



TOGETHER

— IN PRAYER —

**a 21-day
prayer devotional**

Prayer and The Gospel

Day 1 | August 10

Prayer is a gift from God. It is another piece of evidence that God is *rich in mercy*, filled with *great love* for us (Eph. 2:4). For people like us, people who were *dead in trespasses and sins* (Eph. 2:1), *who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds* (Col. 1:21), that we are able to come before Holy God in prayer is astonishing. How are we able to even glance toward God Almighty, not to mention that we can *let our requests be made known to him* (Phil. 4:6)?

The answer is Jesus Christ. By his perfect life, atoning death and victorious resurrection, Jesus the Son of God provided access for us to come to God in prayer. The New Testament tells us that *by the blood of Jesus, we have access to the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh* (Heb. 10:19–20). Incredibly, we don't even come through this way hesitatingly, as if we don't deserve to be there. No, because of Jesus, we have been given full right of access to stand before God himself! *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace*, the author of Hebrews tells us (Heb. 4:16). And don't miss this: what's the reason for this? Why are we given access and why do we draw near? Hebrews 4:16 answers that for us: *that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need*. What a gift!

God has made a way for you—for you!—to come to him so that you can make your requests known to him, and as you do that, he has promised to give you mercy and grace.

So today, spend a few minutes asking God to grow you in prayer over these next 21 days. Thank him for the gift of prayer, ask him to grow in you an appreciation for the gift of prayer, and go ahead and begin bringing your specific needs for mercy and grace to him.

A Heart for God

Day 2 | August 11

One of the great gifts that we receive through the gospel is the gift of a new heart. Previously, before Christ, we had *a heart of stone*, that is, our heart was cold, dead, and hardened toward God. But, according to the prophet Ezekiel, God promised his people: *I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh* (Ezek. 36:26). This new heart is included in the New Covenant promises found in Jer. 31:31–34, promises fulfilled by Jesus through his life, death, and resurrection (Luke 22:20).

The New Testament is full of images that help us understand the significance of the new heart. The new heart is what Jesus was describing when he told Nicodemus, *“You must be born again”* (John 3:3, 7). The new heart is part of what Paul was referring to when he wrote that God has *made us alive together with Christ* (Eph. 2:5) and when he told the church in Corinth that *if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come* (2 Cor. 5:17). The reality of the new heart is an all-encompassing, life changing miracle!

One of the effects of the miracle of the new heart is that where we once were opposed to God, now we have a heart that loves God. The new heart enables us to live in light of the first great commandment: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart* (Matt. 22:37). The new heart, then, radically reorients our lives, turning us from loving self to loving God.

Today, read Ephesians 3:16–19 and make that passage your prayer. Ask God to help you comprehend anew his love for you in Christ, and to grow your love for him in response. Ask him to help you love him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, so that, instead of living for yourself, you would choose to live for him today.

The Spirit

Day 3 | August 12

Along with the new heart, God promised that he would put in his people *a new spirit*, going on to say, “*I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules*” (Ezek. 36:26–27). At Pentecost, God kept this promise. On that day, God *filled* his people *with the Holy Spirit* (Acts 2:1–4). From that day forward, when someone becomes a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ, he gives that person his Spirit; through the Spirit, God himself dwells in each of his people!

The Spirit is *the Helper* who is *with you forever* (John 14:16). Through the Spirit, both the Father and the Son *come ... and make (their) home with you* (John 14:23). By the Spirit, God teaches us *all things*, and, by the Spirit, Jesus promises to *bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you* (John 14:26). In this way, the Spirit is yet another fulfillment of the New Covenant promises, so that all of God’s people will know him, be taught by him, and have his word written on their hearts (Jer. 31:33–34).

If you are a Christian, God himself is with you. His Spirit is a Spirit of *power*, a Spirit of *love*, a Spirit of *self-control* (2 Tim. 1:7). As you go into the world today—into your workplace, or your school, or your neighborhood, or even into your own living room—you go with the presence of God. You have all that you need to love him, serve him, follow him, and honor him today, and you have all you need because he has given himself to you. Praise God for the gift of his Spirit!

