

# Let Us

HEBREWS CALLS  
CHRISTIANS BEYOND “ME”  
INTO THE LIFE OF “US”





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CHRISTIANS BEYOND “ME”  
INTO THE LIFE OF “US”

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# Preface

Your YouTube can't. Your podcast can't. Your favorite streaming pastor can't. None of these can fulfill the "us" we are called to be. Are they all bad? Absolutely not! But they can never replace the life, beauty, and calling of the local church. Throughout the book of Hebrews, we are invited into something deeper, something shared. Again and again, Scripture calls us not just to believe, but to belong—not just to "me," but to "us."

"*Let Us*" is a devotional journey through these sacred invitations. Each "**Let us**" gently draws us out of isolation and into the life of the Church—a people marked by nearness to God and commitment to one another.

Let us hold fast to the confession.

Let us stir one another up.

Let us run.

Let us worship together.

Let us rest.

Let us pray.

Let us go outside the camp.

These are not individual commands to be lived out in solitude, but shared callings that shape a community of faith. "*Let Us*" consists of seven study guides for personal growth or group discussion and thirty-six devotions to help you see the beauty of a faith that is formed, strengthened, and sustained together. This race was never meant to be run alone, and the life we've been given through Christ was always meant to be shared.

It's not "let you," and it's not "let me." But together, "**let us**" be the Church God has called us to be.

*1.*  
*Let Us*  
*Hold Fast*

*HEBREWS 10:19-23*

PASTOR JAYSON COMBS

**“Let us.”** Just let that phrase sink in. Over and over again, the writer of Hebrews speaks to the believers of Christ as a group. Take a minute to soak yourself in the **“Let us”** commands in the book of Hebrews.

### **Let Us Hold Fast**

***“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”***

Hebrews 10:22-23

### **Let Us Stir One Another Up**

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

### **Let Us Run**

***“Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”*** Hebrews 12:1-2

### **Let Us Worship Together**

***“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire... Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.”*** Hebrews 12:28-29; 13:15

## Let Us Rest

***“Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.”*** Hebrews 4:1

## Let Us Pray

***“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*** Hebrews 4:16

## Let Us Go Outside the Camp

***“Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.”*** Hebrews 13:13

Today in our culture of “me” everything—“me” marriage (Keller), “me” friendships, “me” life—we see that this “me” thinking has drifted into the church. I contend that Christianity is not about you and me; it is about us. If we follow Jesus, we must fight the urge to make it all about ourselves and grow to see the whole body of Christ, which is the church. When you think of the church, what are some thoughts that come to your head? Be honest with yourself: does it make you smile, or make you cringe? If you were to place it on a list of important things in your life, where would it end up? To be even more personal, what has the church meant to you over the past six months, the last year? Has the church been a blessing? Or are the thoughts of how the church has failed you the first to pop up in your mind?

Some people love group texting chats, and then others would list group chats as one of the most annoying things in the world. It is that text thread with ten to fifteen people in it. There’s that one person who always comments, gives a thumbs up, emoji, “haha” to every single comment, or always posting a video. There are some who can’t exit those conversations fast enough, or at least you find a



way to mute the conversation. Would you consider church to be like those group chats? Sadly, when people think of the church, it can easily be thought of as an annoyance. A weekly gathering of people that you don't necessarily like who are always making weird comments, or who you have no desire to actually be in relationship with. There may be a few people that fit your group, but the rest, you could live without. I imagine if the church is truly being the church, it is not going to be filled with people who look like you, act like you, and like the same things as you. There will be people with different backgrounds, upbringings, and political views. There may even be people who like Ohio State! But if we will start to see "us" as Hebrews describes it, the church can and will be the most loving, caring, giving, serving, forgiving place on the Earth. Let me make this statement again just so you can feel the weight of it. I believe the church is supposed to be the most loving, caring, giving, serving, forgiving place on the Earth. Without a hesitation, I can tell you I believe this to be the truth. It is why I have such a passion for the church to be the church. Not just a place where people are kind, but a place of true love. Not just a place where people smile and are nice, but a place of sacrificial people, willing to bear one another's burdens. I challenge you, as you read this book, to be looking for what Scripture really says a **"Let us"** church is supposed to be.

## No Need for "Us"

I do see new dangers today that threaten the "us." Maybe I should say it this way, I see the same dangers of the past just packaged a little differently. I am commonly seeing a trend to think that as long as I have my favorite Christian podcast, my favorite preacher, or my favorite app, I am good. People would be more devastated to lose those things than if they lost the church. This isn't speaking against podcasts or listening to other pastors; what I am speaking against is when those things take the place of the church in your life. Now, do I believe that most Bible-believing Christians would argue against the church? No, I do not. Do I think there are many who are missing out on all the things we are called to do together? Yes, I do. I just saw this morning on social media, a question that hundreds of people

answered, “If you could only listen to one pastor the rest of your life, who would it be?” Has the importance of the speaker, or the influencer, moved in front of the local church in your life?

Our culture is becoming more and more separated, and increasingly isolated. People are not seeing the need to work at face-to-face friendships because they think their screen supplies everything they think they need. I see the withdrawal happening; I see the temptation of it in my life. Do I think this is just because technology is changing? No. I believe this is a spiritual battle. God has created us to be together, to worship together, to serve together. The more we are separated, the easier it will be to not be the church the Lord has called us to be.

I started out in student ministry years ago. We would do events like all-nighters, inviting kids to stay up all night with crazy games and activities. I will tell you, I really didn't have to work hard to get kids to come out. The option to hang out all night with their friends was an easy sell. I argue that today, about 20 years later, it's a much harder sell. They already get to hang out with their friends all night, not face-to-face, but on some device that actually gives distance and, for many, a comfort zone that they would rather not exit.

## **Who Is the “Us” in Hebrews?**

The book of Hebrews' original audience was Jewish Christians who were struggling in their confidence in the Lord. These Jews had come to know Christ but were having doubts. Along with their doubts, they were being persecuted because of their faith. Leon Morris says, “They seem to have been hesitant about cutting themselves off decisively from the Jewish religion in favor of the Christian way.” John MacArthur says it this way, “They lacked full confidence in the gospel and consequently in their Lord. They were in danger of going back into the standards and patterns of Judaism.”

***“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way***

***that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”***

Hebrews 10:19-23

You may wonder why we are starting in chapter 10. Hebrews follows many of the Pauline Epistles' outlines. (Now, I didn't say Paul wrote it; I am saying it follows the same style). The first half of the letter speaks to who Jesus Christ truly is. It specifically looks at the Old Testament and how Jesus is the Great High Priest, that He is greater than Moses, and He died once and for all that we may be saved. Hebrews 10:19-21 gives a summary of the first ten chapters of the book and then gives direction on how the church, the believers, the "us," is called to live. Kent Hughes explains, "So we come here to the great turning point in Hebrews where the writer turns from explanation of the superiority of the person and work of Christ to the application of it in the lives of the storm-tossed church. It shifts from doctrine to duty, creed to conduct, precept to practice, instruction to exhortation. All of which means one thing: the writer becomes very explicit regarding how Christians ought to live."

In Hebrews chapter 10 verse 19, the author starts out by telling us of the confidence we have to approach the all-mighty, all-knowing God. To do this, the writer briefly speaks of multiple arguments he has made in the first half of the letter. He mentions entering the holy places by the blood of Jesus. This is in clear reference to the Old Testament and the temple. The temple is where the presence of the Lord resided. There was great fear to enter the presence of the Lord. Only once a year during the Day of Atonement would the high priest enter the inner parts of the temple. He would then sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice (lamb) on the mercy seat, where the Ten Commandments were placed, as an atonement sacrifice for the sins of the Israelites. This was something that was done every year. A new sacrifice every year, but now Hebrews tells us there is a new

way. Because of the blood of Jesus, this once-and-for-all sacrifice truly does bring forgiveness of sin. Tim Keller says, “What a picture! The temple was the residence of the holy God, His perfect moral righteousness represented by the Ten Commandments, which no human being ever has or ever can keep. How shall a person approach God? Wouldn’t the law of God condemn us? Yes it would, except for the blood of the atoning sacrifice on the mercy seat, over the Ten Commandments, shielding us from its condemnation.”

The Scripture goes on to say that this new and living way, pointing to Christ, is not a dead sacrifice but living and is open to us. It again brings us to the temple, the curtain that separates the Holy of Holies. That curtain was about 60 feet tall, 30 feet wide, and four inches thick. This was not your average window curtain to keep out the sun. This curtain was miraculously torn in two from top to bottom, when Christ died on the cross. **“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split”** (Matthew 27:50-51). Albert Mohler, Jr. says, “We no longer enter God’s presence through a curtain, We enter through Jesus, our great high priest over the house of God.” Hughes, describing it more, says, “The inner curtain... was the grandest of thirteen curtains in the temple. Its function was to block all eyes from and forbid access to the Holy of Holies except once a year when the high priest entered with blood offered for himself and for the sins of the people.”

