relationships. He begins to bring healing, forgiveness, and sometimes restoration. Ephesians 4:30-32 specially speaks about grieving the Spirit because of the way we talk to each other and gossip about brothers and sisters in Christ. James refers to the tongue as fire and poison, being very hard to control (Jas. 3:5-12). We bless or curse people with our talk. We are encouraged to use words that build up the body of Christ and do not tear it down. Of course, Paul has already mentioned the necessity of speaking the truth in love. However, I wonder what a church would look like if every believer committed to speaking words of grace, encouragement, and hope to each other. I wonder what would happen in a community of believers where people quit being like policemen and instead become like farmers. Police focus on making sure people are keeping the rules. Farmers focus on planting seeds of encouragement and hope. This would take a work of the Spirit! A policemen may look to see who is breaking the law and gives tickets, sometimes a warning, to those who break the speed limit. But policemen never stop someone who is following the law to praise and encourage them. It seems to me we have more policemen in the Church looking to give out tickets than farmers looking to plant seeds of encouragement, praise, and fuel what is working in their lives. I believe this is how we join in what the Triune God is doing in people lives. I believe this would bring joy to the Spirit of God because it is the love God's people have for each other that gives witness that we are indeed his disciples. It is easier to see the faults and weaknesses of each other than to see the working of God's grace in their life. What would happen if we called people up to who they are in Christ instead of joining Satan in shaming God's people. May God give us eyes to see beyond outward appearances and see what God is doing in people's hearts. This is the work of renewal the Spirit does in a Church when we surrender to him. Are you a sheriff policing people wrong thoughts and actions or a farmer planting good seed in people's hearts? Are you blessing or cursing the body of Christ with your talk?

### APPLICATION

- Ask the Spirit if your communication is filled with a judgmental spirit. Are you prone to tearing people down or building them up with encouragement and hope filled words.
- Confess your sin and repent for being more of a sheriff than a farmer. Ask God for your life to be more like a farmer than a sheriff. Ask God to see people as He sees them.
- Begin to speak and look for God's grace in people's lives, not their faults. Practice praising believers for the grace God is working in their lives.

**PRAYER** Father, help us to welcome your Spirit in the life of our Church. We need an outpouring of your Spirit to keep us from devouring each other with our tongues which you call a fire and poison. We confess we cannot control our tongues without the help of your Spirit. Make it our default to speak words of life and not death, blessing and not cursing to those who bear your image and were created by you. Forgive us for speaking words of gossip, evil of each other, and holding bitterness and unforgiveness towards one another. Forgive us for judging each other and being blind to the grace you are pouring out in our Church and the lives of others. Help us to be more like farmers and not pharisaical sheriffs. May our words be filled with grace for the building of your body and not the tearing down of your people. Amen!

## DAY 20, CHURCH & COMMUNITY RENEWAL SEEING PEOPLE AS GOD SEES THEM

**SCRIPTURE** Matthew 9:35-38

You walk into a coffee shop and hear a multitude of conversations, instinctively evaluating the accuracy of what you hear. You go into a gym and see people who dress and act different than how you would. You take note of people's cars, houses, clothes, and make assessments of how they value and utilize their money. You come across a mother disciplining her young son and make a snap judgement. You watch reality TV shows and think "Is this really reality?????" As you go through life you cannot help but SEE and HEAR people. This is not unusual or wrong. The question becomes HOW do you see them. Do you see them through a grid of morality? Do you see them through a grid of race, culture, or gender? Do you see them through a grid of adding value or productivity? Do you see them through a political lens? Do you see them through a lens of victimhood or privilege? Perhaps your grid is one that takes note of wealth, education, accomplishments, or power? For Christians the ultimate HOW should be HOW did God hear and see them? This becomes even clearer when we ask HOW did Jesus hear and see people? There are a myriad of scriptures we could look to on this subject, but in this moment we will consider one that is both helpful for insight and action. In Matthew 9:35-38 we are given insight into how Jesus saw and heard the crowds of people He encountered as He went from city to city. 1) Jesus saw them as harassed and helpless. This does not indicate that Jesus did not see their sin nature nor overlooked the wages of their sin. It does tell us that Jesus realized there was a greater enemy at work, Satan, who was "Killing, stealing, and destroying" in their lives. 2) Jesus saw that they lacked a shepherd. They were in need of a true, life-giving shepherd who could guide them, provide for them, and protect them. I wonder how often we see the masses around us as Jesus did. Two final notes are worth making. The text tells us that based on how Jesus saw the crowds He responded in two ways. 1) He had compassion on them. The response of Jesus was not indifference nor self-righteousness. He hurt for them and longed to be the shepherd they so desperately needed. 2) He prayed that His Father would send others into the crowds to share and connect them to the Good Shepherd. Might we be the answer to this prayer?