Pray for your day by thinking about the different responsibilities you have today, the different places you’ll go today, and the different people you’ll encounter today. As you think of what’s ahead of you today, pray for each event and person, asking God to help you honor him by living faithfully and loving others. Also, take a moment to recognize that you don’t know everything that’s ahead of you today. Ask God, by his Spirit in you, to make clear to you how you’re to live and speak in those as yet unknown situations, so that you’ll honor Christ in all that you do.

Faith

Day 4 | August 13

Without faith, the author of Hebrews tells us, *it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him* (Heb. 11:6). To draw near to God requires faith. It requires faith, as we saw on Day 1, that the Son of God has opened the way for us to draw near (Heb. 10:19–20). Drawing near to God requires faith that God *exists*, that is, that the God of the Bible—Father, Son, and Spirit—is the one, true God. We might disbelieve the last aspect of faith that is required to draw near to God, if it weren’t mentioned in Heb. 11:6. Drawing near to God requires faith that the God of the Bible *rewards those who seek him*. That’s incredible! Through prayer, God himself wants to *reward* you, so much so that it’s pleasing to God when we remember that aspect of his character and live in light of that!

Do you believe that? Do you believe that the God who is the Creator of all things and the Sustainer of all things (Col. 1:16–17) desires to reward you as you draw near to him? He does! And we can believe it because that’s what he’s revealed about himself in Scripture.

His desire to reward those who seek him is why Jesus invited us, so often, to come to him in prayer. “*Ask, and it will be given to you,*” Jesus said; “*seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened*” (Matt. 7:7–8). Immediately after that, in case there were any doubt, Jesus told us this: “*Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!*” (Matt. 7:9–11).

The point is, your *Father in heaven* loves to give good gifts to his children. So are you asking him?

What are your needs today? What are the needs of your family today? What are the needs of those in the church today, or of your neighbors today, or others who you know and love? God promises to give bread, fish, and good gifts to those who ask. Ask for specific needs, and trust him to provide in response.

Hope

Day 5 | August 14

Christian hope is not the same as what we typically mean by the word “hope.” We hope our team will win the ballgame; we hope that we get at least one good snow each winter; we hope we can take that dream vacation. We hope for all sorts of things, but we don’t have any assurance that we’ll receive any of those things. We hope for it, but we don’t count on it. But that’s not biblical hope.

Biblical hope is confident assurance in the certainty of God’s promises. Yes, *we hope for what we do not see*, but that’s only because what we can see *is not hope* (Rom. 8:24–25). Biblically, *we hope for what we do not see* (and) *we wait for it with patience* (Rom. 8:25). That is, *we wait for it with patience* because we know, we have assurance, that what we wait for is coming. We take God at his word, we believe his promises, and we hope confidently in the fulfillment of those promises because *God is faithful* (1 Cor. 1:9).

Here’s where this helps us: when we’re in the middle of the hardest season of life, we can live with hope, because *we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose* (Rom. 8:28). When we are concerned about the salvation of our loved ones, who maybe seem to be so far away from God, we can live with hope, because he has said, *my word ... shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it* (Isa. 55:11). When we face death itself, we can live with hope, because Jesus has defeated death and given us the victory (1 Cor. 15:54–56).

So where do you need hope today? Where do you need to remember with confident assurance that God is for you, not against you (Rom. 8:31)? Is there something currently plaguing you with fear? Fight it by prayerfully remembering God’s promises. Read and pray through Romans 8:28–39. Thank God for the many promises in these verses and ask him to help you hope confidently in him so that you may live faithfully in response.

Love

Day 6 | August 15

The apostle Paul tells us in Galatians 5:22 that *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*. The presence of the Spirit in our lives will produce fruit in us, and that fruit will taste like these nine characteristics, so that people around us will see something of Christ's image in us; as Paul says elsewhere, *this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit* (2 Cor. 3:18).

God is at work in your life to make you more loving. *God is love* (1 John 4:8, 16), and, like himself, he wants you to be known by love. According to the Bible, we are to love God and love others (Mark 12:28–31). Within the latter category, we're also explicitly called not only to love other Christians (1 Pet. 1:22), but also to *love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you* (Matt. 5:44).

Love is like hope in that the way the word is typically used today stands in sharp contrast to what the word means biblically. Biblically, love for others (including our enemies!) could be defined as a sacrificial commitment to the good of another as God defines it. Love requires sacrifice (Eph. 5:2; 1 John 3:16); love is a commitment (1 Cor. 13:7); love seeks the good of the other, as God defines that good (1 Cor. 13:6).