This wonderful picture shows that we shall no longer be separated from God. Because of Christ and His blood shed on the cross, we now may come boldly to the throne of God. I love what Michael Kruger says, “Drawing near to God is a complex affair.” We don’t do this in arrogance but in humility; because of Christ, we may confidently come.

The next verse again encourages us to come, but we don’t come alone, we come together. **“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith”** (Hebrews 10:22). At the end of this verse,

I can't help but see the picture of baptism. Romans 6:4 reminds us, ***"We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."*** Have you been baptized? It is a very important step for believers in Christ; the outward expression of the amazing inward transformation.

This brings us another ***"Let us."*** ***"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful"*** (Hebrews 10:23). Richard Phillips says, "Hold firm to the gospel hope in an unbelieving world." The teaching of the past four verses is pointing us to the most important thing we know... Christ, Who He is and what He has done. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 says it this way, ***"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures."*** We, as Christians, hold fast to the truth of the Gospel. Here, the word "confession" has an interesting, and even deeper meaning. Phillips goes on to say, "The Greek word for confession here means a public and doctrinal confession, and it is in this manner that we must uphold the truth." Romans 10:9-10 says, ***"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved."*** Mohler remarks, "It is verbal verification of repentant hearts. The writer of Hebrews is not referencing a lengthy doctrinal statement. The confession on his mind is the central confession that Jesus saves sinners."

So, this teaching leads to the question, "Can you hold fast to your confession of hope?" Has there been a time you have confessed Christ as your Savior? Here the writer isn't asking you about how you feel, how you grew up, when you were baptized, or when you had your first communion. I remember a night many years ago when my son was around seven years old. My wife and I, along with our son, were sitting in the living room. The game show *"Family Feud"*

was on the TV, and I only remember one survey from that night. The game show said they surveyed 100 people and asked them, "Where do you take someone on a first date?" After a few answers were given, one guy who was trying to figure out something to say, blurted out, "Church!" Church is where you take someone on a first date. All of a sudden my son explodes and says, "Ohhhh, we got a believer here!" We died laughing. My son, who grew up in church, at seven years old was identifying who was a believer and who wasn't. Hebrews points to true believers, those who hold fast to their confession in Jesus Christ. Those who truly make a proclamation of faith and live it out by following Him.

Can you hold firm to your confession? Do you have the confidence to know you are secure in your relationship with the Lord? Are you confident in Jesus who is faithful? Is your confidence, not in what you have done, but in what He has done for you. Have you ever made that confession of faith? Have you ever been baptized, taking that step of obedience, an outward showing of an inward salvation? Phillips says, "People who trust in Jesus Christ stand before an open door, with free and open access to God, and with their sins atoned for by His blood."



# Questions

1. When you think of the church, what are some thoughts that come to mind?
2. If you are honest, does it make you smile or make you cringe?
3. If you were to place it on a list of important things in your life, where would it end up? Why is it placed that high or low?
4. To be even more personal, what has the church meant to you over the past six months, the last year? Has the church been a blessing? Or are the thoughts of how the church has failed you the first to pop up in your mind?
5. Why do you think the Jews needed to be told to have confidence to approach the Lord? (Leviticus 10:1-2 and Leviticus 16 may help.)
6. Why is understanding the blood of Jesus so important? Why is it so important?
7. How was Jesus' way new? How was it living?
8. Has there ever been a time in your life when you were unable to draw near to the Lord (due to embarrassment, anger, being unsure of the Lord's forgiveness, etc.)? What did it look like for you to regain that confidence to draw near to the Lord with full assurance? Was the church a part of that?
9. What did your confession look like in your life? Have you ever struggled to know you are saved? How would you describe your confidence in Jesus as your Savior?

## Notes





# Devotion 1

## *Where Is Our Confidence?*

PASTOR CHUCK LINDSEY

***“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”***

Hebrews 6:19-20 (NKJV)

For most of us, an anchor is very little more than a choice some make in their bathroom decorating. But an anchor is much more than a wall decoration to stare at while... well, while using the restroom. Its importance cannot be overstated. In the midst of a storm, the anchor is the lifeline that keeps a boat in place. The anchor does just that; it anchors the boat in place. It digs into the rock below, to hold the vessel steady. It is the difference between drifting out to sea, being overturned in waves or crashing into rock.

Have you ever tried to set an anchor? What did you look for to anchor the boat in place?

In Hebrews 6:19, we are told that as Christians we have a strong anchor for our soul. It's telling us that we have something that keeps us anchored both in this life and in the life that is to come. To anchor my soul in this life means that I am steadied in the intense storms of life. The storms of life are insane and to be tossed around is synonymous in Scripture with doubt and fear. So, the words here mean that because of this anchor, I can be steady and continual in my hope and confidence in Christ while things are seemingly out of control around me. This anchor also secures me into the promises of the life that is to come (i.e. heaven). The promise of being with

Him forever cannot be shaken from me even by the fiercest storms this life can thrust upon me. In fact, even if this life is nothing but trouble, heaven is my true promised home and all of my confidence is anchored in this guarantee from my King.

When you hear the word “storm” what life event comes to mind? Was your anchor set?

The question is, what is this anchor? The answer is given in Hebrews 6:19-20 where we are told that our anchor ***“enters the Presence (of God) behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered before us, even Jesus.”*** The anchor, according to verses 13-18 is the certainty of two things. The first is that God has promised all those that trust in Jesus that our forever home is heaven with Him because of His work. The second is that God cannot lie or fail. These two promises create a certainty in our minds and hearts that anchor us in Him in the midst of life’s storms. As we suffer, we look forward to the day we are with Him. We are sure because He has promised and He cannot fail. This anchor is our hope, but it is anchored into the bedrock of Jesus’ work and so it holds always. If my hope (anchor) was in my work, it would never hold. But because His work is ***“sure and steadfast,”*** Hebrews says that He ***“is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him”*** (Hebrews 7:25).

Do you often anchor yourself in His promises? Take a moment to reflect on what this might practically look like for you.

## Devotion 2

# *Has Jesus Reached All The Way To Your Heart?*

DEBBIE GABBARA

My son grew up attending church. He sang the songs and listened to the lessons the teachers taught about Jesus. However, as a teenager, he began to live with God on the outside of his life. He later joined the Marines and served our country, was married and had a beautiful daughter. Sadly, his marriage did not last. He wandered through his life with no place for God in his decisions and activities. This lifestyle continued for many years, until a friend sent him a Bible study he had written and asked him to read it. That started a journey of looking for answers to the aching questions of his heart. Through prayer and Scripture, my son discovered that Jesus, who is a mediator for us to God and our Great High Priest, made a way for him to repent of his sins and gain eternal life.

As our Great High Priest, Jesus bridged the gap of our separation from God. Through His death on the cross, Jesus, the perfect sacrifice, forever washed away our sins with His blood. The book of Hebrews was originally written to Jewish believers who knew only of the sacrificial system that had existed all through the Old Testament. Acts 6:7 tells us that many Jewish priests became believers who were obedient to the faith. Their newfound faith in Jesus changed their life rituals when animal sacrifice was no longer needed because the Perfect Sacrifice had been made once and for all through the shed blood of Jesus.

The sacrificial system was initially established by God and designed to teach God's chosen people about His character and His plans. The qualifications for the high priest are outlined in Hebrews 5:1-4: ***"For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed***



***to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.”***

Every high priest was chosen from among men. In the Old Testament, priests came from the line of Aaron. They were able to understand the sins of the people because they were sinners just like them. Hebrews 5:5-6 tells us that Jesus, the Great High Priest, was appointed by God: ***“So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you;’ as he says also in another place, ‘You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.’”***

God's plan was always to send the perfect high priest. Jesus is perfectly God and perfectly man. He is sinless and sympathetic, perfect in every way, without the blemish of sin. Jesus sacrificed Himself for our sins. He is always there. We can always come directly to Him; we no longer need an intercessor. We can take our failures to Jesus and find forgiveness. In His death on the cross, He made the way for us. In His resurrection, we find life. He is waiting for us to come to Him in repentance, waiting and wanting to forgive us. We could never earn salvation. We don't deserve it; yet, He willingly died to make a way for us to be saved. Our hearts and lives can be forever changed in the name of Jesus, our Great High Priest.

## Devotion 3

# *Swung Wide Open*

GRANT GRIMES

***"By the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh."*** Hebrews 10:20

Separated. Each of us can recall a time in which we were separated from someone or something we loved. Whether it was a physical distance from a person or even an activity, we all can understand the frustration of having a barrier. Often, we try to get around the barrier by any means possible. We convince ourselves the barrier isn't there, or we acknowledge the barrier and give up, deciding the distance between us and what we want is too great.

Sometimes, this is how we feel with Christ. We look to God and see His holiness and perfection, and imagine a wall of uncertainty before us that stops us from getting close to God. In the Old Testament, this barrier truly existed. The place where God resided was protected and limited to only the high priest who would go into the Holy of Holies. Even then, he only entered once a year in order to offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people. The barrier between God and His people was a heavy curtain, a separation, a divide that no human effort could bridge.

