



This is the Life

Rowland Springs Baptist Church
35 Day Devotional Guide
2026

This devotion guide was created by various members of Rowland Springs Baptist Church to encourage the whole body. We are thankful for each contributor.

Special thanks to the devotion team: Carol Branton, John Brewer, Ann Hyde, Jack Kauffman, Debbie Lister, and Linda McCoy.

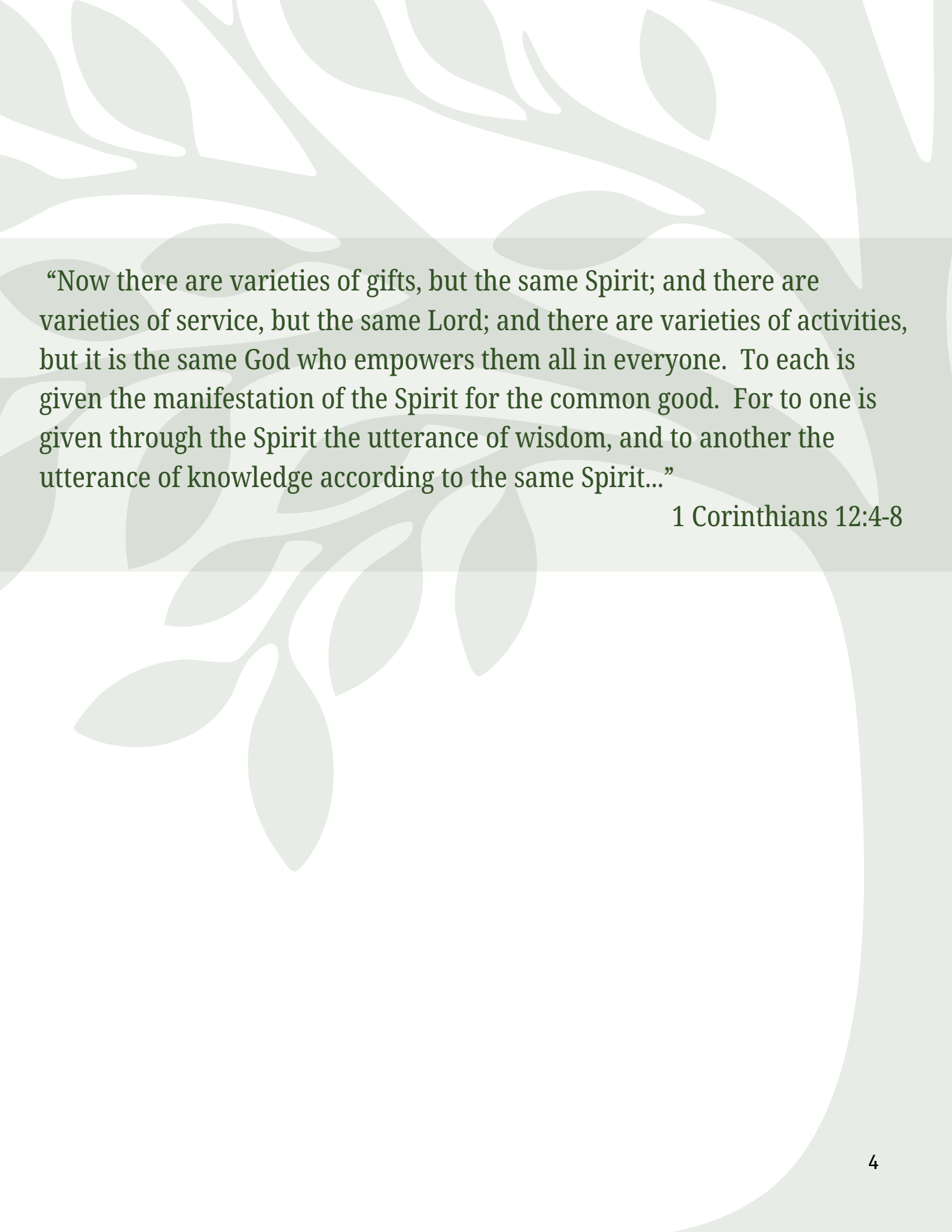


This is the Life

Dear Rowland Springs Baptist Church Family

We have an amazing opportunity over the next five weeks to unify ourselves around core values that inform and fuel our mission. This is the Life that God has created us to live - the life He has saved us for, a life of Serving, Sharing, Generosity, Sacrifice, and Celebration. I pray as we study God's Word together, hearing the stories of how God has worked in our own faith family, it will encourage, inspire, and unite our hearts together. To God be the Glory, great things He has done and great things He will do as we seek to step in faith to reach our community for Jesus.

Pastor Matt

A decorative background featuring a stylized, light green leaf pattern. The leaves are elongated and pointed, arranged in a flowing, organic manner across the page. A horizontal band of slightly darker green is visible behind the text.

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit...”

1 Corinthians 12:4-8

WEEK ONE

A Life of Serving



This is the Life

A Life of Serving

Ephesians 4:11-16

1 Cor 12:4-8

“Father, reveal to us
our spiritual gifts so
we can be obedient to
Your Word and
serve Your Church.”



This is the Life

Faith That Serves

Felton Berry

“If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?”

I John 3:17

Several years ago, I was asked to go with a group of people to serve food and share the gospel at different locations in Bartow County. I enjoyed doing this and felt a sense of gratification. I knew I was doing something for God. This lasted only a few months, and then people stopped going. Not long after that I had a dream where God was telling me to go back out and share with people in need and show his love by sharing the good news of Jesus. I had this dream for three nights in a row. This was at a time when our financial resources at the church were not available. I shared my dream with our pastor and others, and we soon had the resources and volunteers to go out in the community to take food and clothing and share the gospel. I have learned that God will always provide if we are living in alignment with his will.

This scripture tells us that love isn't something that we say, but we should show it with our actions. We can easily show this love daily with a simple smile, greeting, or kind word. If we are faithful servants of God, we will look for ways to show His love and mercy to others. If we feel at times that we have failed, God knows where our heart is.

Where can you show generosity this week? Are you being obedient to where God is leading you to serve?

Prayer: Lord, we pray that you give us a serving heart and that we desire to show your love, grace and mercy to others.

What Is a Servant?

Laura Kauffman

“Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.”

John 12:26

We hear a great deal in church about being a servant, or having a servant's heart. Sometimes we see clear examples, but most often we do not because needs are being quietly met. We will surely be surprised, I believe, to someday in Heaven see the many treasures that faithful believers have stored up to lay before Jesus' feet.

In the book of John, chapter 12, Jesus has begun the last few days He would spend on this earth, and yet He continued to teach His disciples what it meant to be a servant, not only through His words, but His actions. In verses 25-26, Jesus makes it clear that if we want to serve Him, we need to decide who our heart will follow. A servant has given their will over to their master.

As a mother of three, I can see now how much my own mother sacrificed and “served” me when I was younger. Whether it be through preparing a meal, doing laundry so I had clean clothes, or bandaging a skinned knee, my needs often came before hers. We teach our children to obey us when they are young so that when they are old enough to understand, they will (hopefully) obey the Lord. We also model to them what takes priority.

So, what IS a servant? For me, the answer is this: being a servant means making room for the Lord to move. If our heart is tender toward God, He will bring opportunities into our lives where we can be used. He wants desperately for us to trust Him with our most precious commodity: time. Some of the greatest joy in my life has been found through serving my Jesus and serving His church.

What can I or my family do to serve in some capacity in church? Where do you place your priorities?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I pray that You will work in the hearts of every person who reads this devotional. Please use my simple words to encourage others to experience the joy that comes in serving You, amen

What Does It Mean To Serve?

Sharon Nix

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”

Mark 10:45

As I thought about service, I lifted my head and looked at a canvas in my dining room of Jesus washing the feet of His disciples. It reminded me of the Jesus' words in John 13:14, “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.” Jesus is such an amazing example to us all. He shows us how much He loves us not only by dying for us, but also by the people He puts into our lives.

We have had three years of losses and trials in our lives. First, was the death of our nephew, followed by the death of my brother, and very shortly after, the death of our beloved older son. Then, this past year, both my husband and I were diagnosed with cancer. But God was with us through it all. Throughout, we were showered with love, strength, and comfort from God and by family, friends, and so many church members. We received cards, visits, food, and so many were praying for us! To me, this exemplified 1 Peter 4:10, "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." Being the recipient of such love challenges my faith to pray for the Holy Spirit to show me who to walk along side of and where to serve according to God's will. James 1:22 says, "But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." We can only show Jesus' love while we are here on earth. Let's let His love flow through us. May His will be done in me and through me for His glory.

Where is the Holy Spirit inviting you to serve?

Prayer: Holy Father, as I finish this thought, I pray that Your love will flow through me. I pray Your will be done in me and through me as I step out in faith to be Your hands and feet. In Jesus' name, amen.

So, It's All About You?

Hal Maulden

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Joshua 1:9

I had been a member of Rowland Springs Baptist Church for about 10 years. We came to church every Sunday. I attended Sunday school, tithed, and even showed up on work nights to do some work on the church. But I really wasn't serving. Randy Carlisle, my great friend, asked me one night when our families were out to dinner, "Hey, why don't you help me start teaching a Sunday school class?" No thanks! I wasn't interested. But he kept on, and I finally agreed to do it every other Sunday. At the same time, RSBC was expanding and starting new adult classes. As the classes became more numerous, the attendees didn't.

Many Sundays, my wife, Phyllis, and I along with Randy and his wife, Theresa, were the only ones there. I was teaching three people! To me, it was a waste of time. One day, I was at a local restaurant for lunch and saw my friend Stan Wilkins, the former Associational Missionary of Bartow Baptist Association. I began to complain to Stan about spending all this time putting together a lesson only to have 3 people to teach. I told him I was going to give up teaching and move to another class. He asked me several questions about teaching. "Did I like teaching?" Yes. "Did I think I did a good job?" Yes. "So why do you want to quit?" Because no one is there and nobody to talk to about the lesson. Then he asked me the tough one. "So, it's about you?"