This is Christlike love. When we love others in this way, the world takes note. Jesus said *by this, all people will know that (we) are (his) disciples, as we love one another just as (he) loved (us)* (John 13:34). Further, as we love our enemies, seeking their good as God defines it, this is part of fulfilling Jesus's command to *let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven* (Matt. 5:16).

Love like this is difficult, but the good news is, love is a *fruit of the Spirit*. Love like this doesn't depend on you alone; it depends on God at work in you. Have you asked God to help you show biblical love to difficult people in your life? Have you asked him to help you live with Christlike love towards people who are naturally easy to love? Pray today for others in your life, that you would show love to them in a way that honors God and reflects the love of Jesus Christ.

Joy

Day 7 | August 16

One of God's characteristics that he is committed to replicating in your life is joy; *the fruit of the Spirit is ... joy* (Gal. 5:22). What good news!

Joy should increasingly be evident in the life of the Christian. That doesn't mean, of course, that the Christian can't be serious, or sorrowful, or solemn, but even here, the Christian can be, and should be, full of joy!

According to the prophet Isaiah, the coming Messiah (Jesus) would be *a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief* (Isa. 53:3), but Jesus spoke clearly of his own joy and of giving his joy to his followers: "*These things I have spoken to you,*" Jesus said, *"that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full"* (John 15:11). So it's no surprise when we read that Paul described himself as *sorrowful, yet always rejoicing* (2 Cor. 6:10). He was simply following in the footsteps of Jesus!

But how is that possible? What does it look like to be sorrowful, yet always rejoicing? How do we experience both at the same time? The answer is, the Christian is someone who knows her joy is in Christ, not in her circumstances; someone who knows that his joy is rooted in God and the Gospel, not in his personal success or comfort in life.

Joy comes from Jesus. Joy comes from knowing that *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me*. Joy comes from knowing *the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me* (Gal. 2:20). This is why Paul can say that he *learned, in whatever situation ..., to be content*. He knew *how to be brought low ... and how to abound*. He *learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need* (Phil. 4:11–12). And the secret was Christ. Paul knew Christ, the joy of Christ, and Paul discovered the truth that *the joy of the LORD is your strength* (Neh. 8:10).

Do others know you as someone who is full of joy? Are you a joyful mother or a joyful father? Are you a joyful son or a joyful daughter? A joyful employee or a joyful boss? Are you a joyful student? A joyful neighbor? Ask God to increase your joy by reminding you today of all the good things he has done for you in Christ and ask him to help you show that joy to others.

Peace

Day 8 | August 17

The world is full of trouble. Whether it's relationships that need mending or repairs needed around the house, or whether it's personal finances or the global economy, or whether it's wars and rumors of wars or it's difficulty at work, trouble abounds all around us. And in a world like that, it's good to know that Jesus said, *"In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world,"* and the one who overcame the world did so, in part, so that in (him) you may have peace (John 16:33). Indeed, *the fruit of the Spirit is ... peace* (Gal. 5:22).

Peace is not only the absence of hostilities, but it is also the presence of rest and the comfort of God's blessing in the life of the believer. Peace flows to the believer from the gospel: *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ* (Rom. 5:1). Apart from Christ, we *were alienated and hostile in mind*, but Christ *has now reconciled (us) in his body of flesh by his death* (Col. 1:21–22). The hostility between us and God has been removed; now we know peace. Now that we have found rest in Christ, we know the comfort of his blessings.

This peace marks our positional standing before God, and, incredibly, it also is meant to permeate our everyday lives. The enjoyed experience of peace is a major reason for the gift of prayer. Paul tells us to pray so that we will experience God's peace: *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* (Phil. 4:6–7). Peter also encourages you to *cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you* (1 Pet. 5:6). You can cast a fishing line or a net, but how do you "cast" anxieties? Like casting a net, you throw them. You're to take your anxieties ("about anything," Paul says) and throw them on God in prayer.

What's worrying you today? What anxieties have you been carrying recently? Take some time to cast them on God in prayer. Be specific with them. Express your worries honestly to God, and then "make requests" for God to do something about them. You'll probably need to do this again tomorrow. And if so, that's okay. He loves to answer the calls of his children in need (Ps. 50:15).