Hebrews 10:20 describes the demolition that the barrier took at the Crucifixion. In verse 20, the writer describes a ***"new and living way"*** that Christ broke through the barrier. The physical curtain veiling the presence of God from humanity was torn open by Jesus Christ. He was the way we could get to God, and just as the veil tore, so did the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. No longer would humanity have to be separated from God, but through Christ, the

way was thrown wide open.

So, what are we supposed to do with this truth? Run to Jesus. Run to Jesus. Run to Jesus. You have full access to the Creator of the Cosmos. Take a hold of that! There is no barrier between you and the living God. If you do not know Him as the Savior and Lord of your life, repent and believe. For those of us who know Christ as our Savior, don't hold anything back. When life brings storms, you have access to Christ. When blessings arise, you have access to Christ. Simply celebrate the reality that the God of all creation is open to you 24/7.

## Devotion 4

# *Hearts Sprinkled*

STEPHEN BILLINGS

***"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."*** Hebrews 10:22

One of my favorite hobbies to do with my father is golfing. We love getting some exercise while also driving a golf cart, eating snacks, and chasing around a little white ball. When it comes to actually playing golf, the whole point of the game is to try to hit the ball into the hole. However, I am not the greatest golfer in the world. My goal is simply to try to hit the ball as close to the hole as I possibly can.

Just as I want to get the golf ball near the hole, Hebrews 10:22 provides instruction for us to ***"draw near"*** to God. This means God wants us to get as close to Him as we can. The question that comes to mind then is, "How can we ***'draw near'*** to God?" In fact, is that even possible?

The book of Hebrews answers this question, "Yes!" It says that we can draw near to God through faith in God's one and only Son, Jesus, through His death and resurrection. Ephesians 2:8 reminds us that we are saved ***"by grace... through faith."*** This means that Jesus's death and resurrection is an act of grace that we can accept and receive by faith, in what He did for us on the cross. When we accept and receive the grace that God gives us in His one and only Son, Jesus, our hearts are ***"sprinkled clean from an evil conscience."*** We are made clean and renewed by Jesus's sacrifice.

In golf, I must practice my swing repeatedly just to have a chance

of getting the ball near the hole. However, when it comes to our relationship with God and our struggle with sin, we cannot earn the sprinkling of our hearts required to draw near to Him. Instead, it is through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus that we are saved and able to draw near to God.

## Devotion 5

### *Hold Fast*

PASTOR JOSH COMBS

One of my favorite tattoos (if I'm allowed to say such a thing) is in the movie *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World*. In the film, as the ship is entering a massive storm, the hands of an older sailor are shown holding firm to a rope. Across his hands reads, "H-O-L-D F-A-S-T" (four letters per word, one for each knuckle). The tattoo, which was apparently common during that historical period, was superstitiously believed to help sailors climb and hold securely on to the ship's rigging.

The writer of Hebrews says, ***"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering..."*** (Hebrews 10:23). The call is to hold on to our hope with all our might and without wavering, meaning, "Don't let go!" A parent pushing their child on a swing might say, "Hold on tight and don't let go." That's what the passage is saying, but it is essential we know what, or better, Who we are holding on to.

Earlier in Hebrews chapter 6, the Scripture says, ***"We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul"*** (Hebrews 6:19). Our anchor of hope that we hold on to is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The good news that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for sin and that He rose from the dead three days later! That good news sustains us through the storms of doubt, fear, confusion, depression, grief, and loneliness.

In storms, we are often tired or can be tempted to hold to something else. This is where disaster comes in. We let go of the power of the Gospel for other anchors. We rely on our own strength, resources, abilities, or connections. We can be lured by some promised deeper

spiritual experience. Let me say clearly: there is nothing deeper or more powerful or more profound than the simple truth of the Gospel. Hold fast to the Gospel!

We may also be tempted at times to hold fast to other ideas or opinions. There's a saying from the 1600s from a German theologian that says, "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and, in all things, charity." We must be gracious and loving with those we disagree with, but we must not loosen our grip on the true Gospel and its exclusivity to save our soul. Hold loosely to negotiable things, but hold fast to the nonnegotiable truth of the Gospel.

Maybe your grip today is feeling weak or you feel like you may be slipping. Hebrews 10:23 reminds us, "***For he who promised is faithful.***" We are challenged to hold fast to our hope, knowing that our Savior also holds fast to us. The second verse of the old hymn "He Will Hold Me Fast" says it so well:

I could never keep my hold, He must hold me fast;  
For my love is often cold, He must hold me fast.  
He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast;  
For my Savior loves me so, He will hold me fast.

## Devotion 6

# *He Is Faithful*

JILL OSMON

***“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”*** Hebrews 10:23

There are seasons in life when hope feels fragile. When our prayers seem unanswered, when circumstances shake us, and when our emotions cannot carry the weight of what we’re walking through. In those moments, Hebrews gives us both an anchor and an invitation.

Scripture echoes this truth from beginning to end. ***“Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations”*** (Deuteronomy 7:9). One of my favorite verses is in Lamentations 3:22–23: ***“The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”*** And 2 Timothy 2:13 says, ***“If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.”*** God’s faithfulness is not dependent on our performance, our understanding, or even our feelings. It flows from who He is.

During my battle with cancer, this truth became more than theology; it became survival. There were days I didn’t “feel” God’s love. I didn’t understand why I had to walk that road. My prayers for healing felt heavy. The uncertainty was real, but even when I couldn’t feel Him, I believed Him. We see that in 2 Corinthians 5:7, ***“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”*** Faith meant trusting what I knew to be true about God’s character, even when my emotions lagged behind.



There is a stability in God's faithfulness. Feelings rise and fall. Circumstances shift. Diagnoses change. But ***"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever"*** (Hebrews 13:8). Even in the valley, Psalm 23 reminds us, ***"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me."*** His presence is steady. His promises are secure.

We must not forget that God's faithfulness does not guarantee we will always get the job, the healing, the spouse, the children, or everything we long for. It does not mean every valley will be removed or every mountain made easy. There will be seasons when, like Thomas, we want tangible proof. Thomas said, ***"Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails... I will never believe"*** (John 20:25). When Jesus came to him, He gently invited him closer, ***"Put your finger here, and see my hands... Do not disbelieve, but believe"*** (John 20:27). Thomas was invited to trace the scars, the visible reminder of Christ's finished work. In our own seasons of doubt or disappointment, we may not be able to trace God's hand in our circumstances, but we can look to the cross. The cross stands as lasting proof of His love and faithfulness.



2.  
*Let Us  
Stir*

*HEBREWS 10:24-25*

PASTOR JAYSON COMBS

On Friday, March 13, 2020, we called an emergency meeting for the elders at the church. The world was told to close down, to stay home, and not to meet together. Looking back, this was a very difficult time for pastors worldwide. What should the church do? How important is it for the church to gather together? Is the gathering of the church essential? Those six months taught me, like never before in my life, that the answer to that question is, "Yes!" This chapter is not about calling out every church for closing or pointing out how they should have handled COVID-19 differently. This chapter is about how important it is that the saints gather together.

I love the church, and I love gathering with the church. Most Wednesday nights, I greet people at the front door. This throws people off because I am the pastor, and they think I shouldn't be the door holder. This, in turn, throws me off because I am the pastor; why wouldn't I be the door holder? I do this because I love seeing families come into the church.

During the last few years, Hebrews 10:24-25 has become one of my favorite passages: ***"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."*** There is a notion out there that because people are called the church (not the physical building), gathering together is not as important. They may think, "All I need is my Bible, prayer time, some videos online, or a live stream, and I'm good." I love the verse in Hebrews because it makes that sentiment a bunch of hot garbage built upon lies.

The writer of Hebrews says, ***"Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some..."*** But why? At that time (and still today), some people thought that meeting together with the church was not a big deal, and the Hebrews writer calls this out. Albert Mohler, Jr. says it strongly, "We cannot have confidence and full assurance of faith apart from the church. We cannot endure in isolation. Each Christian desperately needs the body of believers for encouragement."

Let us dive into the specifics of what gathering together looks like, according to this passage.

## **1. Let Us Consider**

When I started out in ministry almost twenty-five years ago, I was the Middle School Intern, and I worked in student ministry for the next seventeen years. It was a wonderful time in my life. I had no aspirations of being the Senior Pastor one day. I loved student ministry, and I felt like I was right where the Lord wanted me to be.

To my surprise, and maybe even more so to my wife, the Lord called me to be the Lead Pastor at the Waterford location of The River Church. Shortly after I moved into this position, my son went into middle school. It was now his time in student ministry, and I was excited about all the fun he was going to have. However, it did not go as planned. He did not like student ministry. He did not even want to go. I thought, “What do you mean you don’t want to go? This is student ministry. This is the best! Summer camp is the most wonderful time of the year! It is better than Christmas.” He did not see it that way. He did not even want to go to camp. He was not excited to go to small groups. Now, you may be thinking, maybe he is just a “normal,” rebellious pastor kid; truly, that is not what this was. He loves the Lord, and it is a joy to witness as a parent. It was a struggle for me that he had no excitement when it came to the student ministry, which had excited me so greatly.