I was taken back. I didn't know how to answer that question. But he was right. I was making it about me and not about Jesus. Fast forward about five years, and God called both Randy and Stan home. I had the class alone. But I believe God used those years as a training season for me to become a full servant. I teach every week now and truly love it. I feel blessed to have my class and want to

serve each and every person in it. Joshua 1:9 tells us, “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” That day in the Capri, the Bible verse could have started, “Hal, have I not commanded you?” I love teaching people about Jesus. I love to serve in different ways, and my hope is that something I do leads one person to Christ. That day, I learned what true service is. It’s not about YOU. It’s about Jesus!

In reflecting on this experience, ask yourself, “Who is my service about?” My service is about Jesus, not me.

Prayer: Lord, please touch whoever reads this. Give them the courage to serve in tough times. Lead them to not be afraid to speak and serve. Please prop them up in time of discouragements, and they will know that you are their God.

Before, During, After A Song of Praise

Amy Ong

“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: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

Mark 12:30-31

In my younger days before surrendering my life to Christ, I thought a life of service was about what I should be doing for others to make me look good! How to stand out or be better at something. Boy was I sadly mistaken. God took me through some storms and opened my eyes on more than a few occasions.

He was preparing my heart for a relationship with Him. Though I have loved Jesus my whole life, I didn't begin walking in His Word or living for Him until I was in my 30s. By then I had married a Catholic man who didn't attend church, but I loved him anyway. During those days we had three wonderful children, and I survived my battle with cancer. Through those trials, I realized I needed a relationship with Jesus. Accepting Him, I became born again and followed with baptism. My prayer was for Him to lead me to a church family where I could grow and serve.

I praise God for His mercies and love for me and my family every day and stay faithful in His promises. Jesus reminded me of the gift he gave me for music. I could use my voice to share the gospel. Singing has always been in my spirit. I love being able to lift my voice in praise for all He has done for my life and even if every note isn't perfect, I know that God loves me anyway.

Now I know what serving truly means. I love others as Christ loves me. I have a heart of service for God and not for what He gives me, but for what He gave me, His Son Jesus Christ. If God can give His one and only Son to die for me then I can give my whole heart to serving others with a Christ like heart in my daily life.

Have you truly given your life to God? What has He done in your life? What gift has God given to you and how are you using it for His glory?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I pray for each person who is reading this today. Pour out your blessings on them, and may the Holy Spirit fill their hearts with a song of praise and thankfulness. In Jesus' mighty name, amen.

"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace."

1 Peter 4:10

Learning to Serve

Shanon McDurmon

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus."

Philippians 2:3-5

Sometimes it's easy to become so focused on our own responsibilities, needs, and desires that we fail to see the needs of the people around us. We only notice our own tiredness, our own needs, and our own plans while overlooking opportunities to serve others; opportunities to love our neighbor (Mark 12:31).

There was a time in my life when I was solely focused on my own wants and desires. I was selfish. Sure, I would be willing to lend a hand when others asked for help, but I wasn't actively searching for opportunities to serve others. I don't think I understood what serving others really meant.

After becoming a Christian, the more I studied God's Word, the more I noticed something: Christ spent a whole lot of time serving others. If the God of the universe was willing to humble himself and actively serve others, shouldn't I? Philippians 2:5 tells us that Christians are called to adopt the mindset of Jesus, to serve one another through humble, joyful and selfless acts. Serving others does not always require a grand act or something impressive. Often, it just means showing up, sharing the load or something as simple as a few kind words to brighten someone's day.

In what areas or in what ways can you begin better serving your spouse, your neighbor, or strangers you meet? Is there an area in the church you feel called to serve in?

Prayer: Lord, make me aware of the ways I can serve those around me. Help me notice when someone needs encouragement or assistance. Take away my desire to be thanked or recognized for my acts. Give me a heart that is willing to pause, even when I am busy, and to serve, even when it is inconvenient, amen.

A Life of Service

Renee Hibbard

"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'."

Galatians 5:14

For most of my life, I thought of myself as a helpful person, but after having children, I realized I had an even greater capacity to love. Later, when I became a nursing student, I learned I could

become a school nurse, spend more time with children, and still have summers free. I also felt called to serve alongside my brother, Randy, and my church family through Constructors for Christ. I loved helping build churches where others could be reached and come to know Christ. Serving others became deeply rewarding. Randy would often say while sweating on construction sites, “The pay is terrible, but the retirement plan is out of this world!” After having children, I also saw the need for Children’s Church. Carol Key shared the same vision, so after much prayer and planning, we began. We met every other Sunday for 18 years. Many blessings came from that time, and we hoped we taught our children about the Ten Commandments, the fruit of the Spirit, the books of the Bible, and the need for salvation.

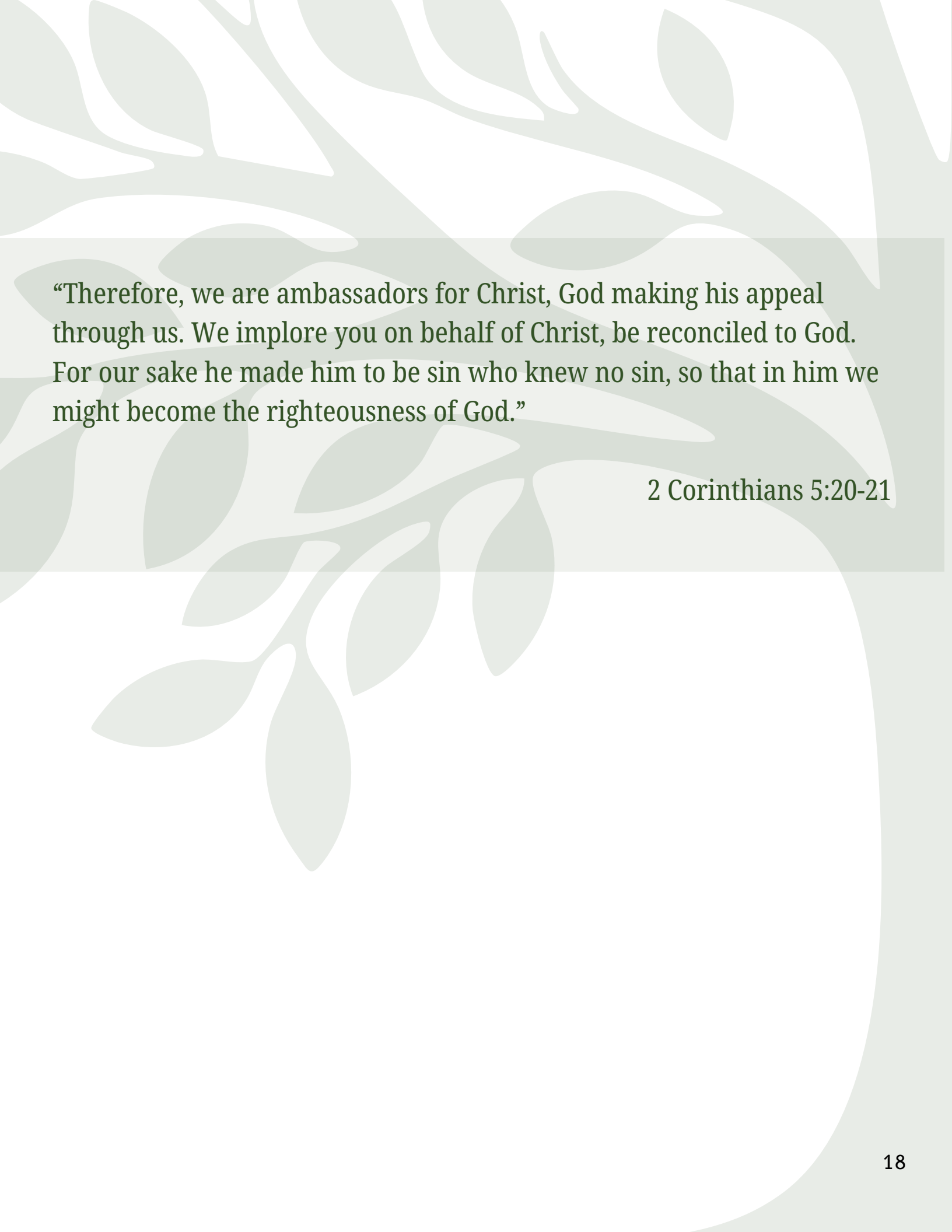
Through reading the Bible, we learn that Jesus was the greatest servant of all. He always put others first. Serving became a gift from God, and I have tried to use that gift wherever I can—in my church and in my community. My brother also said, “You can’t outgive God.” I have seen that truth in my own life and in the life of this church. When we think more of others than ourselves, our burdens may feel lighter. Philippians 2:4 reminds us, “Look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” My favorite verse to live by is Colossians 3:23–24: “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.”

Can you find where your act of service might be?

Prayer: I pray that God will give me the strength to keep serving in whatever capacity He desires, and that He will show you where your gifts can be used too.

Reflections

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“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

2 Corinthians 5:20-21

WEEK TWO

A Life of Sharing



This is the Life

A Life of Sharing

2 Cor 5:16-21

“Father, help us
understand who we
are in Christ and
share that with others!”



This is the Life

Everyday Faith

Malorie Rogers

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:4-7 NIV

About a year ago, I had made it a point to ask servers if I could pray for them. It seemed like an easy way to simply show support and the love of Christ. Sometimes I would be met with a no, but often they said, “Yeah sure, I don’t have anything too specific but just pray for my wellbeing.” So, I would. However, I remember one specific time when I had just finished eating at the Waffle House off Highway 20. I had asked the server if there was anything I could pray for her about, and she responded with, “Sure, but I don’t have anything specific.”

So, I began to pray over simple necessities like finances, housing, medical needs, the usual prayer topics for someone’s wellbeing. But for some reason, I had really tuned into praying over her family and relationships. After that, I wasn’t able to come back for a few weeks, but my family did. The same server recognized my family and began to explain that my prayer over her led her to start mending relationships, attending church services, and ultimately give her life to Christ. One simple prayer had turned her life around, which goes to show that God can use something such as a generic prayer to completely alter another’s life. Simple obedience allowed the Lord to work in mighty ways. One question planted a seed in her heart for the Lord to tend to and nurture.

In what ways is the Lord asking you to be obedient? Is it through prayer? Is it through offering an open ear or shoulder to lean on? Is it simply helping someone cross the road to show His light? What can you do today to make the Lord evident?