Patience

Day 9 | August 18

It's a funny quirk in contemporary Christianity: people don't want to pray for patience, because they're worried that God will teach them patience, and learning patience usually isn't a fun lesson. But patience is part of the fruit that the Spirit produces in our lives, just *like love, joy, peace*, and the rest (Gal. 5:22–23). We desire that God would bring these aspects of *the fruit of the Spirit* to bear in our lives, so we should also desire the aspect of patience as well, and if the lesson is sour, the fruit is sweet!

Patience is a *fruit of the Spirit* because patience is a character trait of God himself. Each of us, and in fact every human who has ever existed, has benefited from the patience of God. God is patient in his dealing with us. He withholds the judgment due to sin (1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 3:9). He is *slow to anger* (Exod. 34:6; Num. 14:18; Ps. 78:38, 86:15). And he is patient with us in part so that we will see his beauty and turn to him in faith (Rom. 2:4; 1 Tim. 1:16). When we pray for patience, we're praying that God will transform us to be better reflections of him to the world around us.

Yes, the lessons are not easy. Sometimes God teaches us patience through years of hardship, like Abraham (Gen. 12–21; Heb. 6:15), Joseph (Gen. 37–50), and Moses (Exod. 2–4). Sometimes the lessons involve great loss and immense tragedy, like with Job (Job 1–2; James 5:10–11). But the lesson is always good for our souls. In the school of patience, we learn the truth of what God told Paul: *My grace is sufficient for you* (2 Cor. 12:9). And in the everyday lessons of patience, we receive the much greater lesson: we wait patiently on the Lord, who will one day come again. *You have need of endurance*, the author of Hebrews tells us, *so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised* (Heb. 10:36).

So, go ahead and do what maybe someone has told you not to do: take some time this morning and pray for patience. Praise God for his patience with you and ask him to grow patience in you toward others. Pray for specific people with whom you're often impatient, or for specific circumstances that reveal a lack of patience in your life. Ask God to help you bear this *fruit of the Spirit*. (And it's okay to ask for easy lessons.)

Kindness

Day 10 | August 19

Tomorrow, we will consider what it means that *the fruit of the Spirit is ... goodness*, but today, we consider goodness-in-action, the fruit of kindness. Kindness is the sweet mixture of graciousness, generosity, and compassion. It possesses a soft demeanor as opposed to a harsh attitude towards others. Therefore, kindness invites others in, as they are, and receives them with warmth and love.

God is kind. Paul tells us about the *riches of (God's) kindness*, the goal of which is *meant to lead you to repentance* (Rom. 2:4). That the goal of God's kindness is repentance means that God's kindness is expressed toward people who need repentance; that is, he shows kindness to people who are opposed to him. Indeed, according to Jesus, *God is kind, even to the ungrateful and the evil* (Luke 6:35).

Romans 2:4 and Luke 6:35 teach us that God was kind to us, even *while we were enemies* (Rom. 5:10), which brings us to the greatest expression of God's kindness. In Luke 6:35, God's kindness is shown in him *doing good* and giving (the words are, "*lend, expecting nothing in return*" which means freely giving, without expecting) to *enemies*. *Love your enemies*, Jesus says there, *and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil*. God's kindness is shown in him giving to the *evil*, to the *ungrateful*, to his enemies. And in Rom. 5, we read of the greatest gift of love that he gave to his enemies: his Son. *God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us* (Rom. 5:8).

We were enemies of God, and we were beneficiaries of the kindness of God. He gave us food and rain, health and strength, family and friends, all of these, each and every day. And he gave his Son, even when we were entirely opposed to him. That's kindness.

There are probably people in your life with whom it is difficult for you to show kindness. You're polite to them, sure. But are you kind to them? Do they sense graciousness, generosity, and compassion from you? Are you receiving them as they are with warmth and love? Do they see the kindness of God reflecting from your life? Pray about that. Ask God to help you reflect his kindness today.