I vividly remember when he would come home from student group week after week, and I would repeatedly ask him the same question, “Did you have fun tonight?” I remember him responding with a shrug and saying it was fine. One day, I read this verse and had a great conviction come over me. I was convicted of my question to my son, “Did you have fun?” I was convicted because I knew, and he knew, that the number one goal of the gathering of the church was not just for “fun.” I was pushing him to think that the student ministry’s value was found in fun. Do I enjoy being with the people of God? Yes! Do we smile and laugh? Certainly! But if gathering with saints focuses

solely on FUN, we will never last. We will never be the church God has called us to be. Sadly, this has become the goal for too many people in the church, and even some leaders.

With this conviction in mind, my wife and I changed the question. Now, when my son comes home from student group, my wife and I ask the question, "Did you consider? Son, you know the Lord, and when you gathered with other students, did you consider them? Was your first thought not fun, but how can I think about them? Maybe some of the other students are nervous, scared, sad, or feeling alone. Son, have a heart to consider them."

Church, this is the question we should ask ourselves as we gather. Too often, we go to a service and think, "How is everyone here going to serve me?" Frankly, that is just wrong. At The River Church, we stopped calling Sunday morning a "service." We now call it a "gathering." If you know the Lord, it is time to change the question. ***"So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith"*** (Galatians 6:10). Let us seize the opportunity.

Hebrews goes on to say, ***"Let us consider how to stir up one another..."***

## 2. Let Us Stir

I am a visual person. As a pastor, I like to use props to help illustrate a truth or make a point in many of my sermons. It is very helpful for me to be able to see it. As I read this passage, I think of a coffee stir-stick. Yes, it is one of those little red sticks that helps make coffee not taste so disgusting after adding the cream and sugar. Once I add those things, the stir-stick helps bring it all together. God's Word tells us to be a stir-stick! I am called to consider, to think about others, and think how I can stir them up ***"to love and good works."***

In Greek, the word ***"stir"*** is quite interesting. Usually, it has a negative connotation. It means "to provoke around." It carries the

idea of prodding people and is connected to the word “splinter.” Here, the thought is to poke them. Do you consider yourself to be a stir-stick for love and good works?

I am so thankful for these stir-sticks in the church, the people who reach out and say, “Pastor, I am praying for you.” This week, I was physically sick. I got a text from someone in the church saying that they are praying that I will recover quickly. I thought, “How do they even know I'm sick?!” Not only was I physically sick, but this week in ministry has been particularly heavy. I have had three funerals: a baby, a 40-year-old man, and a 70-year-old faithful member of the church. What is so amazing is that each of these families has come to me in amazement at how wonderful the church has been in their time of need. We are far from a perfect church, but we do have people who strive to ***“stir up one another to love and good works.”*** They work to love each other. This is the gathering of the church. We prod one another to know the love of Christ.

The Apostle Paul reminds us in Philippians 2:1-5, ***“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.”***

I love what Peter says about stirring one another up, ***“I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder”*** (2 Peter 1:13). He later adds, ***“This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder”*** (2 Peter 3:1). Believers must actively and verbally stir up one another to love and to do good works. An unhealthy church fails to do this.



### 3. Let Us Not Neglect To Meet Together

The book of Hebrews was written to a church of Jewish believers whose world was falling apart. Kent Hughes says, “Their Christianity had not been a worldly advantage. Rather, it set them up for persecution and the loss of property and privilege, and now could possibly even cost them their lives. Some had even withdrawn from the worshiping community altogether.” Gathering together came at great cost to them. God's Holy Word tells us we do not stop meeting together, even if it costs us.

What have we allowed to stand in the way of us meeting together? If you want to know how important gathering together with the church is, ask your kids how important they think it is to you. I am not here telling you to become “religious” and have a legalistic set of rules that call you to meet every Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night. Then, if you miss a service, you are a pagan sinner. That is NOT what I am saying here. What I am saying is that it is important. Do you make the gathering with the saints to ***“stir up one another to love and good works”*** an important part of your life? Has the church become more of a mechanical learning experience that you just come to and leave? I often get questions like, “What time do your gatherings (services) start?” “How long do gatherings normally last?” I always want to respond with, “What time are you going to get here, and what time are you planning on leaving?” Around 10:30 a.m., our worship pastor will start to lead us in corporate worship, and then the pastor will preach, but the gathering starts and ends with you.

One thing I call out regularly is being a “church ninja.” Let me tell you, some people are so good at being a church ninja! These people come in right before I begin to preach, they sneak in during the opening prayer, and slide into a seat. Before the prayer, there was no sign of them, and after, they were waiting, ready to go. When I finish the sermon and close in prayer, they leave as quickly as they came. We, the church, cannot be church ninjas if we are going to be the church that Christ calls us to be.



## 4. Let Us Encourage

Those of us who have been a part of the church for a while know that it is not always pretty. It is not always smiles and hugs. It is messy. People get hurt. Arguments happen, and division takes place. Stirring one another up is not always easy. The word “encourage” here in Greek can be defined as “to urge one to pursue some course of conduct” (Dr. Jerry Vines). That conduct is not always welcome. In the letter to the Philippian church, Paul points out their conflict: ***“I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life”*** (Philippians 4:2-3). These two “famous” ladies in the Bible (I say that with much sarcasm) had some type of disagreement. Can you imagine this letter being read to the church? If someone had ignored the first half of Paul's letter to the church, you can bet they were all ears now! There was a problem with unity in the church, and Paul called for the church to ***“help these women”*** who served together, to find agreement and peace.

In another letter, Paul exhorts the Galatians, ***“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ”*** (Galatians 6:1-2). Stirring each other up is not always easy, but if we are to be the church God calls us to be, we must stir one another up to love and good works, even in difficult situations. This takes discernment and wisdom. Which is why the passage says, ***“You who are spiritual.”***

The importance of gathering at the church has never been more important to me than it is now. It is essential. Let us daily consider how to stir up other believers to know how wonderful and good the love of the Lord is. Let us stir one another up to live a life that is pleasing to Him. Let us not take the gathering of the church lightly, but let us speak encouragement to one another.

# Questions

1. What is the most fun you have ever had with the church?
2. Do you feel that “fun” can get in the way of the church?
3. If you could make a top ten list of reasons why the church does not gather, what would it be?
4. What does a Sunday morning gathering look like when the church ***“consider[s] how to stir up one another in love and good works?”***
5. What are some things that have gotten in the way of you considering?
6. What are some things the church has done to stir you up to love and good works?
7. In what ways are you tempted to be a “church ninja”?
8. What would your kids, coworkers, family members, friends, etc., say about how important it is to you to gather with the church?

## Notes





# Devotion 1

## *Preparation*

PASTOR CALEB COMBS

“Those who fail to prepare, prepare to fail.” I’ve heard that quote my whole life from coaches and mentors urging their teams to prepare for the next game or season. Preparation was never optional; it was the difference between success and failure.

As I think about the phrase “**consider**” in Hebrews 10:24, I can’t help but connect that same idea to how Christians prepare for gathering with the church. The Greek word used here carries the sense of intentional thought, careful attention, and purposeful preparation. The writer of Hebrews is encouraging believers to come ready—mentally, spiritually, and relationally—before gathering with the saints.

What would it look like if we truly prepared before walking into the gathering?

Let’s take it one step further. Scripture reminds us that believers need one another. Ephesians 3:18 tells us we are strengthened as we grow in Christ “**with all the saints.**” We are not meant to follow Jesus alone. We are designed to walk this life together within the church.

Now, let’s tie these ideas together. I prepare before gathering, knowing that someone in that room may be strengthened and encouraged simply because I am there. That sounds surprising, maybe even a little unbelievable, but it’s true.

I remember a conversation with a friend after COVID. She said

something that stuck with me, “I need to get back to church. I know someone there needs me.” At first, I was taken aback. It sounded almost arrogant, but the more I thought about it, the more I realized she understood something deeply biblical. She saw church not just as a place to receive, but as a place to strengthen others.

When we prepare our hearts with the awareness that God may use us to encourage someone else, it changes how we **“consider”** the gathering. Church becomes more than attendance; it becomes ministry.

Before gathering this Sunday, consider praying:

- God, prepare my heart to be changed by something that happens in the gathering today.
- God, prepare someone else's heart to strengthen me today.
- God, prepare my heart to strengthen someone else today.

Come ready. Someone is depending on it.

## Devotion 2

# Where Love Leaves Its Trace

LORENA NORRIS

***“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.”*** Hebrews 10:24

This verse is so straightforward, but also so challenging. It tells us to actually think about how our presence, our words, and our choices can awaken something good in the people around us. In this part of scripture, ***“stir”*** carries the meaning of provoking, sparking, awakening, and moving someone towards love, toward action, toward the things God calls good.