Prayer: Lord, I pray that you will open our minds to know that there is always time to show Your grace to others. I pray we would obey Your commands and live out Your love, knowing that we may be the only Bible someone reads. I pray that we will uphold You in our everyday actions. In Jesus name, amen.

Hot Kurdish Tea and a Prayer Rug

Marty McGukin

“But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect”

1 Peter 3:15

The phone rang as I made my weary way through the grocery store. Mary, our church’s administrative assistant, told me of a young mom who had just moved to town. A campus minister from a university in Illinois called to see if a lady from our church would be willing to befriend her and pray with her. Her husband was working in town and finishing his doctorate. She was a stay-at-home-mom and didn’t have a driver’s license. “Oh, and Marty,” Mary said, “she is from Kurdistan and is Muslim.” I told her I would make the call and see if I could set up something. That evening after talking it over with Matt, I gave her a call. I had butterflies in my stomach. I had never

shared the gospel with a Muslim. Would she even want to hear what I had to say? She answered quickly, and we set up a time the next day for me to come for a visit. I was excited and nervous as I knocked on her door the following day. A beautiful woman with an infectious smile greeted me kindly and ushered me into her apartment. She motioned me to the couch as she rolled up her prayer rug and muted the live feed of Mecca. In a moment, she was back with the best hot tea I had ever tasted. I had barely taken a sip and enjoyed a small piece of Turkish delight, when my new friend asked me pointedly, “So can we talk about Jesus and Joseph Smith?”

With gentleness, I opened my Bible and walked through what the Bible says about Jesus. She asked many questions about Him and referenced Isa in the Quran. Our conversation jumped from Allah to Joseph Smith and always back to Jesus. We talked about the cross and His payment for our sins and the grace He offers for those who believe.

What started as a simple call to befriend someone quickly turned into a friendship that still grows. She is still walking in the ways of Islam, and I am continuing to share Jesus with her. Would you believe me if I told you I almost didn’t bring my Bible when I went to meet her? Certainly, I thought, she was devout Muslim and would be offended by what I had to say. I am so thankful I listened to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I am so thankful my meeting with her was from an outpouring of a life lived on mission. I am thankful I was prepared.

Would others see hope when they look at your life? Why or why not?

Prayer: Father, give me opportunities to share the gospel with gentleness and respect.

 Sharing Good News in an Airport

Dustin Rogers

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Matthew 28:19

Jesus did not give His followers the gospel as a private treasure to hide, but as good news to share. Before He ascended, He said, "Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations." Sharing the gospel is not reserved for pastors or people who feel especially gifted with words. It is a command for every believer who has been saved by the grace of Christ. Sometimes we hesitate because we feel afraid or unqualified of what to say. But the power of the gospel does not rest in our ability. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16).

I was in an airport one morning earlier this year in south Florida headed back to ATL. When I got to the gate to sit down, there was a lady (55ish-years-old), who was having a bad day. She was on the phone having a very passionate conversation about some family difficulties in her life. The foul language that was being spoken would as they say, "put a sailor to shame." My natural thought (what Dustin wanted to do) was to go away and find another area to sit, but the Holy Spirit instructed me to sit beside this woman. After the call was over, she was crying, angry, and clearly hurting. There was one chair between us, and I leaned over and said, "Sounds like you are having a rough day". After listening to her for a few minutes, I was able to share the gospel with her. I told her about Jesus and the hope that I have in my salvation. I told her how the world would always let her down (money, activities, even family and friends), but not Jesus.

After we talked a bit, I asked if I could pray with her, and of course she said yes. I prayed for her specific situation and that she would find the peace she needs in Jesus. I will never forget when I ended that prayer, “God I pray these things in JESUS’ name...Amen.” I looked up, and three different travelers were looking right at me. Some gave me a smile, one guy looked almost amazed, and one lady who was on the row behind me tapped my shoulder and said, “Thank you for that.” I was talking to the upset lady, but it may have been that God was talking to some of the people that were watching and listening. We never know how God will use us when we are obedient to what we are commanded to do. The joy I feel when I tell people about Jesus is indescribable; I call it the joy of obedience.

Get you some of that joy today! Romans 10:14 asks, “And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?” People need to hear the good news, and God may choose you for that.

When the Holy Spirit nudges me toward someone who is hurting, do I respond with obedience or retreat into comfort? And, what specific fears tend to hold me back? In my daily interactions, am I actively looking for opportunities to share the hope of Christ, or am I waiting for “ideal” moments? And, what would change if I viewed every encounter as a potential divine appointment?

Prayer: God, thank You for saving me by Your grace. Give me courage, compassion, wisdom, and boldness to share the gospel with those around me. Help my words and actions point others to You. In Jesus name, amen.

 Let Your Life Point Others to Jesus.

Deborah Lister

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Matthew 5:16

Sharing the good news of Jesus Christ involves living authentically, sharing our personal testimony, demonstrating God’s love through our actions, and relying on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. One of the most effective ways for me to share the gospel has been by living a life that reflects Christ. My actions of kindness, patience, forgiveness, and selfless service can become a testimony to others. When people see the love, joy, and integrity that comes from a life surrendered to Christ, they may become curious about our faith and more open to hearing about Jesus.

A good example of this happened when the place where I worked hired a new accountant. Her name was Susan. She and I quickly became best friends. Susan began going to Sunday School and church with me. She joined the Bible study I was leading at work and another Bible study I held in my home. As our friendship grew, she was able to see not only what I believed, but how my faith affected the way I lived. One morning, Susan came running into my office crying. I asked her what was wrong, and she immediately said, “I want what you have!” I shared with her the love of Jesus and His redemption. Right there in my office, she asked the Lord to forgive her and invited Him into her life. Two weeks later, she was baptized. We are still best friends, but now we are also sisters in Christ!

God’s Word reminds us that our lives can be a witness to the people around us. We are called to let our light shine, encourage one another,

and boldly share the hope we have in Christ. Susan's story reminds me that people are watching—not so that we can live perfectly, so that they can see what Christ is doing in us. Our words matter, but our actions matter, too. Kindness, patience, forgiveness, generosity, compassion, and faithful service can open doors for conversations about Jesus.

We may never know who is watching, who is hurting, or who is searching for something they cannot explain. God can use our ordinary, everyday lives to make someone curious about Jesus. We don't save people—Jesus does. He can use our lives to help point them to Himself.

Who has God placed in my life who may need to see the love of Jesus through me? What is one way I can intentionally share Christ through my words or actions this week?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank You for saving me and giving me a life worth sharing. Help me to live in a way that reflects Your love, grace, and truth. Give me eyes to see the people You have placed around me and courage to share the hope I have in You. Let my words and actions point others to Jesus. Use my life for Your glory.

Sharing

Will Rogers

“But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the HOPE that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.”

1 Peter 3:15

“Since we have such a hope, we are very bold”

2 Corinthians 3:12

I once went to Six Flags in Atlanta to worship at a Jeremy Camp concert. After leaving very late at night, the only restaurant that was open was a Waffle House which was conveniently located in an area where people would stop to eat after leaving a bar or nightclub. When we sat down, the server asked us where we had been and why we were out so late at night, and we told her we had just left a concert. Hearing this, she assumed it was a normal concert and not a Christian one. After asking what was so cool about that (obviously we were hyped up for Jesus), I had the opportunity to share the gospel with her, explaining the love of God toward her and how Jesus loved her enough to go to cross and die for her. She froze with shock, and as the Holy Spirit took over, she broke down and could no longer hold back her emotions.

The other servers took over for her and handled her duties. The lady repented that night and gave her heart to the Lord asking Him to save her and to come in and live in her and help her. She had abandoned her husband and children, and after that night, immediately worked to reconcile her relationships with her family, and they all began attending a church near them.

What I learned from that night is that we are called to always be ready to give a reason for the HOPE that is within us, because we never know who is in front of us and what situation they are in or what story they have. The Gospel is the only HOPE we have, and it is not for us to keep to ourselves. God showed me His faithfulness through my simple obedience that night.

The passages above teach us that we are to trust that God will honor His word when we are obedient to share it and it will not come back void. It teaches us that there are opportunities all around us to share the Gospel if we would look for them. It also teaches us that there is power in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in fact so much that it is the power of God unto Salvation.

Where is God inviting you to share the Gospel daily? Are you holding back from sharing the Gospel of Christ? How could the Gospel change those around you?

Prayer: Lord, I pray that we have the boldness to share with as many as possible the HOPE we have in Christ Jesus. I pray we have doors of opportunity, and that we are obedient to walk through those doors for the Glory of God.

There Are No Ordinary People

Logan Hinton

“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making His appeal through us. We plead on Christ’s behalf, “Be reconciled to God.””

2 Corinthians 5: 20

When it comes to sharing the gospel, I want to point out something obvious - it requires us to talk about God out loud. As obvious as that sounds, it can give us a place to start. However, we must put first things first, and that is a life surrendered to Jesus. We must get to a point where we pray something like, “Lord take my life and make it what you would have it to be”; then take a step of faith. The first small step of faith I took in regards to talking about God out loud was praying out loud with my family. It was nothing big and bold in most people’s eyes, but it was for

me, and it was a step toward Jesus. It wasn't long after that, and wouldn't you know it, another step was in front of me. I was given several opportunities to pray out loud in a crowd. God continued to place multiple steps in front me until talking about God became easy and that included sharing the gospel. At first, I was nervous, but now I can share the hope I have in Jesus publicly and regularly including at multiple outreach ministries here at RSBC. So, I want to encourage you to remember that there are no ordinary people - only image bearers of God with an eternal destiny, and we have been given the "message of reconciliation" to share with them. Take some time and really focus on verse 20.

Who has God placed in your life? When, where, and how can you share the hope that you have in Christ with them?

Prayer: Lord, help me to represent Jesus in my life. Show me where I can take a step of trust today.

Come and See, Simple as That

Pastor Phillip Sutton

"So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"

John 4:28-29

In John chapter 4, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at a well. What begins as an ordinary conversation becomes a life-changing encounter. Jesus reveals who He is, and the woman leaves the well so excited about what she has experienced that she goes back into town

and tells others about Jesus. Verses 28 and 29 says: “The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, ‘Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?’”