Goodness

Day 11 | August 20

If, as we read yesterday, kindness is goodness-in-action, that means that a down-deep goodness is required to live a life that reflects God to others. That's why goodness, like kindness, requires the Spirit at work in us. *The fruit of the Spirit is ... kindness, goodness* (Gal. 5:22). On our own, we are not good. Now, before you object to that statement, just remember that Paul said, quoting David, and, most importantly, inspired by the Spirit, *no one does good, not even one* (Rom 3:12; Ps. 14:3). Paul later wrote, *I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh* (Rom. 7:18). He confessed there that he had *the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out*. What that means is, we are in desperate need of God at work in us to do good to others. For, as Jesus said, *apart from him, we can do nothing* (John 15:5).

Goodness is godly, moral excellence that loves to do what is right in God's eyes for God's glory and the good of others, as God defines it. Notice the prevalence of "God" or "godly" in that definition. It is godly moral excellence. That is, goodness is living by God's morality, not the world's. Goodness, therefore, loves to do what is right in God's eyes, even if the world tells us otherwise. Goodness also seeks God's glory, not the glory of self. It is not self-serving in its motivation; it is God-serving. And goodness seeks the good (the benefit) of others, again, as God defines that good, not as the world defines it.

Ps. 119:68, speaking of God, says, *You are good and do good*. Goodness describes both a character trait (*the Lord is good*, Ps. 34:8) and it describes the works that God does (see Ps. 145:9). The greatest expression of God's goodness, of course, is Christ. Paul described the coming of Jesus Christ by *when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared* (Tit. 3:5).

The goodness of God should be seen in and through us, and we should ask God to grow this in us. We are to both be good—*living self-controlled, upright, and godly lives* (Tit. 2:12)—and we are to be *zealous for good works* (Tit. 2:14). Does that describe you? Are you zealous for good works? Do people know you as someone who is "good"? In God's goodness, he can reproduce that in you. So ask him. Ask him to grow you in goodness, for the good of others and the glory of Jesus.

Faithfulness

Day 12 | August 21

In Yellowstone National Park, one can see “Old Faithful.” The geyser was given its name in 1871 because those on the expedition at that time found that it could be counted on to erupt at regular intervals. It could be counted on. It could be trusted. It was faithful.

Faithfulness is the Spirit-produced consistency of trusting in and following Christ, regardless of the circumstances. It is steadfast, active trust. We’re faithful, we’re true, in our devotion to our King; we’re faithful and true to his Word; we’re faithful and true to his community, the Church. More than Old Faithful can be counted on as reliably consistent, our lives should be marked by both trust in Christ and lives that are consistent with that trust.

Incredibly, this doesn’t depend entirely on us. Yes, we do it. Yes, we must choose to obey and choose to follow; we choose to be faithful everyday. But, at the same time, faithfulness is a *fruit of the Spirit* (Gal. 5:22). Faithfulness is something produced in us by the Spirit as a reflection of the faithfulness of God in us.

God is faithful (1 Cor. 1:9). He is described as *the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments* (Deut. 7:9). Jeremiah praised God, saying *great is your faithfulness* (Lam. 3:23). God is faithful to us, even when we’re not faithful to him (2 Tim. 2:13). These Scriptures, and more, are meant to remind us and encourage us that God keeps his promises, that he is trustworthy and true to his character, that we can count on him to do what is right and good.

So, we should ask God to grow faithfulness in us in response to his faithfulness to us. Ask God to help you grow in your trust and in living a life consistent with the confession that Jesus is Lord. Ask, and you can count on him to do that: *He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it* (1 Thess. 5:24).

Gentleness

Day 13 | August 22

We could call it “the forgotten fruit.” Especially in a day that is marked by loud personalities demanding their voices be heard and their opinions be accepted without reservation, gentleness is seen as passive, as weak, as soft. But all of those are misrepresentations. Far from being spineless and timid, gentleness requires strength. And though we may not talk about it much, God has assigned gentleness a value that is far weightier than we might think.

Christians are commanded to *put on ... meekness* (Col. 3:12), the same word translated as “gentleness” in *the fruit of the Spirit* in Gal. 5:23. We’re to put on gentleness as a reflection of Christ in us. Jesus described himself as one who is *gentle and lowly in heart* (Matt. 11:29), and he said that in an invitation for all to come to him. Like kindness, gentleness invites others in. It’s closely related to humility, and it involves lovingkindness. To be gentle is to be friendly and warm, not rough and prone to sudden outbursts of anger. And Paul says in Col. 3:12, we’re to *put on* gentleness. We’re to be clothed in gentleness. It should be obvious to others that we’re gentle people.