Intentional or not, we all stir something. Every time we walk into a room, join a conversation, or sit beside someone during a gathering, we are adding something into the mix. Sometimes we stir things that build up: encouragement, unity, faith, movement; and sometimes we stir things that aren't helpful: drama, selfishness, or that quiet consumer mentality that says, “What can the church do for me?”

It is so easy to fall into that mentality, to sit in the church chair and stay passive, to show up without stepping into the calling of this verse. Hebrews 10:24 is an invitation into action, into responsibility, into love that moves. It asks us to shift our posture from receiving to participating. Instead of asking, “What can I get?” it nudges us to ask, “What can I give my church family? To my brother or sister in Christ? To someone in my local body who needs encouragement today?”

The verse goes on to give the direction, ***“to love and good works.”*** Jesus summarizes this perfectly when He says that the greatest



commandment is, ***“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,”*** and the second greatest commandment is, ***“You shall love your neighbor as yourself”*** (Matthew 22:37, 39). The second commandment is the overflow and natural echo of the first. Loving God deeply has this way of making love for people an overflow. You don’t have to fake it because it rises from within. Your heart grows, your attitude changes, and your presence carries the aroma of Christ that others want to draw near to.

So, when the church gathers together, side by side in worship, prays together, when we check in on each other, when we share meals, stories, and burdens with each other, we are shaping the culture of our church. Every person contributes. Every attitude leaves a trace. The question this verse leaves us with is simple, but convicting: What am I stirring in?

I hope that we lean into this calling. Not settling for passivity, not slipping into consumer mode, but showing up with intention. I pray that we would be people who stir up love, who encourage faith, who move one another toward good works, simply because our love for God is overflowing into our love for His people.

If you’re in a season where you feel disconnected or unsure of what you bring, or maybe you’ve just been showing up, sitting down, and slipping out, ask the Lord for fresh eyes. Ask Him to show you the person who needs encouragement, the conversation that needs your kindness, the burden you could help carry. You might be someone’s answered prayer without even realizing it. Remember, all of this starts with Jesus and His redeeming work in us. He is sanctifying us and stirring up something new so He can work through us and use our lives as the overflow that strengthens His people.

## Devotion 3

# *What Kind Of Stir Stick Are You?*

JOSH THAYER

Let me start with a simple question. When you walk into a room or a church gathering, what happens to the atmosphere? Do things get warmer, more encouraging, more faith-filled, or do people quietly brace themselves? That question sits right at the heart of what Scripture calls us to in community.

Hebrews 12:25 says, ***“See that you do not refuse him who is speaking.”*** That’s a strong warning. God is speaking through His Word, through His Spirit, and yes, even through His people. The danger isn’t just outright rebellion; sometimes it’s quiet indifference. We hear, but we don’t respond. We show up, but we don’t engage.

That’s where Hebrews 10:24–25 fits perfectly into this conversation: ***“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works... encouraging one another.”*** Gathering as the church isn’t meant to be a passive experience. It’s not a weekly event where we sit, consume, and leave unchanged. It’s a living, breathing community where we actively stir one another toward love, obedience, and good works. That raises the question, “What kind of stir-stick are you?”

I love coffee a lot! Typically, when you make a cup of black coffee, you just drink it, but some people like to stir in creamer, milk, and/or sugar. What would happen if I stirred in lemon juice instead? The stir-stick doesn’t know the difference; it just stirs. When we taste the coffee, we will for sure know the difference! In life, some people stir with encouragement, hope, and grace. Others stir up frustration, gossip, criticism, or division. Both are stirring, but only one reflects

the heart of Christ.

Hebrews chapter 12 reminds us that God is speaking truth that is meant to shape us, correct us, and move us toward maturity. When we refuse to listen, when we ignore His voice, we often default to stirring in unhealthy ways. When we're attentive to Him, our words and actions start to line up with His heart.

Encouragement isn't about flattery or pretending everything's fine. It's about pointing people back to the truth. It's reminding someone they're not alone. It's calling out God's work in their life when they can't see it themselves. Sometimes encouragement is gentle, and sometimes it's challenging, but it is always loving.

So, here's an honest reflection: when you engage with the church—your growth community, Sunday gathering, conversations—are you stirring people closer to Jesus? Or are you unintentionally stirring discouragement, distraction, or disunity? God is speaking. He's calling His church to gather with purpose, to engage with intention, and to stir one another toward love and good works. Let's be the kind of people who don't refuse His voice and who help others hear it more clearly, too. The church doesn't just gather to sit still. We gather to stir.

## Devotion 4

# *A Pat On The Back*

JUSTIN FOROOZAN

Before working at the church, I had a career in the trades. I am in one of the last generations that was trained with a pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps type of attitude. The only encouraging words that I was ever told by my supervisor were that I should “Be better,” or that I needed to “Get out of the way,” because I was “Making it worse.” It did make me want to work harder, but looking back, it was only because I wanted some sort of recognition.

1 Thessalonians 5:9–12 says, ***“For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you.”***

After talking about the return of Jesus and telling them they’ve been saved, not destined for wrath, Paul tells the church of Thessalonica to ***“encourage one another, and build one another up.”*** This is something so many of us miss when we allow our whole world to revolve around ourselves. When we are so fixated on our own lives, we tend to forget what we’ve been called to do: not to sit around and wait aimlessly for Jesus to return, but to encourage and build up other people. When the time came for me to start training my own team, I decided to go down the path less traveled by training them with encouraging words and building them up to believe in their ability to work. Did I get some people who worked not as hard? Maybe, but I got a lot more people who were willing to keep working

with me.

Encouraging others has become one of my favorite things to do. Simply telling someone, “You’re awesome,” and “God loves you,” can change their whole day. This doesn’t mean we say things that we think others want to hear; that would be lying. It means we come alongside them. It means we offer them support, strength, and hope by speaking the truth. All of us need to be affirmed in God’s grace. When Paul says to **“build one another up,”** this is never about putting someone in the center of attention. It’s simply about offering warm words of prayer, grace, and affirmation, and helping to realign their focus on Jesus.

One challenge I would ask anyone reading this is to make a conscious effort this week to encourage the people you come across. It could be your family, friends, work colleagues, or the Meijer greeter. It’s not always easy to execute, so sometimes we must be very intentional. How amazing it is to see people light up when they’re reminded how much God loves them!

# Devotion 5

## *Do You See The Day Approaching?*

ZACH MALUZHINSKY

Growing up, I remember getting excited for particular events that I knew were coming. Christmas, the last day of school, birthday parties, those days on the calendar filled me with anticipation! As the years passed, many of those types of events started to feel ordinary. The excitement for them faded.

The last time I remember truly anticipating something in a way that changed how I lived was when we were expecting our first daughter. From the moment we found out, we knew life would have to adjust. Our home had to be rearranged. Our schedules had to be reworked. Our priorities needed to be reshaped. As the due date drew closer, these things became all the more urgent. That approaching day changed how we spent our time, our money, and our energy. Our joyful expectation produced a real-life transformation.

Hebrews 10:25 ends with the phrase, ***"All the more as you see the Day drawing near."*** The ***"Day"*** is the return of Christ. Titus 2:13 calls this, ***"Our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."*** For believers, this coming Day is filled with hope. This hope is meant to stir a response that changes the way that we live. It raises the question: Do we see the Day approaching?

For some, the return of Jesus is a living reality that shapes daily decisions. It deepens love for others, loosens our grip on temporary things, and produces an awareness that our lives are no longer ours, but belong to Christ. However, this reality, all too often, gets drowned out by the day-to-day activities and worries of life. Philippians 3:20

reminds us, ***"Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior."*** Like expectant parents preparing for a child, believers are called to live in light of a coming King. The nearness of that Day brings both comfort and clarity. It steadies us, refocuses us, and calls us to live intentionally.

Notice that the response given in Hebrews is not isolation, but rather community. We are called to gather more, not less; to encourage more, not less; to stir one another up to love and good works. The approaching Day should make us more intentional about people, more serious about faithfulness, and more eager to reflect Christ together.

The truth is, Jesus will return. What then is our response? My prayer is that it would shape the way we love, serve, and interact with those around us. The Day is approaching. May our anticipation lead to preparation, not just in belief, but in the way we live together right now.

# Devotion 6

## *Do You See The Opportunity?*

PASTOR NOBLE BAIRD

Opportunity is a heavy word. By definition, according to the great Google, opportunity is a “set of circumstances that makes it possible to do something.” Every day, we are met with circumstances that present a new chance for a potential outcome. That circumstance or opportunity can have an endless number of possible outcomes or end results. We will all step into these circumstances and opportunities to either serve ourselves or to serve the Lord.

In Galatians 1:10, we read, ***“For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”***

Whenever we talk about gathering as a church, it is important for us to keep focus on the why. If we are gathering together to simply appease ourselves and our needs, or if we are gathering together to appease a pastor or church, we are missing the mark. Here, Paul is calling us to refocus and have the proper mindset as we gather and seize opportunities to gather with the body! We simply gather to please the Lord and to align ourselves with His will.