There is something powerful about what she did. She received something from Jesus, and then she shared it with others. That is stewardship. We often think of stewardship as how we manage our money, possessions, time, or talents. And, those things certainly matter. But God has also entrusted us with something far more valuable: the good news of Jesus Christ.

I wish I could say I had immediate boldness after accepting Jesus like she did; but I didn’t. I was too afraid of what people would think of me, especially my friends. I didn’t want them to think I was a “goody two-shoes” or something. It wasn’t until I truly started studying God’s Word and examining stories such as the woman at the well that God revealed that what I was doing was wrong. Jesus didn’t save me to be silent and keep His gift to myself, but to share it with others!

Today, I love sharing my faith. The more I become obedient to God’s command, the more power His Spirit gives me to accomplish that command. The Samaritan woman didn’t have a seminary degree. She wasn’t a Bible scholar. She didn’t have all the answers (much like me). But she knew one thing: “I met Jesus, and I need to tell somebody.” And, look what happened. Her testimony caused people to come to Jesus. Verse 39 tells us that “many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman.” Her willingness to share became a doorway for someone else to encounter Christ.

We are stewards of the Gospel. God didn't save us so that we could keep the Gospel to ourselves. He has entrusted us with the greatest message the world could ever hear. She simply invited them: "Come, see." Our responsibility is not to save people. Our responsibility is to faithfully share what God has given us. Ask yourself today:

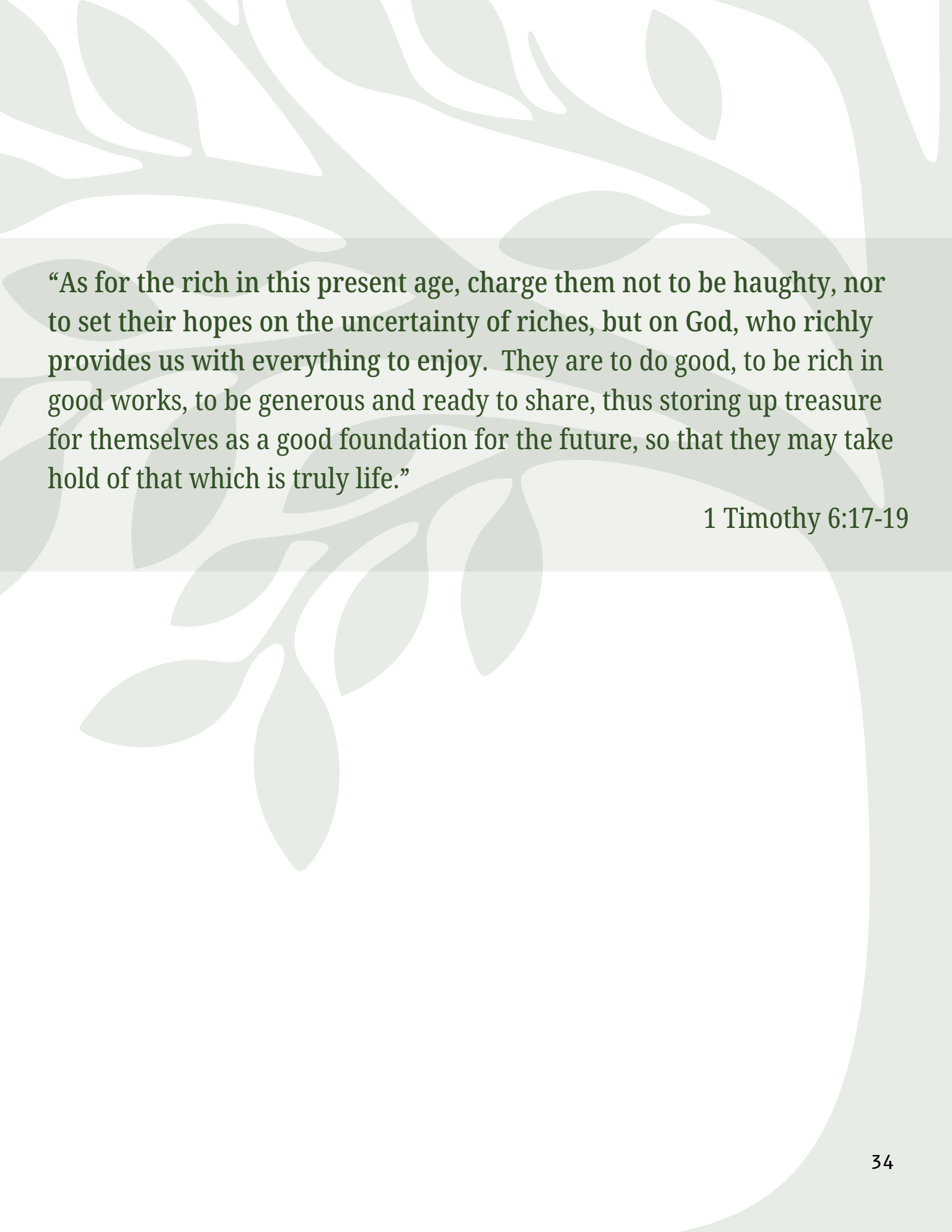
Who has God placed in my life that needs to hear about Jesus? A coworker, a neighbor, a family member, a friend, or perhaps someone sitting beside you at church. Don't underestimate the power of simply saying: "Let me tell you what Jesus has done for me."

The woman left her waterpot behind, but she carried something much more valuable back into town—the testimony of what Jesus had done. God has entrusted the Gospel to us. Let's be good stewards of it by sharing it.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for saving me and entrusting me with the good news of Jesus Christ. Give me boldness, compassion, and wisdom to share my testimony with the people you've placed around me. Make me a good steward of the Gospel. In Jesus' name, amen.

Reflections

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

A decorative background featuring a stylized, light green leaf pattern. The leaves are elongated and pointed, arranged in a flowing, organic manner across the page. A horizontal band of light gray color runs across the middle of the page, serving as a backdrop for the text.

“As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.”

1 Timothy 6:17-19

WEEK THREE

A Life of Generosity



This is the Life

A Life of Generosity

1 Timothy 6:17-19

“Father, convince
us to be generous
people who would
give so that the
whole world might
know Jesus!”



This is the Life

The Blessing is in the Offering.

Jessica Kennedy

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house and test me now in this,” says the Lord of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.”

Malachi 3:10

Hard work was both demonstrated and preached in my house growing up. God expects us to use our talents for Him, but He also expects us to be good stewards of our time and money. You don't make money sitting around doing nothing. So, with my very first babysitting job, I was taught the wonders of tithing. I've honestly never looked back or thought of not giving God His portion; technically it's His anyway.

So, when I found myself struggling financially a year and half after my sister moved in with me, I began to question God. Alicia had just lost her job, and I was now supporting both of us on a 3rd year teacher's salary. My dad was in and out of the hospital, so I definitely wasn't going to ask my parents for help. I cut off the T.V., went to the bare minimum plan on my flip phone, and struggled for the first time with do I pay my tithe or a bill. Alicia, in her unemployment, started helping with the Food Pantry at our old church every Thursday and after a few weeks, I finally said, “You need to bring a bag of groceries home for us!”

During that time, we had some revelations. She realized she had never truly been saved, and I realized she had not been tithing. Fast forward a little, she gets a part-time job and even though it's rough, she's

giving God His portion, and I'm clinging to one of my favorite scriptures, "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose," (Romans 8:28). We start making ends meet, we went through a Dave Ramsey course, Alicia got a full-time job, and lo and behold the dishwasher goes out! I prayed, "Lord, you know this month was already tight, and Christmas is a month away. Yes, I am fully capable of hand-washing dishes until I save enough to get another dishwasher, so this is not the end of the world. And, I can figure out how to save for a dishwasher... right?" And, then I got a phone call. "Jessica, my wife and I always like to help someone at this time of year. It's our way of giving each other a Christmas present. We want to buy you and Alicia a dishwasher." I sobbed! The Lord is absolutely amazing, and I was totally humbled! I realized that I can't fix everything and God had already fixed this! He didn't need my help or input. Not only was this couple's gift a demonstration of God's, but also an offering.

What a blessing to be able to show God's love through giving to others. A gift that goes beyond tithing! An Offering! What can I give, beyond my regular tithe, that can be a blessing to others? How can I demonstrate God's love to those who don't know Him?

Prayer: Lord, in times of difficulty and times of abundance help me to always trust in You. Help me to see where I can help and be a blessing to others as this couple was to me.

“Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

2 Corinthians 9:7

I remember times in my life, actually this happens all the time in my life if I'm being honest, when I have been blessed to be able to give what I have received. From God's amazing grace alone comes every good gift of life. That includes our time, talent, and our resources (financial or material). God, through His providence, has shown me time and time again, that I am to rely completely on Him for everything. I have had seasons of plenty and seasons of less, but He has always provided exactly what my family and I needed, when we needed it.

More and more as we grow with Christ, we must learn to follow His leading in all areas of our lives. Once I realized that everything I have belonged to Him, it changed how I gave. I can't tell you how many times someone would need something and God would bring me to say, “I have one of those you can have” or seeing any need someone might have and without hesitation, just saying yes! It is a joyful gift to our hearts when we step out in faith and just give it away!

How will we sow that which we have been blessed with? What heart posture will we have when we are sowing?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I thank you for your grace in our lives and the joyful hearts you give us to in turn give to others. Help us to be good stewards of all that you have given. We love You and give You all honor, praise, and Glory, amen.

Treasures of the Heart

Glenda Reese

“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”

3 John 1:4

I didn't see where God was leading me at this time in my life, but He knew. Our great-grandson was born and stole our hearts. We wanted to help care for him while his mommy worked. Why wouldn't we? Time is precious. I heard someone say we can't add any days to our life, but we can add life to our days. Our great-grandson brings us so much joy and happiness. We wanted to be a part of his life – giving our care, time, attention, sharing Jesus, and just loving him.

Generosity is more than our financial gifts. Giving to our family or church is a reflection of His gift to us. Generosity is a matter of the heart rather than the size of the gift. 1 Peter 4:10 “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.”

How can I model generosity each day with my time, attention, how I speak, how I treat others, and with words of encouragement? Does my behavior teach others about Jesus?

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for Your generosity. Because You love us, You gave us Jesus. Help me to be obedient and generous in all that is before me.