Some are wired this way, but those who are wired this way may need to grow in strength and conviction to speak *the truth in love* (Eph. 4:15). Others may find the fruit of gentleness to be very difficult. Those may need to grow in the “in love” part of speaking the truth.

All of us need to be known by gentleness, in the same way that Christ is gentle with us. We need to be gentle in our parenting, in our marriages, in our work relationships. We need to be gentle in our posting on social media, in our conversations with customer service reps, in our speaking to those with whom we disagree.

Gentleness is not easy in 2026. So we need to pray. Ask God to grow in you, and in all of us, the sweet fruit of gentleness.

Self-Control

Day 14 | August 23

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22–23). These nine virtues together comprise the fruit that the Spirit produces in the lives of believers. The first eight obviously require the Spirit, but the last, self-control, may not be as clear. If it is self-control, why do we need the Spirit?

First, what is self-control? One writer has said that self-control is the ability to speak with kindness when you want to scream. It is battle on two fronts: self-control is the Spirit-enabled resistance of temptation and the Spirit-enabled active pursuit of godly living. Paul tells us in 2 Tim. 2:22 to *flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace*. We're to flee what's wrong and pursue what's right. And both are a battle.

The word “battle” was used intentionally. You must fight to exercise control over self, and the flesh does not make it easy. Paul described this battle by saying *I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate* (Rom. 7:15). What's the answer? How can we exercise control, so that we will do what is right and not do what is evil?

The answer is, we exercise self-control by the Spirit. Just a few verses down from that, Paul said *if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live* (Rom. 8:13). By the Spirit we exercise self-control over the deeds of the body.

Self-control is our work. We do it. We choose to say no to the flesh, we choose to say yes to God and to godliness. But we're only able to fully do this by the Spirit alive and at work in us. So let's ask him to help us. Ask God to help you say no to specific things today that you need to stop doing, and ask him to help you do the things that you need to do. And then today, do it. Exercise self-control. And each time, pray a prayer of thanks to God.

Walk in the Light

Day 15 | August 24

Take two minutes, that's literally all it will take, to read this out loud, slowly: *This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world* (1 John 1:5–2:1).

What did you notice? What themes are repeated? What does John want us to know and to do because of this passage?

1. John wants us to *walk in the light*. He wants us to live faithful lives, seeking to honor God and not *walk in darkness*. Pray for what is ahead of you today. Ask God to help you *practice the truth*, to live in light of Scripture, and to live in *fellowship* with *Jesus his Son*.
2. John wants us to humbly *confess sin* and practice true repentance. He wants us to be honest about our sin and not be those who deny sin and so *deceive* themselves. Instead, he wants us to *confess sin* while trusting that God is *faithful to forgive us and to cleanse us* from sin. So spend a few minutes doing that. Think of specific sins or sin patterns in your life, and confess those honestly before God, asking him to help you no longer *walk in darkness* but to *walk in the light*.
3. John wants us to remember the gospel. When we do sin, we remember that Christ made *propitiation* (an atoning sacrifice) *for our sins* and now stands as our *advocate*. Thank God for Christ, for what he has done for you and for the world.

Unity

Day 16 | August 25

“Only.” It narrows everything down to the thing of greatest importance. If your calculus professor in college tells you, “If you only remember this one formula, you’ll excel on this exam,” then you write it down, you memorize it, you work hard to do that one thing because you know, it’s the one thing that will help you understand everything else. And “only” is the word that Paul uses to tell the church at Philippi this: *Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel* (Phil. 1:27).

Paul’s great concern with the church at Philippi was that they would live *worthy of the gospel*, and Paul believed that one of the chief effects of that life would be seen in the unity of the church. He described that unity as *standing firm in one spirit, with one mind*. Unity, or oneness in spirit and mind, should mark the group of Christians who follow Jesus together as the local church. Further, according to the apostle, living *worthy of the gospel* involves living in unity with the local church—not just attending a church, not just being a member of a particular church, but living in unity with the local church.