Hebrews 10:23-25 reads, ***“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”*** As we gather, we are called to stir one another to good works and love. However, if we do so, trying to please ourselves or man, we will miss the mark.



Each day, we are given new opportunities. Will you use these circumstances and opportunities to please the Lord or to please man? Will you encourage and stir up one another in the Lord or towards self?



3.  
*Let Us  
Run*

*HEBREWS 12:1-2*

PASTOR JAYSON COMBS

On the corner of a cornfield in the “Thumb” of Michigan, there’s a building that stirs up a lot of emotions within me whenever I drive past it. It is right between two small towns that are just ten miles apart. Standing on that property, you can see for miles and miles; miles of farmland, with little elevation change.

When I was fourteen years old, my father moved our family from the suburbs of Detroit to the farmlands of Michigan. For the first time in his life, He took on a pastor position at a small county church. I have very fond memories of this place. It’s where I fell in love with ministry. My dad served there for over ten years.

After my father left the church, it began to struggle. A new pastor came in and sold the building, ultimately leading to the closure of the church. It’s no longer in operation, no longer in the race, no longer impacting people, and no longer sharing the Gospel. It’s now just a peculiar-looking house (churches transformed into homes always seem a bit odd).

If you’ve been in the church world for a while, you probably have a similar story of a church that deeply impacted you but is no longer there. It might have been closed due to sin, distractions, or a loss of focus on Jesus.

In Hebrews, the writer uses the metaphor of a race, which is repeated throughout the Bible, to encourage the church to persevere and run with endurance in the race that the Lord has for us. ***“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted”*** (Hebrews 12:1-3).

I would say this is one of the more famous passages in our Christian culture. I'm not sure if it's because we are a culture of competition and games, but it sure does seem to connect. Multiple times in the New Testament, Paul uses this image of a large running event. The people who first received this letter would know well the Roman and Greek games. As I studied this passage here in Hebrews, it stands out as a little different than the other verses on running. Here are a few of them from the epistles:

***“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”*** 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

***“You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?”*** Galatians 5:7

***“Holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.”*** Philippians 2:16

I can't help but see a difference here in Hebrews. It's something that I can't take lightly. The verses on running outside of Hebrews speak of a personal run. Paul says, ***“I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others, I myself should be disqualified.”*** In Galatians, we read, ***“You were running well...”*** In Hebrews, the illustration is different; it doesn't say “you” or “I,” it says ***“us.”*** It's not your race. It's ours. We have to lay aside sin. We have to set our sights on Jesus. We can't get distracted. Many argue from this passage that we all have our own race to run. Each path is different. I just don't see that. It's our race as the church to run, and Scripture tells us how to live so we can finish.

## The Fans In The Stands

***“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...”*** Hebrews 12:1

Richard Phillips says, “The context in which we envision ourselves has a great influence over our thinking.” The race Christians are called to run has a great crowd. Here we see the idea to view our race as one in a coliseum filled with those faithful followers who went before us. The chapter starts with ***“Therefore.”*** It is connecting chapter 11 to this truth at the beginning of chapter 12. The ***“witnesses”*** refer to all of the saints that are mentioned in chapter 11. This is our crowd. Michael Kruger says, “All those Old Testament figures mentioned in chapter 11, are now surrounding you, watching you as you run—cheering you on.” There is much debate about this crowd. First, I do not think that these witnesses are limited to the saints in chapter 11. I think this is in reference to all those believers who have finished the race and have kept the faith. I put my father in the stands, who passed a few years ago. I like the thought of him cheering me on. But what does that exactly mean? Are the saints all watching us now? I think Kruger explains it well in his book *“Hebrews for You.”* He explains, “They are not there to watch you. They are there to be seen by you as you run. This encourages you about what is possible. There will be times when you think you cannot finish, you cannot push past the pain. But then you realize the stadium is filled with people who have finished the race. It can be done.” There is a wonderful encouragement from those who have gone before us. I believe this to be personal and biblical. This is why reading the Old Testament isn’t just a side dish in our Christian walk. Romans 15:4 explains, ***“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”*** It’s wonderful to know the great God who gave them strength to run the race is our great God. I think of my father and his story of redemption, how he finished the race, and this gives me great confidence.

As the church runs the race, there is a danger if we misunderstand

this passage. There is a danger if we think the Bible is telling us to create human heroes, people that we think we should run for, people that we will run to please. Very quickly, Hebrews directs us to the real Hero. The writer says, ***"Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith."*** In chapter three of Hebrews, the writer has pointed out that Jesus is greater than all. This was shocking to the Jews because Abraham, Moses, and Joshua were placed on a very high platform. These Old Testament servants are examples to follow, people who, through the power of God, helped us in our walk. But they are not the hero; they are not who we should run for. We run for Christ with our eyes on Him.

In the church world today, we love to set up pastors as heroes. This has caused great destruction in the church. The pastor is called to shepherd the flock, to be an example as one who follows Christ, but not the hero. Albert Mohler Jr. states, "Christianity is not a cult of hero worship." As the church, we must always make sure we keep our eyes on Christ.

## **Community Waste Removal**

***"Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely..."*** Hebrews 12:1

The Bible goes on to say, ***"Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely."*** Here is the very clear analogy that you cannot run well with extra weight, especially weight that entangles you.

I will never forget that summer when we moved from the suburbs of Detroit to the farmland of Michigan. That summer was a great transition in my life. It's interesting to me the things that we hold on to in our memories. In that summer of 1994, I'll never forget the number of flies in the air. Our new home was next to acres of farmland. The whiff of cattle dung filled the air most days. When we moved in, flies were everywhere. My dad went to the local store and bought these long, sticky fly strips that he hung from the ceiling in the garage. I can

remember them being filled with flies, top to bottom, on both sides. The flies would land on that sticky glue and get stuck. It was over, no more flying. I read this verse, and I think of being stuck. Watching those flies land, the more they would try to maneuver themselves free, the more they would entangle themselves. The warning is so important for believers who want to run the race. There are things that will slow you down, and there is sin that doesn't just look to trip you up; it looks to entangle your life. You don't have to do much for it to wrap you up and bring you down.

Understanding the two categories is important. First, there is the weight; these things are the things that slow you down. These are not necessarily sinful things, but things in your life that are obstacles for you. Hughes gives a helpful list: "It could be friendship, associations, an event, a place, a habit, a pleasure, an entertainment, an honor." My father came to know the Lord in his thirties. Before that, he lived an addicted life. His brother died of drinking, and my father was on the same path. Thankfully, the Lord saved my dad and radically changed his life. This radical change affected everything in his life. One of the things that changed was where my dad would eat. Restaurants like Applebee's, just your normal bar and grill restaurant, were off-limits. It wasn't because Applebee's was sinful and everyone in there was doing wrong. It was because the bar scene was something my dad needed to stay far away from. This was a weight for him. Not a weight for everyone else, but something that could slow him down, something that could lead him to sinful things.

***"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."*** Ephesians 5:15-17

Redeeming the time is a current weight in my life. How I spend my time is something I'm working to be more disciplined in. It's so easy for me to waste time. A few weeks ago, I had the privilege of teaching the Young Adult group at the church. I challenged them with this passage. I asked them (a room of about forty), "What is your biggest



waste of time?” Doomscrolling was the word they used. It’s defined as “the act of excessively scrolling through negative, depressing news or social media, even though it causes anxiety, sadness, or anger.” I challenge you with the same question: what is your biggest waste of time? Is there a weight that you need to urgently **“lay aside”**? Or as the New American Standard Bible translates this verse, **“Let’s rid ourselves”** (NASB). Here, sin seems even more devastating. It not only slows you down, but it also takes you down. We might get nervous about listing sins, but the Bible doesn’t.

***“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”*** Galatians 5:19-21

***“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.”*** 2 Timothy 3:1-5

Followers of Christ can never take sin lightly. Again, I believe an important truth to not be missed here is that it says, **“let us”** lay down every sin and weight. We don’t do this by ourselves. James 5:16 points out, **“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”** At the beginning of the church in Acts 19:18, it says, **“Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices.”** We know that the Lord is the One who brings forgiveness, but the accountability of brothers and sisters in the Lord is vital. The encouragement and prayers from other saints are vital.

## A Focused Run

***“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”*** Hebrews 12:1-2

In this passage, we see the focus of our run. Jesus is not just another example to follow. He isn't one of the faithful servants from chapter 11 in Hebrews. Jesus is the focus. Michael J. Kruger says, “Jesus for us is not just another member of the Hall of Faith but the founder and perfecter of our faith... Jesus is the one who carved the path in which we walk. He is the founder, meaning He is the pioneer; He is the one who goes before us and is waiting at the finish line.”