“Generosity? No One’s Ever Shown Me Generosity!”

-Scrooge McDuck
Chad Whitlock

“Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”

Hebrews 13:16

Many years ago, we went through a sermon series about giving, service, outreach, etc. Our Sunday school class, at that time, started talking about what we could do together as a bonding experience and to act as an outreach into the community. Frankly, anything that we thought of was not great. To give you an idea of how bad they were, one idea was window stickers for your car that had some slogans like, “Follow me to Rowland Springs”.

One Sunday near the end of service, Sharon Collum, who was a school principal across town at the time, got up during announcements and talked about Backpack Buddies. I was not familiar with this program, but this was it. We had prayed for an opportunity, and God answered that prayer. Some of our class had children at Cloverleaf Elementary School, and we knew that the school would be relocating on the same road as our church at the end of that school year. We discussed sponsoring five kids a week, but God had a different plan.

The school needed 15 bags a week from us, so we stepped out in faith and signed up for that amount. Personally, I was worried about this amount. Back then, the bags cost about \$4.25 each to put together. There was no line item in the budget, so we would need to take up \$65 dollars a week to buy the supplies. It wasn’t a huge amount; I prayed,

but I still worried. Most weeks, we barely scraped by, and sometimes we took up enough in class to buy supplies for two weeks. We made it through that year, but the next year, the school needed twenty bags a week. I was still worried, but a little less than the last year.

We had prayed about it as a class, and I had seen God continue to answer that prayer. Somehow, the money was always there. To that point, we weren't really advertising what we were doing, but word got out. I was asked to speak about the Backpack Buddy program at one of our men's breakfasts. At that breakfast, someone asked about donating to that ministry. It hadn't really occurred to me at that point to put it out there for the church, but others started offering that if we needed funds, just let their Sunday school class know, and they would take up an offering to support this ministry.

Everything just took off from there. This was 100% a learning experience for me, and it started with trusting God and realizing He is in control, not me. I saw firsthand the generosity of others and their willingness to go above and beyond their tithes and give sacrificially to help others in need. We just finished assembling 880 bags that will feed 40 kids a week all because of the generosity of a body of believers that are sacrificing not for any recognition or anything in return, but simply to please God. I think these passages help us focus on praising Jesus and His sacrifice and thinking about our eternal home instead of focusing as much on the things of this world, because they are temporary.

How can I demonstrate generosity this week? What does that look like to me?

Prayer: I pray that I do the good deeds and share what I have because I do want to please you God.

Not Just the Extra.

Jack Kauffman

“They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on.”

Mark 12:44

Whenever I think about generosity, the first story that always comes to my mind is the widow and her two mites. This story has always been a perfect example of what pure generosity is because it shows that being generous isn't about giving from your extra, it's giving even when it's the last bit you have. At its essence, giving is another form of sacrifice.

Four years ago, I was trapped in what I currently consider the lowest part of my life- in fact, I was so stuck in this world's darkness, I could hardly see any light at all. Looking back now, I see how the only reason I was able to get out of that pit is due to the generosity and sacrifice of those around me. People willing to step down for a moment to be with me on my level, to look me in the eyes, and listen to my need for rescue. 1 John 4:19 says, “We love Him because He first loved us”. I think about how those people were so generous to me, and how the widow gave the last of what she had. It pushes me to be generous with what I have. I will strive, not to give my extras, but to give everything to the kingdom of Christ. All that I have, God has given to me - the people in my life, the income I make working, every breath in my lungs - everything comes from Him, and I will lift it all up to Him.

Are you willing to give everything to the Lord, even when it feels like

you have nothing? Has there ever been a time where someone has been generous to you and inspired you to be generous toward others?

Prayer: Dear Lord, I pray over the readers of this devotion, that You would let it inspire and uplift them. I pray You would strengthen their desire to be generous, and You would help them to live out Your word, for Your name, amen.

The Measurement of Generosity

Haley Hinton

“Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

Luke 21:3-4

Have you ever considered how generosity is measured? I used to think it was based on the size of the gift. However, over time, I have come to realize that generosity is measured according to the size of the sacrifice.

After getting ourselves in a tight financial situation, we decided to dig our way out of debt so that one day we would be able to “live and give like no one else.” During that process, it required a lot of modern sacrifices like eating out, Amazon shopping, extravagant trips, etc. There were a few moments of stress and some disagreements, but eventually, we reached our goal. Soon a situation came up of a single mother in college who completely lost her house in a house fire. Without hesitation, we felt led to help and knew we were in a position to do so. We had the ability to cover her and her son’s rent for a few months. Somehow, all the sacrifices and stress we had felt over the last couple of years simply faded away and it felt like we were the ones

receiving the blessing.

In Luke 21:1-4, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into an offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. In verses 3-4, He said, “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.” God values the heart and sacrifice behind the gift. Generosity is not so much of an action as it is a response. A response to the greatest sacrifice - Jesus Christ.

Are there areas in your life in which you need to sacrifice in order to be more generous? More importantly, are you giving with a heart focused on Jesus and His ultimate sacrifice?

Prayer: Father, thank you for your son, Jesus, and your sacrificial love for us. Help us to surrender our heart and lives to you, so that we may be more generous, Amen.

Everyone Has Something to Give

Pastor Josh Brown

“...for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.”

2 Corinthians 8:2

Generosity comes in many forms. In this passage of scripture, Paul is acknowledging all the churches in Macedonia that faced many hardships, especially financially, who came together to meet physical needs and to help spread the gospel. How could a people with so little,

give so much? Verse two gives us the answer, “their ABUNDANCE of JOY and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.” They were a people full of joy and excitement about what The Lord was doing, and they were desperate to get in on the blessings that come along with giving to the movement of the gospel! In Philippians 4:17, Paul describes the heart and true reward of giving, “Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.” When we give to causes that honor Christ and progress the gospel, God will bless that gift, and there will be fruit and JOY in your life when you begin to see lives changed by Christ because of your generosity. And, they were glad to give! But take a look at verse five. They were only able to give like that because they, “gave themselves FIRST to the Lord.” Without Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, you can give to a church all you want and never receive the blessing that comes with it.

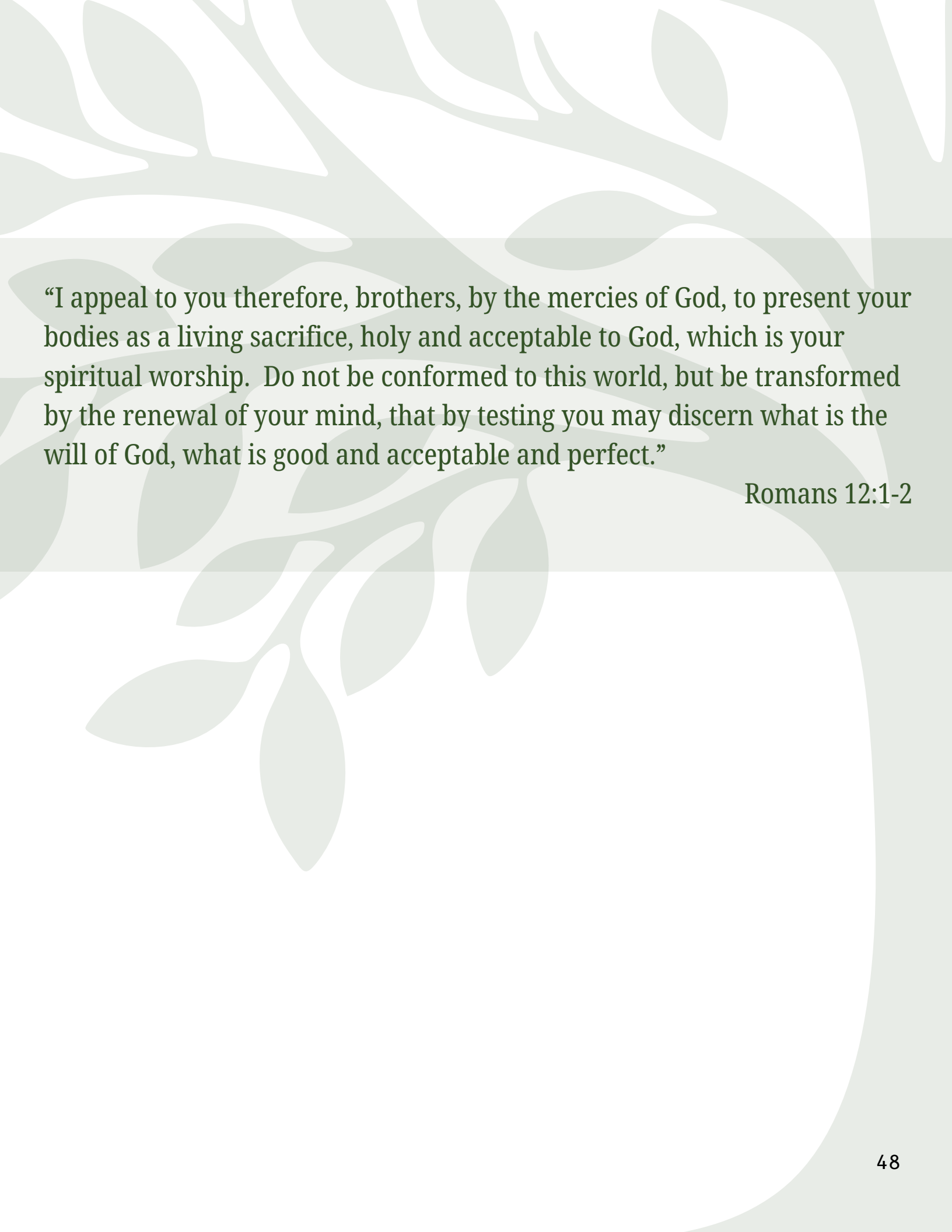
The best feeling in the world is when we get field reports from missionaries we have supported, and we get to see the work of the gospel in those areas and see pictures of ones who had accepted Christ! That is truly “fruit that increases to your credit.” My wife, Amanda, and I started out a broke married couple too, but God still found a way to use our sacrifice for His glory!

Do you give generously from a place of joy with a desire to see the gospel presented to the whole world? Have you given yourself completely to Christ?

Prayer: Father, help us be generous people who would give so that the whole world would know Your Son, amen.