Unity in the congregation requires humility among the members of the congregation. It requires a focus on seeking the glory of God through seeking the good of others and the good of the collective body. Paul speaks to this in Phil. 2:1–4, calling us to be *of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind* and to *count others more significant than yourselves*. That’s not natural. How can we do that? Because of Christ, both Christ’s example for us and Christ’s life in us (Phil. 2:5–11).

Do you see unity in the church as a fruit of living worthy of the gospel? Because of our common connection to Christ, are you working to pursue unity at Mountain Creek? Ask God to give us unity, that we would *stand firm in one spirit, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel*.

Strengthened According to His Might

Day 17 | August 26

One of the best ways to grow your prayer life is to read (and pray!) the prayers of the New Testament. These prayers are scattered throughout the NT and include Matt. 6:9–13; John 17; Acts 4:24–31; Eph. 1:15–23; 3:14–21; Phil. 1:9–11; Col. 4:12; and 2 Thess. 1:11–12. Today, we're going to pray through the prayer from Col. 1:9–14. There, Paul outlines his prayer for the church at Colossae.

Read the passage in full. Paul prayed that the church would *be filled with the knowledge of (God's) will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding*, and as that happened, that they would *walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit ... and increasing in the knowledge of God*. He prayed that they would be *strengthened with all power according to (God's) glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy*. Not an afterthought, Paul also prayed that they would be *giving thanks to the Father who made qualified them for this because He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins*.

Redemption in Christ made possible the realities that Paul prayed for, but Paul still prayed for them. Redemption in Christ *qualified* them for this, but Paul still asked God to work this in them. Paul's example shows us that prayer is one of the means that God uses to *work in (us), both to will and to work for his good pleasure* (Phil. 2:13).

Are you praying for Mountain Creek to experience the fullness of what God has done for us in Christ? Are you asking God to fill us with wisdom, so that we would walk worthy and live pleasing to him? Are you asking him to strengthen us with his power, so that we would endure in the Christian life with joy? And are you regularly giving thanks for what God has done for us and is doing in us through Christ?

Make this your prayer today for MCBC.

Not Conformed, but Transformed

Day 18 | August 27

After eleven chapters of gospel truth, Paul turns to applying the gospel to daily life in Rom. 12. There, he wrote this to the church in Rome, and, by extension, to the church at Mountain Creek: *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* (Rom. 12:1–2).

To *be conformed* is to take the shape of something pressed on you. Cookie dough is conformed to the shape of the cookie cutter. Silly putty takes the shape of the items pressed into it. To *be conformed* is to allow the world to shape your desires, thoughts, attitudes, and purpose by bringing those into alignment with the world's.

To *be transformed* is different. The Greek word for this is the word from which we get the English word “metamorphosis.” It’s to be changed from the inside out, and that’s what God does within us through the Spirit. Elsewhere, Paul, speaking of Christians, wrote, *we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit* (2 Cor. 3:18). We’re *being transformed*, it’s something that God does in us, *into the same image* (“the glory of the Lord”) as we *behold* and worship Christ.

God is at work in us to transform us so that, more and more, we look like Jesus, which is entirely different than looking like the world. This comes as we *present our bodies* (both spiritually and physically!) *as a living sacrifice* to God and as we *behold the glory of the Lord*. Does that describe you? Are you presenting yourself to God? Are you seeking to behold him? Ask him to help you. Ask him to change your specific desires to align with his desires, and not the world's. Ask him to show you more of his glory each time you open his word and each time you come to worship, and ask him to transform you and the church more into the image of his Son.

The Eyes of Your Heart

Day 19 | August 28

How are your eyes? Can you see clearly? Do you wear lenses to correct your vision? What about your spiritual eyes? Paul prayed for the church at Ephesus that they would *have the eyes of (their) hearts enlightened* (Eph. 1:18). What about you? Do you see clearly from your heart?

Maybe it would be helpful to think first about what that means. If the heart is the seat of our lives, the control center of who we are, and if eyes represent our ability to see or perceive truth, then the eyes of our heart are the means by which we perceive reality that shapes our lives. On our own, our heart has been shaped by the sin nature we inherited from Adam. But Christ made us new (2 Cor. 5:17); he has given us *a new heart* and *put (his) Spirit within (us)* (Ezek. 36:26–27). Before Christ we were spiritually blind (2 Cor. 4:4), but now we can see! The question is, if that's true, why do we still need our eyes *enlightened*?