We are told to keep our eyes on who Jesus is, what Jesus did, and where Jesus is. Looking to Jesus, we keep the cross in view. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. If you do not know the salvation of the Lord, it is found in the cross. Jesus, perfect Jesus, went to the cross for our sins, the wrath of God was placed upon Him, and He always offers salvation. If you will truly humble yourself, repent of your sins, and as Romans 10:9 says, ***“Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”*** If you are a believer, we never move past the cross. It is our motivation. As Romans 12:1 says, ***“By the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice.”*** The grace and mercy of God are our motivation to continue running this race. In this passage, we have a picture of moving our eyes from things that distract us and placing them on Jesus. John MacArthur contends that the original readers of Hebrews were starting to look back. “They started looking back at the old ways of Judaism and around them and ahead of them at the persecution and suffering and they began to weaken and waver.” We can so easily take our eyes off of Jesus and place them on other believers, or on ourselves.

When I was in high school, I specifically remember an all-school assembly. I can't remember if it was a "don't do drugs" assembly or a "you can conquer the world" assembly. What I do remember is the prop that the speaker used. I honestly don't even remember his point, but I do remember what he did. He asked two students to come up on the stage. He brought out two ordinary broomsticks. He then challenged the students to try their best to balance the broomstick on one hand. Before they started, he gave them some stipulations. First, he said, "I want you to do this by only looking at your hand." For years and years as a student pastor, I used this illustration. It's always fun to bring a couple of students up and challenge them to balance the broom. Many times, they can't wait to impress their friends. This stipulation changes everything, though. Balancing a broom by only looking at your hand doesn't work. I've watched student after student fail at trying. Then at the assembly, he changed the instructions. He then said, "Now I want you to balance the broom by only looking at the top of the broom." This dramatically changes everything. As I've used this example, I've watched student after student go from failure to success. In all my years of doing this, I've never had a student fail. It always changes things when you move from looking at yourself to looking at the top of the beautiful, bristly broom.

Christian, will you take your eyes off yourself and place them on Jesus? The book of Philippians challenges us, saying, ***"Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"*** (Philippians 3:12-14). Maybe your struggle is constantly looking back at the life that is behind you, forgetting the power of the cross and the forgiveness of the Lord. Maybe you placed your eyes on a person whom you trusted, and they failed you. The clear teaching here is that if we put our faith in anything other than Jesus, things are not going to go well. Placing our eyes on the perfect Savior changes everything. This definitely

doesn't mean it's easy or that this race is all fun and games. No, it's why it says to run with endurance. Someone once said, "Our enthusiasm for Christ must be converted into endurance." In the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes, ***"So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified"*** (1 Corinthians 9:26-27).



# Questions

1. Would you want someone from heaven to watch you “run”? If so, who?
2. How could making man out to be the hero hurt your walk with the Lord? Has this ever happened to you?
3. How does understanding this passage correctly bring encouragement to your run for the Lord?
4. What are some ways you have learned to deal with hindering weights in your life?
5. What are the current weights in your life that you need to lay down? What are the tools that have helped you to identify these weights?
6. What is hurting you from redeeming the time?
7. Have you ever had a friend who has helped you out of the entanglement of sin?
8. How are we called to help each other in laying down sin and weight?
9. Who is someone in your life who has shown you a race of endurance? How has that impacted you?
10. Who does this verse say Jesus is? What does this verse say He did? Where does this verse say Jesus is?
11. How can the group pray for you as you run the race?

## Notes







# Devotion 1

## *A Pep Talk To Run!*

PASTOR ROY TOWNSEND

As a teacher, I often get many questions about the **“cloud of witnesses”** that surrounds us. When people hear or read this verse, it often brings to mind a picture that everyone in Heaven is sitting in an arena and watching us. This thought brings joy to some and terror to others. Hebrews 12:1 reads, **“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”** At first glance, I can understand why people would have those questions.

When we first look at a verse, we realize that this verse starts with **“therefore,”** which connects the beginning of chapter twelve with the previous chapter. The previous chapter is a list of Old Testament believers who, by faith in the coming Savior, lived their lives for Him. Moreover, we are being encouraged by the faithful men and women of the Old Testament to run the race that is before us with endurance. It isn't that they are watching us, but we are surrounded with encouragement that they finished the race as they looked forward to Christ, and we can finish the race as we look back to what Christ has done for us. It is as though we are getting a “pep talk” for the building up of believers. Hebrews 12:2 puts the emphasis directly on Jesus. It reads, **“Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”**

We should be motivated by these saints, such as Abel, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, and Moses. We are motivated to run. Why?

Because of their confirmed testimony of who Christ is and the fact that they finished the race! John Piper wrote, "The best way to illustrate this, I think, is with Hebrews 11:4, where the writer speaks of Abel and says, '**And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.**' So Abel is in the cloud of witnesses, and he is witnessing to us by his life through the Scriptures. This is the way all the witnesses of Hebrews 11 are helping us. They have gathered along the sidelines of our race and they hold out their wounds and their joys and give us the best high-fives we ever got: 'Go for it! You can do it. By faith, you can finish. You can lay the weights down and the sins. By faith, by the assurance of better things hoped for, you can do it. I did it. And I know it can be done. Run. Run!'"

## Devotion 2

# *What's Slowing You Down?*

PASTOR JOSH YATES

***"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."*** Hebrews 12:1-2

I hate to lose. Like, I *really* hate to lose. I'm a pretty competitive person in any game that I play. I'm that guy who, when we play games as a family, plays to win. Otherwise, why play? My girls never beat me in *"Chutes & Ladders."* I'm undefeated and make sure they know it often.

I'm also a rules guy. Basketball is the game that has been a staple in my life for years. I played in high school, refereed for many years, and coached at various levels. I know the rules of basketball well, and because of that experience, any sport I watch or play, as well as every game I play, I make sure I know the rules. Should you break the rules of a game you're playing with me, you can rest assured that I will call you on it. I play to WIN!

The writer of Hebrews likens our walk with Jesus to a race that we are running for the entirety of our lives. We are called to run with endurance while keeping our eyes on Jesus the entire time. In that call, the rules for this race are given to us. Really, it's only one rule: keep your eyes on Jesus. The writer also gives us some pointers on how to finish well, one of which is, ***"Lay aside every weight, and***

*sin which clings so closely.”*

I'll take you back to February 1996 (I know, a long time ago). I was a senior in high school, and we were playing in round one of the Division V CIF (California Interscholastic Federation) playoffs. My team was playing Mother Lode Christian High School, and they made sure to tell us that they'd never lost a home game in the playoffs. (I'm sure you can imagine that we used that as motivation.) At the end of the game, we were up one point with just under a minute to play, and they had to foul. I got the ball in my hands and was fouled immediately, giving me a 1-and-1 free throw situation (If I make the first, I get another free throw).

I stepped up to the line, and their crowd was going nuts! They were screaming, yelling, the band was being as loud as possible, and then their coach called a time-out to try to freeze me. Needless to say, I stepped up to the line, shot the first free throw, and I was a bit nervous. The ball hit the front of the rim, the back of the rim, then the front again before falling through. I was able to hit the second free throw and then do that all again two more times in the last minute to secure the win.

What would've happened if I got distracted by all the noise and screaming around me? What if I flinched as the drums were banging and trumpets blaring as loud as they could? We might have lost that game.

What are the stakes when we get our eyes off of Jesus and onto the weights of the world and the sin that entangles us? We get slowed down in our walk with the Lord. How do we get slowed down? We start to get frustrated, self-reliant, selfish in motive and deed, caught in sin, depressed, and anxious. Is there anything slowing you down today? Is there anything that you're paying more attention to other than Jesus? What is capturing your attention more than Him? What is it that you need to lay aside?

Don't listen to the clanging sounds of the enemy today. Focus on

Jesus. Make your free throws and run your race with your eyes fixed on the One who loves you so much that He died for you.



## Devotion 3

# Turn Your Eyes

JEANNIE YATES

***"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*** Hebrews 12:1-2 (NIV)

My family has two very lovable dogs. Both of our dogs come running when they hear the crinkling sound of a bag of snacks being opened, or when someone says, "Treat!" Like most dogs, they are highly food-motivated. Occasionally, our spoiled (I mean, loved) pets get a bite of our food or a little scrap from the table. The amount of special treats increases immensely when my parents come to visit. Grandpa and Ruby have a special bond, and Ruby knows exactly who to sit by when food is nearby. One night, we had steak for dinner, and Ruby planted herself right next to Grandpa at the dinner table. Every time he moved his hand, picked up his fork, and ate a piece of steak, her eyes watched his every move. It didn't matter that the rest of us around the table were eating the same thing; her gaze was completely set on what Grandpa was doing, and nothing we said or did could distract her. She was confident that he was going to come through with a treat.

Like Ruby watching Grandpa, we need to be ***"fixing our eyes on Jesus,"*** watching His every move, seeking His face, and aligning our lives to His purpose and plan. Over and over again, we find phrases like these in Scripture: ***"Look to the Lord,"*** (Psalm 105:4,



Micah 7:7), ***“Seek the Lord,”*** (1 Chronicles 16:11, Zephaniah 2:3), and ***“Lift up your eyes,”*** (Psalm 121:1, Isaiah 40:26). Colossians 3:2 reminds us, ***“Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”*** When Scripture repeats a theme, that means we had better pay attention to it!