Reflections

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A decorative background featuring a stylized, light green leaf pattern that flows from the top left towards the bottom right, partially overlapping a horizontal band.

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Romans 12:1-2

WEEK FOUR

A Life of Sacrifice



This is the Life

A Life of Sacrifice

Mark 1:16-20

Romans 12:1-2

“Father, teach us to
be people who give
sacrificially with the
understanding that our
temporary discomfort is
nothing compared to
Your eternal Glory!”



This is the Life

“I urge you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, which is your spiritual service of worship.”

Romans 12:1

Sacrifice is an act of giving. God gave His only begotten Son, Jesus, before time began. He loved us, His creation, so much that he provided a way of salvation through His Son, Jesus. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Jesus is the only way to salvation. He is the ultimate sacrifice. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). By His Word, He teaches us His truth, His way, and the life.

When I was convicted of my sins by His Word, I prayed and asked Jesus to forgive me and come into my heart and save me. I believed God’s Word that Jesus was my sacrifice, that He died for me and was buried, and God raised Him the third day. When I felt called to teach His Word, it felt like it would be too big a sacrifice, but after submitting to His call, I found it to be more a blessing than a sacrifice. I’ve learned you can’t outgive God. It is not the sacrifice He wants; it’s obedience. Jesus has already made the sacrifice.

He has grown me in my faith through the Holy Spirit that teaches and guides me in my daily walk and gives me knowledge and wisdom of His truth.

My challenge is to run the race of perfection to become conformed to be like Jesus and bring honor and glory to God. I have learned to die to self and to be a sacrifice of spiritual worship to Him.

God is faithful to keep His promises. Throughout my life, I have seen His faithfulness in the many blessings I have received from Him. In all walks of life, we have His promises to carry us through good and bad.

How can you and I be a sacrifice to serve Him, to bring Him honor and glory, and be a light and witness to all we come in contact with each day? Tell someone today about Jesus.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I praise Your holy and righteous name. May Your words speak to someone today and bring them into Your kingdom of eternal life.

A Sacrificial Heart

David Sutton

“You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little, loves little.” Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

Luke 7:46-48

In this passage of scripture, Luke tells of a sinful woman who came to Jesus, wept at His feet, wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and poured expensive perfume on them. Though others judged her, Jesus understood her heart and the love behind her sacrifice. This woman understood that Jesus is worth

everything. She sacrificed her valuable perfume, pride, reputation, comfort, and dignity to honor Him. True sacrifice means giving something that costs us because we believe Jesus is worth it. It may involve our time, resources, comfort, forgiveness, or putting others before ourselves.

A time in my life when I experienced this was when I was serving in ministry with a group of good friends who were putting on a meal and outreach event. We stood on corners and in crowded areas inviting people to come sit down and have a meal. It took time, energy, and a willingness to step outside of our comfort zones. At first, it may have looked like we were simply serving people a meal. But when I think about it now, I see the sacrifice involved. We gave up our time and comfort because we believed those moments could make an eternal difference. We had the opportunity to speak kind words, build relationships, and plant seeds for the Holy Spirit to use. It showed me how much people can open up when someone is willing to sacrifice their time and simply show them love.

Just like the woman in Luke 7, we should be willing to lay down our pride, our comfort, our time, our possessions, and even our plans when God calls us to do something for Him. Here are some questions you could ask yourself:

What am I holding onto that God may be asking me to surrender?
What am I willing to sacrifice for Jesus today? Am I giving God my leftovers, or am I giving Him my best? How can my sacrifice show someone else the love of Christ?

The woman who humbled herself before Jesus experienced a life-changing moment. She came knowing she was a sinner, and she left

knowing she was forgiven.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help me live a life of sacrifice. Thank You for Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Show me what to surrender and give me courage to serve You and others. May my life reflect Your love and bring You glory, amen.

Your Reasonable Service

Stephen Langhans

“I beseech you brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

Romans 12:1

In the early 1990s, I was playing baseball for Southern Arkansas University. God used the game of baseball, my coaches, teammates, and my parents to teach me some valuable lessons about sacrifice and putting your mission and team above yourself for a greater purpose. My coach was very focused on the fundamentals of the game and developing character. The mission and the team came before any individual achievements. Each individual had a job to do to put the team in a better position to be successful. Getting on base, moving the runner into scoring position, and driving the run in was the mission every inning. The culture of the team was selflessness, so when a teammate was called on to sacrifice himself to move the runner into scoring position, it was honored and celebrated as much or more than the hit that would eventually score the run. You had to trust that your sacrifice would not be wasted and that your teammate would come through and do his job to score.

I would always look up and see my father standing in the back behind all the other fans covered in sweat and grease from a long hard shift in the steel mill. He sacrificed his time, sleep, and resources to allow me to have the opportunity to play a game that I loved. As a young man, I did not fully understand or appreciate how much he sacrificed to give that to me. Now that I am older and making sacrifices for my own children, I can appreciate and better understand what it cost my father and mother.

All the sacrifices that we can make pale in comparison to the sacrifice that God has made so that we can spend eternity with him. I want to encourage you to know that God will not waste your sacrifice or pain and He will always come through to accomplish His mission in His time. It is not how much that you have to offer that is important, but rather that you are willing to do what you can with what you have. I am reminded of the Macedonians who did not have much, but what they had, they gave.

- God desires our obedience first, are we willing?
- Jesus is our reason for sacrificing, and He will accomplish His plan.
- Sacrifice will cost you something whether it be stats, sleep, resources, time, or talents. Everyone has something to contribute to the mission of growing the Kingdom of God.

I think about the first commandment and that we are not to have any gods before Him. God did not spare his own son and freely gave Him up for us. Is there anything that we are putting before Him or holding back? I encourage us as Christians to honor and celebrate the sacrifices we are asked to make to further the Kingdom.

Stay humble, stay hungry, and follow Jesus!

Prayer: Lord, thank you for being the perfect example for us to follow. I pray that we are willing and obedient just as you are, and we give you all the glory, honor, and praise, amen

View From God

Deb Baker

“But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as Eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint.”

Isaiah 40:31

I grew up a Boaz, Alabama-Main Street city girl in the '70s. In 11th grade, my home-economics teacher asked us to describe our "dream home" to which I wrote down, "Cottage, large front yard, gently rolling hills, wrap around porch and five to ten minutes from town." I figured my future husband would have the same dream as me. Five years later, I found out God had other plans! With our three small kids, we moved to Pine Log, Georgia. My "dream home" was a 700 square foot cabin, one bathroom, a quarter mile long driveway, and thirty minutes from town - thirty minutes from anywhere. To our right, there were no houses for two miles. To our left, we had neighbors who are still dear friends to this day.

We lived in that cabin for four and a half years while Jeff built our "dream home." He was a framing contractor and would build houses in Marietta, drive home, eat supper, and work until dark on our house ...and get up and do it all over again the next day.

When it was finished enough to move in, the recession hit. There was no building or framing going on. At the supper table one evening, we were going over finances. There was just enough money to buy groceries for the week. We continued to tithe, but there were a few times that ten percent of nought is nought.

We noticed the kids, ages ten, eight, and five, had left the table, but returned about ten minutes later. All three had emptied their piggy banks and laid out \$62.40. Of course, I started telling them that we didn't want to take their money. But my wise husband kicked me (gently) under the table and thanked them and told them it would help us so much. They left the room, happy that they could help in their own way, and after I wiped my tears, he whispered to me that we were a family and were in this trial together. We learned as a family that God has been and always will be faithful. He provided in ways that we couldn't comprehend. There were many times that money anonymously appeared in the mail, food was shared, and needed assistance was provided.

And now today, I am blessed every morning to sit on that wrap-around-porch, look out over mountains and valleys, read my Bible, and sign praises to the One who blessed me with more than I ever dreamed of at age seventeen. Our "sacrifices" were temporary. Only one Sacrifice cost everything, and that was the sacrifice Jesus willingly made on the cross for you and me.

When have you sacrificed your plans and followed God's leading for His Glory and our good?

Prayer: Thank You, Precious Jesus, for reminding me that Your Ways are better. You were faithful then and are faithful now.

Time - The Most Precious of Commodities John Brewer

“To everything [there is] a season, A time for every purpose under heaven”

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Today let's talk about sacrifice. Not so much as the giving of things like money, items, or passing on that favorite dessert you have been craving. I'm thinking more of the sacrifice of the most precious commodity we have – time. Your time is valuable and is often consumed with both the necessary and the mundane of life. However, when it comes to serving it can become difficult to find the time needed.

Salvation occurred for me when I was 35 years old. In that time, I had grown accustomed to living life on my terms and in my time. After coming to the Lord, I found He has plans and directions that didn't necessarily fit my plans. Yes, the daily tasks of work and family life continued but into that mix I found Jesus leading me to a deeper walk with Him. That walk initially led to bringing God's Word to folks in assisted living centers and nursing homes. That in turn led to a season of pastoring rural churches, all too small to afford a full-time pastor. What I found is the challenge of preparing and delivering a message is the same no matter the size, age or ability of one's congregation.

My sacrifice was time. But that time was also an investment. The dividends of that experience have been a deeper knowledge of His Word and a greater love for His presence. You too may find Him speaking through His Word to you as you read the devotionals on these pages. I'll warn you in advance, it will cost you time but the rewards will far outweigh the price. If you are a believer then I can say with certainty that Jesus has a plan for your life as well.

So, as we finish up today, I have a couple of questions for you to ponder. First, how are you going to sacrifice your precious time to follow Him closer? And, what is it that you feel the Holy Spirit softly speaking to you to set aside to accomplish that task?

The journey awaits, why not start today. Let's pray.

Prayer: My precious Jesus, I come before you today asking You to guide the thoughts of my heart to seek out the season You desire in my life. As I seek You, help me see how I can help others with the most precious commodity you have given – my time, amen

To Honor the Lord is to Sacrifice

Samson Johnston

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

Romans 12:1

In the summer of 2016, I had the opportunity to meet Betsy Maddox and her son, Josiah. Betsy is the Metro Director of Children's Evangelism Fellowship for New York City. We were there to help serve and run daily Bible schools throughout the five boroughs of New York. Throughout our trip, we learned about Betsy's incredible story. She and her husband moved to New York in 1987 as missionaries to low-income children and their families. In 1995, tragedy struck as her husband passed away leaving her with four children. Yet, Betsy remained faithful to their calling and has continued their life's mission of spreading the gospel. While her story and commitment are great examples of sacrifice, this trip showed me all different kinds of sacrifices as each group of volunteers ran three five-day camps all across the city.