### APPLICATION

- What is your knee jerk action reaction as you encounter people in your community? Not what you "know" should be your reaction but what is your reaction?
- There are sins of commission and omission. Sins of commission are those that we do. Sins of omission are those that we should do but don't. Concerning the crowds, sins of commission could be: pride, self-righteousness, judgementalism, anger, or attacks. Sins of omission could be: lacking compassion, indifference, failing to help those in need, or share the good news of Jesus. Ask God to reveal where your outlook on the masses does not reflect that of Jesus. Confess this to the Lord. Also, ask God to help you see people the way He does.
- Before you were a sheep of the Good Shepherd you were one of the helpless and harassed sheep of the crowds. God not only saw you but had compassion and sent His Son for you. Jesus did not stay in the comfortable confines of His heavenly home but came to the earth so that you would have a Good Shepherd in your life. Take a moment and remember your own helpless and harassed state outside of Jesus. Allow this to soften your heart towards the people around you.
- What would it look like for you to take news of The Good Shepherd to the those around you?

**PRAYER** Heavenly Father, forgive us for failing to see, hear, and respond to the crowds as you do. Help us to see the people around us as you do. Help us to see their helpless and harassed nature, their need for a Good Shepherd in Jesus, and break our hearts with compassion for them. Also, be delighted to fill us with your Spirit and send us to them with the Good News of Jesus! Amen.

## **DAY 21, CHURCH & COMMUNITY RENEWAL WITNESSING TO THE GOOD NEWS**

**SCRIPTURE** Acts 1:6-11

One of the signs of true renewal and revival is that God awakens a love for the lost and sinners. We see this in the early Church in the books of Acts. Jesus told them they would be His witnesses and make disciples of all nations. However, they could not fulfill the great commission without the Spirit of God. Therefore, they waited for the outpouring of the Spirit in their lives (Acts 1-2). After the Holy Spirit came to live in them they became the temple of God. They began to witness about Jesus and in chapter two 3,000 souls come to Christ. In Acts chapter four over 5,000 souls come to Christ. Talk about Church growth! The witness of Jesus continued throughout the book of Acts. We find Jesus' disciples faithfully witnessing to the Jews first and then eventually to the gentiles. As believers, we know we are called to be witness to the lost but often feel more guilt than joy about sharing our faith. Some are truly gifted as evangelists and seem to have little trouble sharing their faith. I have struggled and battled to share my faith boldly and constantly with others. This may surely be because of fear of men. However, when I have experienced renewal and a fresh outpouring of His Spirit in my life, I had a new desire and boldness to share my faith. This even happened to the apostles when they were threatened to not preach about Jesus in Jerusalem. What did they do? They prayed and asked God to fill them with boldness. A great manifestation of the Spirit happened, shaking the place where they were and filling them with boldness to witness. The rest is history. Let's ask the Father to fill us afresh with a spirit of boldness that we may boldly proclaim the gospel, sharing the good news with those who don't know him.

### **APPLICATION**

- Ask the Spirit to fill you with boldness to witness to others.
- I have found it helpful to write my testimony out so that I have a 3 minute version, and 10 minute version. This helps depending on the setting I have a version of it I can share within the given time limit.
- Ask God to give you divine appointments where you can share your testimony.
- Learn to see and join the Spirit in what He is doing and not what you want to happen. God is always working, whether people are receiving or not, join the triune God's work to redeem the world.

**PRAYER** Father, I confess that I don't witness because I fear men and my heart has grown cold towards the lost. Break my heart for the lost. Deliver me from the fear of men and give me boldness to share the gospel. Father, fill my own heart with joy with all you have done in Christ so it overflows to others. Renew me and pour out your love on me again and again that I may be like a lover who can't stop talking about the one whom they love. It was your love that motivated Paul to share your gospel, do the same work in me. In Christ name!

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**SPIRITUAL RENEWAL IS NOT A ONE TIME EVENT. IT IS NEEDED OVER AND OVER AGAIN AS OUR HEARTS GROW COLD TOWARD GOD, HIS PEOPLE, AND UNBELIEVERS. USE THIS RESOURCE REGULARLY TO HELP RESTORE A BURNING DESIRE FOR GOD AND HIS GLORY.**