When you look through binoculars, you can see objects far away, but you can't see them clearly without turning the dial. You need to bring the items into focus and then you can see them clearly. Our sin nature constantly blurs reality. We've been given binoculars to see, but we haven't yet been given new eyes, so to speak. We still need to get things in focus. And the way we do that is by prayer. We ask God to *enlighten the eyes of our hearts* so that we can see and perceive reality clearly.

That'll change when we see Jesus *face to face* (1 John 3:2). Now, *we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face* (1 Cor. 13:12). Then, we'll see clearly. But in this life, we need his daily help to see as we ought. So we should pray.

Ask God today to open the eyes of your heart so that you could see truth clearly. Ask him to help you know and apply his word. Ask him to show you how to live and honor him. And ask him to do this in your family and in our church.

He Cares for You

Day 20 | August 29

Near the end of the movie *Hook*, the crisis moment hits on a baseball field. Peter Pan's son, Jack, has been slowly brainwashed by Captain Hook, who convinced Jack that his dad (Peter Pan) didn't care for him. Little by little, Jack forgot who he was and where he came from, and he forgot the truth about his father's care for him.

The climatic moment comes when Jack is up to bat in a baseball game. Jack loved baseball, so Captain Hook not only put on this game for him, he also set it up so Jack could be the hero. When Jack came up to bat, the pirates in the crowd didn't know anything about baseball, so instead of chanting "Home Run, Jack!", they shouted, "Run Home, Jack!" Jack was snapped out of his fog; he remembered the truth, and he ran home.

Like Jack, sometimes we become clouded and forget the truth. We forget who we are in Christ, we forget that *our citizenship is in heaven* (Phil. 3:20), and, very importantly for us in this life, we forget that our Father in heaven cares for us. God, the Almighty One, cares for you!

That's why Peter writes, *humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you* (1 Pet. 5:6–7). Humble yourself by casting your anxieties on him. Pride leads us to carry our anxieties, but humility leads us to cast them on God. Are you living in pride, or living in humility?

Similarly, clouded by the world, the flesh, and the devil, we quickly forget that God cares for us. But the truth of Scripture is this: God loves you so much he gave his Son for you. *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?* (Rom. 8:32). Since that's true, why would you not take time right now to cast your anxieties on him? Name them specifically, and ask him to show yet again his care for you.

Always Pray, and Don't Lose Heart

Day 21 | August 30

One goal of this little devotional booklet has simply been to help us remember that any Scripture passage—whether it's a prayer, or a command, a story, an exhortation, or even just a character trait—any Scripture passage can and should lead us to pray. (For a great resource to learn more about that, check out Donald Whitney's little book, *Praying the Bible*, available in the MCBC Library.) The goal of today's entry is this: to encourage us to keep going in prayer.

Jesus told a parable in Luke 18:1–8, and he told it *to the effect that (we) ought always to pray and not lose heart* (Luke 18:1). The story involved an unjust judge and a persistent widow. Because she kept coming to the unjust judge, asking again and again, he finally relented and finally gave her the justice that she needed. And Jesus's point is this: God is not like the unjust judge. God is just; he will give justice. And unlike the unjust judge, God loves to answer the prayers of his people *who cry to him day and night* (18:7).

God loves to answer prayers. The hard part is, Jesus said *he will give justice ... speedily* (18:8). There are many times, however, when answers to prayer seem to be anything but speedy. But Jesus helps us in the next sentence. He asked this question: *Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?* Apparently, Jesus expected there to be times when *always praying and not losing heart* means persevering in prayer, exercising *faith*, when it would be easy to stop praying and to lose heart. Apparently, *speedily* doesn't necessarily mean "whenever I want it."

Prayer requires persevering faith. Prayer requires trust that God is just—he will do what is right—and it requires that we don't lose heart when things don't work out (yet) like we hoped—that we remember that God is still good. In all of this, God is drawing us closer to him so that we'll find that his presence is our good (Ps. 73:28). So keep going. Continue to *let your requests be made known to God* (Phil. 4:6), to *pray without ceasing* (1 Thess. 5:17), to *always pray and not lose heart*. And, of course, ask God right now to help you do this. He loves to answer prayers like that.



MOUNTAIN CREEK

BAPTIST CHURCH

2026