There was the sacrifice of the volunteers' time as they worked long hours away from their families. There was also sacrifice of time for those physically unable to be help, but were fiercely praying for us. There was the financial sacrifice of those who donated to CEF allowing us to be there. However, most importantly there was the sacrifice of self. All the people who made those camps possible chose to die to their own desires and seek to honor Christ through their lives and actions.

Paul calls a life of sacrifice our "reasonable service." Through salvation, we have been made alive. What once was dead is alive, and we should not take that lightly. Sacrifice for us looks different throughout the course of life. It may be through time in service or in prayer. It may be in sacrificing our resources that we have been blessed with. It may even be sacrificing our comfort, but what it will always be is dying to our self. As Christians, our life mission should always be to honor and glorify God regardless of the sacrifice.

What does sacrifice look like for me in this stage of my life?

What areas of my flesh have I not died to?

Prayer: Lord God help us remove barriers that hinder our service.

Help us live a life of sacrifice that honors your great gift to us in Jesus Name, amen.

Yellowed Keys with a Lasting Purpose

Linda McCoy

“This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.”

2 Corinthians 9:12

It still stands in my home today – a beautiful, tastefully carved, mahogany upright piano belonging to the early 1900s. I was around eight-years-old when my older sisters and I voiced our deepest desire to learn to play. And, within a matter of weeks, the most beautiful piano in the world (in our eyes) was delivered to our home. We didn’t realize at the time why Daddy walked to the service station a few miles away every Saturday for many months to pump gas in the central Florida heat and why Mom would carefully price items at the grocery store, sometimes putting things back on the shelves.

As adults looking back, we realized it was to make payments on the piano from an already stretched to the limit budget. But, to them, it wasn’t about sacrifice, it was providing an instrument of joy to our music loving immediate and extended family. They never complained about the missed notes and arguments about whose turn it was to

practice. But, their sacrifice of time, hard work, and finances were turned to thankful blessings when we finally learned to play songs out of the Broadman Hymnal and were asked to play for church services. The beautiful piano endured a workout every Saturday as we practiced the music that would be sung in the worship services on Sunday morning and evening and the following Wednesday night prayer service. It moved with us when we relocated to north Georgia and then followed me when I had a home of my own.

Just as I've wondered if my parents ever thought about how many hymns and songs of praise would be played on the piano in preparation for worship and other church services, I wonder if the founding members of Rowland Springs Baptist Church thought about how many services would be conducted throughout the next century and beyond. Could they imagine the number of messages preached, the number of baptisms, the number of Sunday School lessons taught, and most importantly, the number of people saved – all because of their sacrifice of time, hard work, tithes, and their offerings.

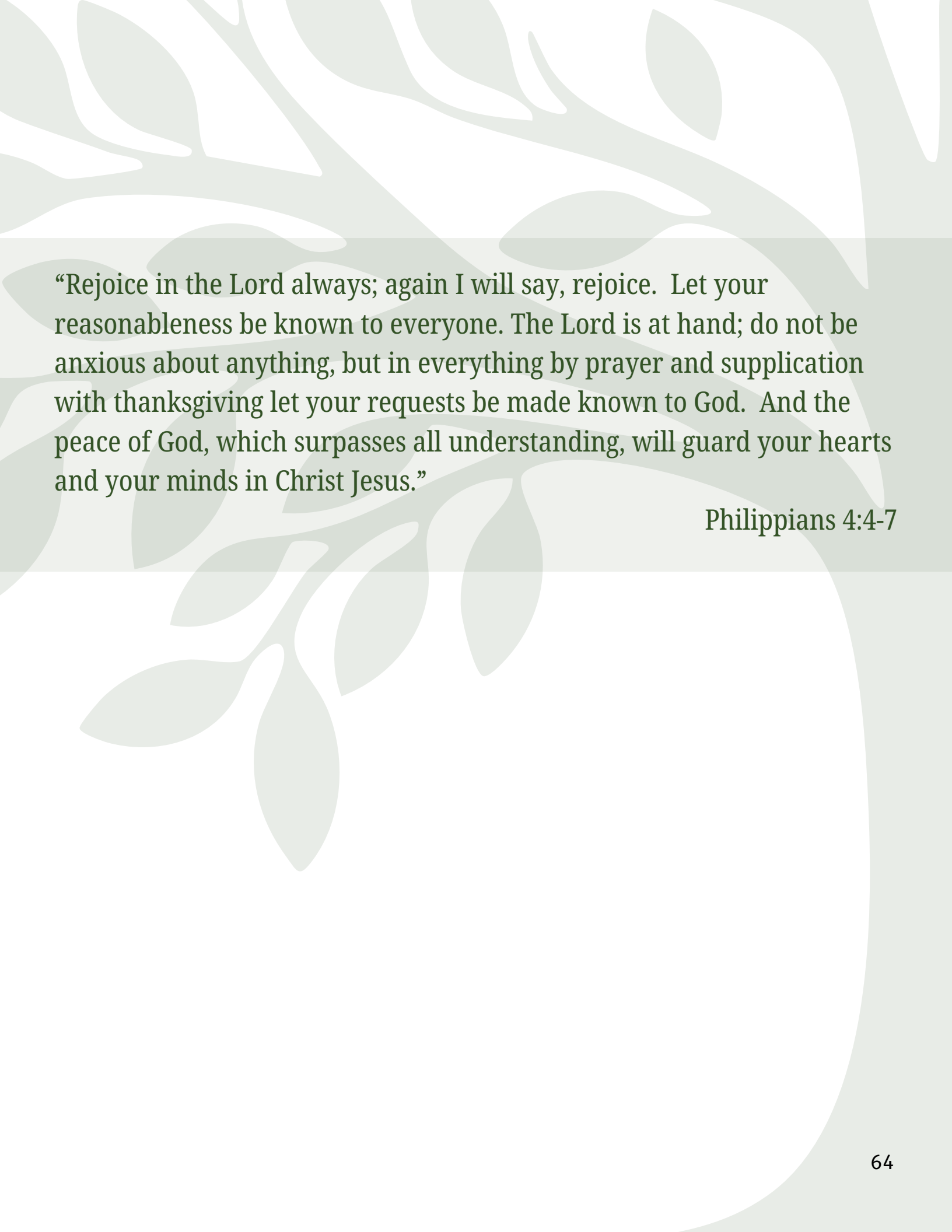
The ivories on the old piano are now yellowed, and the high octave can no longer be tuned. But it is still used each week in preparation for worship, His purpose, and His Glory.

How and what can you sacrifice for the glory of God and His work to reach and bless others? What can you give that will enable our church to continue to grow and make a lasting impact for future generations?

Prayer: Father, I pray for willing hearts to give sacrificially and that You bless them with a lasting joy that cannot be taken away. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Reflections

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

A decorative background featuring a stylized, light green leaf pattern that flows across the page. The leaves are elongated and pointed, with some showing detailed vein structures. The pattern is layered over a light gray background, creating a subtle, organic feel.

“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.”

Philippians 4:4-7

WEEK FIVE

A Life of Celebration



This is the Life

A Life Of Celebration

Philippians 4:4-7

“Father, as we
lean on the peace
that passes all
understanding, may we
be people who celebrate
Your goodness and
faithfulness!”



This is the Life

Celebration of Life

Ann Garland

“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”

Psalm 147:3

My body was present but my mind seemed to be miles away as I stood in the choir trying to sing God’s praises. How could my mouth sing when my body and spirit felt so broken? Before my precious husband of close to sixty years died, he made me promise to get back up into the choir and sing again. As the voices of those around me sang out in worship, a shift began to happen. My focus transferred from my pain to God’s presence with me in the pain. I found myself whispering the words of the second song, and soon I was singing normally again!

The praise of others encouraged me and even empowered me to praise even in my pain. It lifted my spirits, and I was worshipping my Savior and praising Him. There is still brokenness in my body, but the wounds are healing, not by doctors, but by the ever-present God who holds me through this difficult time. I’ve learned to praise God in my pain and to give thanks for His mercy and grace.

After my husband’s funeral, several people came up to me and said it was more like a celebration of life than a funeral. My Jerry would have been so pleased and thankful for that.

When the enemy would have us focus on the problems and pain, God would have us focus on how He binds our wounds and His grace in our brokenness and pain.

What are you facing that you can bring before the Lord? Ask Him to heal and bind the painful and broken parts of your life.

“For the Lord Himself will descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus, we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore, comfort one another with these words.”

I Thessalonians 4:16-18.

Prayer: Father, thank You for the grace of healing and binding up wounds in my life, both physically and spiritually. And thank You for the Celebration of Life and the promise that I will see my Jerry again one day at Your return! In Jesus name, amen!

Remember, Then Rejoice

Callie Tutherow

“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.”

Psalms 103:2

There are moments in life when celebrating feels easy – when prayers are answered, circumstances are good, and we have good news to share. But what should you do when you are still waiting. During my pregnancy with our daughter, Rosalie, I learned that celebration can and should begin long before the answer comes. On September 30, 2022, at 12 weeks pregnant, Dillon and I went for an ultrasound excited to see our sweet baby. Instead, we were told that the doctors had found a large retroplacental hematoma, a pocket of blood, near the baby.

Because of its size, we were told our chances of losing or keeping this baby were about 50/50. We were devastated. My mind immediately went to the worst possible outcome, and I was even hesitant to find out our baby's gender. But we told our family, friends, and church family, and they immediately began to pray. One prayer became especially meaningful to us. Ezekiel 16:6 says, "And when I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' I said to you in your blood, 'Live!'" My family continued to pray these words over my womb.

For the next several weeks, I was put on light bedrest. I spent those weeks praying, worshipping, and singing uplifting songs on my keyboard. At each appointment, we waited to hear what the ultrasound would show. The blood was still there 8 weeks later. We were even told it might remain throughout the entire pregnancy. I didn't always know what God was going to do, but I was learning to trust who He was. Then came our 20-week anatomy scan. There was no sign of ANY blood! Our baby girl was healthy, and I was overwhelmed with gratitude! I cried knowing that God had carried us through every uncertain moment and had answered a prayer we had placed completely in His hands. On April 2, 2023, our perfect Rosalie Marie entered the world. Three years later, God is showing us just how special her life is and how He is going to use her for His Kingdom.

Psalm 103:2 says, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." Sometimes, we have to intentionally remember what God has done so that we don't forget His faithfulness while we are waiting on what He will do next. No matter the outcome of the obstacle we were facing during my pregnancy, we would still choose to share the power of Jesus in every moment. He would get the glory anyway. A life

of celebration isn't a life without uncertainty. It is a life that chooses to recognize God's goodness in every season and that He knows what's best for us, even when we don't understand. Today, I can look back on that season and celebrate, not only because of the outcome, but because God was faithful every step of the way!

What has God done in your life that you need to stop and celebrate today? How can you trust God and celebrate while you wait?

Prayer: Jesus, help us remember Your faithfulness in every season. Teach us to celebrate not only Your answers, but Your presence and our full reliance on You while we wait, amen.

Great is His Faithfulness

Pastor Matt McGukin

"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end: they are new every morning: great is your faithfulness."
(Lamentations 3:22-23)

Some of the greatest times of joy and celebration come after the darkest nights of the soul. In March of 2023, our son Noah received his second kidney transplant. A true blessing from God after multiple years of quarantine and declining health. But the timing and distance from the hospital would make this a difficult time for our family. Marty and Noah had to remain in Salt Lake City near the hospital for at least a month, while Daisy and I were three hours away, traveling back and forth every few days. To make matters more complicated, our church was hosting a major two-week revival, with

a large revival team, that we had been planning for over a year. Some of the team members were staying in our house, so Daisy and I were living away from home in someone else's house while Marty and Noah were three hours away.

I was stressed, tired, overwhelmed, and missing my wife and son. After one night of the revival, I was talking to Marty on the phone, and she seemed a little more excited than normal. In that conversation, I found out she and Noah were coming home two weeks early, and my heart was filled with such joy and celebration. Even though we would not be in our own home for another week, at least we would all be under the same roof. My outlook completely changed to one of gratitude, joy, and thankfulness. Many of the hard details remained; another week of the revival remained. Noah still had multiple doctor appointments three hours away, and we were not in our own home, but we were together. The grace, mercy, and provision of God sustained us, and my heart could truly celebrate that the “steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.”

Has there been a time in your life when you had to trust God even when it didn't make sense? What daily habit(s) could increase your joy in the Lord?

Prayer: Lord help my heart to be filled with joy and celebration despite whatever circumstances I may face. Continuously remind me that you are my portion, therefore I will hope in you.

 And, They Began to Be Merry

Grant McDurmon

“And bring the fatted calf here and kill it and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.” Luke 15:24

God has given me many reasons to celebrate. There are too many reasons to count! My wife and children are certainly cause for rejoicing. We celebrate our marriage anniversary each year and the birthdays of our children. We celebrate together whenever one of us reaches a hard-fought goal, such as a milestone at work or a good grade in school. When we consider the faithfulness of the Lord in our lives, we can’t help but rejoice.

Celebration and rejoicing are even commanded by God (Philippians 4:4, Psalm 118:24). This is because, for the Christian, our celebrations are centered on Jesus! After all, it is in His presence we find fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11). Since we know that every good and perfect gift is from above (James 1:17), our celebrations are always rooted in thanksgiving to God. We recognize that, even as we may celebrate our loved ones or our accomplishments or our milestones, it is God and His grace we are truly making much of.

For me, this has never been more apparent than on the days my son and daughter told me that Jesus had saved them. God had been at work in their hearts and had given them faith to believe. According to God’s timing, he saved them, and our whole family celebrated with baptism, worship, good food, and family time.

This kind of great rejoicing is illustrated by Jesus' parable about the son who was lost but then found. Jesus uses these verses to teach us many things. As our heavenly Father, God loves us and desires us to be in fellowship with Him. Like the father in the story Jesus told, God never abandons us; instead, when we come to him with a humble heart, He runs to us, clothes us, kisses us, and calls for a big party! We, following God's example, should likewise devote our passion and resources to celebrations like this – “parties” that magnify the goodness of God in our lives.

What has God given you that is worthy of celebration? Is your life characterized by rejoicing and generosity, as the father in the parable, or are you holding back?

Prayer: Father, you are worthy of my praise, and I want to share this celebration with others. Help me not to hold back, but to devote more of myself to times and ways of rejoicing, in Jesus' name, amen.

Before All Else Fails, Pray.

Phil Bennett

“Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

John 14:13

Over the years, God has allowed me to go on numerous mission trips. The one thing about mission trips is to expect the unexpected. What you remember and take with you are the lessons learned and the wonders experienced while seeking to do God's will.

On my very first mission trip to a third-world country, I took in all the sights and sounds, experiencing their way of life. As part of an evangelism team in a country where English wasn't the primary language, we reached people through an interpreter, tracts, and films about Christ. On one particular evening, more than a hundred people gathered to watch a movie and hear a short salvation message. As the sun went down, the sky began to light up with lightning, and thunder rumbled in the distance. Everyone was anxious about the approaching storm. It was the culmination of a week's worth of door-to-door witnessing, and it felt like the entire event could be rained out and ruined. Our team leader immediately suggested we gather, form a circle, join hands, and pray for God to hold off the rain. Although I had always believed in prayer, asking God to stop the weather felt like a setup for failure. Yet, we did exactly that. We joined hands and prayed as a group. Lo and behold, the storm was held off. The movie played, the speaker delivered the message, the invitation was given, and numerous people came to know Christ before the rains finally came. I learned a serious lesson about prayer and faith that night that would one day be needed.

Fast forward five or more years. With many more mission trips behind me, I found myself leading a team in a very similar situation. This time, however, the challenge wasn't a rainstorm—it was a generator. We were in a village with absolutely no electricity except for what we brought with us. The generator looked like it had been pulled out of a landfill, yet it was our only source of power to show the film and run the microphone. As the sun began to set, the men running the equipment tried to fire up the generator. It wouldn't start. They pulled the cord repeatedly. Ten minutes passed, then twenty, then thirty. It seemed hopeless. Remembering the leader from my first trip,

I gathered my team into a circle, and we bowed our heads to pray. As I asked God to start the engine, I could hear it sputter and stop in the background. In my mind, I wondered how long we should keep going. I felt a deep conviction to pray until God answered. Finally, I prayed, & I quote; “Father, this is for Your glory, Your honor, and Your praise.” Immediately, the generator roared to life. I dropped my hands from the circle and raised them to celebrate God’s faithfulness. The whole team walked away praising Him. I learned that before all else fails, pray. God hears and answers when His children cry out, using us to share His message of salvation in His perfect timing. Am I guilty of believing that God only cares about the big things in my life? Do I wait until every other option has been exhausted before turning to God in prayer?

Prayer: Father, help me to always turn to you first knowing that I can celebrate your faithfulness in every part of my life, amen.

The Joy of Trusting God

“Then she left, and went and gleaned in the fields after the reapers. And she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.”

Ruth 2:3

Next to our salvation, is there a more important time than finding one’s spouse-to-be? While in college, I prayed that God would guide me to that woman – the one who would complete me, bless me, and make me a better man. (For sure, this cuts both ways, but this is my story, not hers!) Many marriages begin in college, but I did not find her there.

My prayers continued, and over the next four years, I was still in an academic setting, but, again, she was not there.

Then I found myself over a thousand miles from home in a large city wherein I knew no one. Knowing I would be there for some time, I looked for a church. It was a big city, so lots of churches – big, small, and in between – so, I picked one. I don't recall asking God for some sign or divine guidance in my choice for, after all, any Bible-believing church should be acceptable to Him, right? And, so I went. The minister was great; the folks were friendly and welcoming. So, then I went to Sunday School – and drumroll... there she was! And, here is the part that makes certain, in my mind, that this was of God: Our paths would never have crossed outside this church, and she had started going to that Sunday School class only two weeks before me! We dated, fell in love, and got married in that church.

Because of this experience, when I read the book of Ruth, verse three always stand out to me. We know that it was God's plan that Ruth and Boaz would wed, for the book closes with a genealogy showing them to be the great grandparents of King David. But what were the circumstances of their meeting? The book details a series of seemingly coincidental events that bring Ruth, a God-fearing foreigner, into contact with Boaz. That series leads to her reaping in his field. There were other fields, so why did she pick his? Did a priest or prophet tell her to go there? Did God tell her in a dream? Apparently not, for the text simply says "as it turned out she found herself in Boaz's field – just as it turned out I found myself in that Sunday School class a thousand miles away.

So, we are to cast all our anxieties on Him knowing that He cares for us (I Peter 5:7), knowing that He hears our prayers (I John 5:14), and knowing that He works things out for our good (Romans 8:28). In short, we are to trust Him to know what is for “our good” and resist the urge to dictate how and when God should answer our prayers. Be open to His surprises!

How have you seen God work out the details in your life for your good and His glory? In what ways are you still not trusting God with the details of your life?

Prayer: Oh, God, thank you for showing up time and again to work in ways I would never have imagined. Give me grace today to trust you with even the smallest details of my life, amen.

Learning to Celebrate

Matt McGukin

“I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance”

Luke 15:7

I am not the best at celebrating. In fact, my family very often considers me to be the party pooper. It’s not that I don’t like having fun, I just naturally tend to be more reserved. But God has blessed me with two sons that are the life of the party. They exude joy, laughter, and full-speed energy. God has used my sons to teach me how to cut loose a little more - to not withhold my excitement or joy because I’m worried what others may think.

God has been teaching me the value of Biblical celebration. In fact, Luke 15 presents the picture of a joyful party in heaven over just one sinner coming to faith in Jesus, making the transition from lost to found. We, in the church, need to learn to celebrate like the angels in heaven when someone is brought from death to life, from hell bound to heaven destined.

In what ways do you celebrate on a regular basis? How can the church better celebrate when someone comes to faith in Christ?

Prayer: Oh God, teach me to find joy in you. Help me to be filled with joy and celebration when even one person comes to faith in you. Thank you for saving me, amen.

Reflections

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



This is the Life