To truly set our gaze on Christ, we must first rid ourselves of ***“everything that hinders.”*** I appreciate how the Amplified translation words it, ***“[Looking away from all that will distract us and] focusing our eyes on Jesus.”*** I know that I am way too easily distracted by things that don't matter. I let my gaze get pulled onto a difficult circumstance, an anxious thought, or even a ***“sin that so easily entangles.”***

I wish this were one of those things where you do it once, and you're set for life, but focusing our eyes on Jesus is a daily choice (sometimes it's minute by minute). It is a commitment each day to align your heart with His. Where we choose to set our focus determines our direction. So, where are you headed? Do you have a clear purpose with a steady focus on your Savior, or are you going around in circles, distracted by the troubles and concerns of this world? Let me encourage you to “Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace” (Lilias Trotter, 1922).

## Devotion 4

# Ready To Run

SIERRA COMBS

***"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."*** Hebrews 12:1-2

About ten years ago, I saw one of those marathon-style bumper stickers that read "0.0 I don't run," and I have never felt more understood and supported by a piece of sticky vinyl in my life. I hate running. In college, after a 2.5-mile treadmill run for a final PE exam, my teacher actually had to walk me around the gym for ten or so minutes because I think she thought I might die (I am not exaggerating). So, when Hebrews 12 describes the Christian life as a race, everything in me wants to hold up my 0.0 sticker and say, "Sorry God, but I have asthma and a weak sense of discipline; I am not your girl!" But here's the thing, even though I hate physical running, God calls every believer into a race, and this one isn't measured by miles. It is measured in endurance, focus, and joy. We don't run this race because we love the feeling of the struggle; we run because, like Jesus, we see the joy set before us.

Hebrews 12:2 tells us that as we run our race, we must look to Jesus, ***"who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross."*** That phrase, "the joy set before Him," is everything. Jesus didn't endure the cross because it was painless. He didn't walk through rejection, betrayal, humiliation, and death by crucifixion

because it felt good. He did it because His eyes were locked on a joy so great, so certain, and so worth it, that every step towards that cross became a step towards victory! It was that very joy that made Him ready to run. What was that joy? It was you! It was the Father's will fully accomplished! It was salvation finished and opened to the entire world! It was redemption complete, bringing many sons and daughters into His family forever! Jesus was ready to run His race because He knew what was waiting on the other side. Now He calls us to follow Him and run our own race. As hard as it is to remember sometimes, that same joy stands before us. Not the joy of an easy and pain-free life, but the deeper joy of knowing Christ, walking with Him, and becoming more like Him. The joy of yearning for that finish line, where we will one day hear, "Well done!" The joy of a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and an eternal home where we will always be in His presence with no more pain and no more sorrow. This joy is our future, and it compels us to keep going.

Even if we are 0.0 runners in real life, we can be ready for this race, not because we feel strong, fast, or prepared, but because the joy that awaits us is real. Jesus has already proved He is worth running towards. So, let's step up to the starting line with confidence, fixing our eyes on Jesus and the joy ahead. The race may stretch us, but the finish is guaranteed, and the One who ran before us runs with us still.

## Devotion 5

# *Despising The Shame*

PASTOR JUSTIN DEAN

If you could have a button to fast-forward your life or rewind your life, which would you choose?

Most people to whom I ask this question say they would rather have a button that would rewind their life. Part of the reason is they want to relive precious moments from their lives, but more often, they wish they could go back and change things or do things differently. As the Recovery Pastor, I often hear people say things like, “If only I could go back,” or “I wish I could have done things differently.” Regret stemming from shame plagues many of us, and a desire to go back and change things is heavy on many people’s hearts.

What is one regret that plagues your mind? If you had the chance, would you go back and change things? What would you change and why?

Hebrews 12:2 says, “***Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.***” The writer of this book says that a key to having spiritual endurance is to lay aside things that weigh us down. One of those weights is shame, which we are called to despise. It is the thing that plagues so many of us because of the myriad of mistakes and bad choices we make in the race of following Christ.

Do you find yourself struggling with shame? What are some things that you are ashamed of? In order to despise this shame, we first have to understand why it is so common to begin with.

Read Genesis 3:6-10. Though the word “shame” is not used in this passage, it is clearly what Adam and Eve are feeling. They are ashamed of their sin, their nakedness, and their failure to obey God. So they cover up, hide, and try to pretend that nothing happened. Before their sin, Adam and Eve relished their time with God in the Garden, but now are hiding from Him and fearing His presence. This is all because of their shame. Worldly shame tells us to hide, like Adam and Eve in the garden, but godly sorrow calls us out of hiding and back into God's presence (2 Corinthians 7:10). To despise shame, then, is to reject its lie that we are better off covering up, and instead to run toward God in honesty, trusting that He meets us not with condemnation, but with mercy and restoration.

No wonder we are warned to lay aside what hinders us. Clearly, shame does exactly what the writer of Hebrews says it does: it weighs us down and holds us back from running our spiritual race. So, how exactly do we despise our shame? ***“Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*** Philippians 3:13-14

How does Paul encourage the Philippians to handle the past? What does he encourage them to do instead?

When we remember the Gospel, we are reminded that our sin has been forgiven through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. If Christ has forgiven us, we can also forgive ourselves. We cannot continue to hold onto shame and allow that to hinder our endurance when following Christ. We have to forget what lies behind and press on towards the race of Christ.

What are some things you need to lay down because they have been forgiven? Spend some time in prayer and ask God to help you leave your shame behind you.

## Devotion 6

# *Where Is Jesus Now?*

PASTOR MITCHELL HOLMES

When I think of a race, my mind often pictures the sidelines and the people who are there, cheering for their loved ones, excited to see them put forth their best effort to win. You all can picture the best sideliners: the ones that cheer the loudest, clapping, hooting, and hollering to be the best encouragement they can be to their runner. As the writer of Hebrews paints a picture of the race of life, we can feel tempted to imagine Jesus in this way, as someone who is on the sidelines wanting to see us run the race of our lives and be as successful as we can be. As if that isn't an amazing enough encouragement, Hebrews chapter twelve paints us an even better picture of Jesus' involvement in our lives.

In Hebrews, the author is driving home the point that our lives are a race, not a sprint, but an endurance run. The start of a long race is easy. You are rested, hydrated, and it feels like you could run forever. To finish that endurance run is much harder, especially if you are not focused on the right thing. For us to finish our race well, that is to live a life that is God-honoring, we must understand something fundamental: where we focus our attention matters. Over the course of this week, we have read that fixing our eyes on Jesus is integral to this race, not just because Jesus is an encouragement to us, but also because of where He is now.

Hebrews 12:2 reads, ***“Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”*** Notice at the end that the author draws special attention to where Jesus is now. This is not

the position of someone who is passive or distant. Christ is seated ***“at the right hand of the throne of God.”*** This seat is a position of victory and authority. There, Christ reigns as King, interceding for His people. Hebrews calls us to look to the One who is alive, victorious, and actively involved in our race.

Christ has endured the shame of the cross and emerged victorious. If He is reigning, then our race is certain. If He is interceding, then we are not running alone. Jesus has run this race perfectly. When we fix our eyes on Him and see that He is, all at once, cheering for us from the sideline, waiting excitedly for us at the finish line, and running alongside us in our day-to-day, we are confronted with the simple, yet profoundly difficult question, “Will I follow Him?” Not just in terms of salvation, but in the moments where our eyes wander, when we veer off-course, will we look back to Him and follow?

This passage pushes us to fix our eyes on Jesus, throw off our hindrances, and run with endurance because we know how the story ends. God calls us to let go of everything else and simply focus on Him, not to burden us, but to free us to run well. Run the race of life well. Place your eyes and your trust in Him. Endure this present hardship by keeping your focus on the One who has the victory and run to Him.





4.

*Let Us  
Worship  
Together*

*HEBREWS 12:18-29*

PASTOR JAYSON COMBS

I believe some of you instantly exploded with joy when you read the title of this chapter. I have had many people tell me that they just love the worship at our gatherings. The thought of singing praises to the Lord excites you. Others of you, well, let's just say, not so much. You may even be one of those who always slips into gatherings just a little late, like it's kind of an "accident." If you are being honest, it is not an accident at all. Singing together with the church is not something you strive to do; maybe it is even uncomfortable for you. In this chapter, we will talk about worship. Yes, I know worship is not just about music, but what does true worship look like? Hebrews 12:28-29 says, ***"Let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire."*** Hebrews 13:15 adds, ***"Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God."***

In Hebrews, what do we see? Worship is about team worship. It is not "Let me," but ***"Let us,"*** worship together. This is something we are called to do as a group. We see over and over again in Scripture that the church is called a body. Ephesians 4:12-16 talks about the whole church being joined together in one body ***"to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."*** God has gifted us this body, the church. When we come together to serve and worship together, it is a beautiful thing, and we see the body grow.

A few years ago, I coached a local high school baseball team. We would often have doubleheaders (two games back-to-back). I

remember this one time our team was not playing the best, and I needed to make some substitutions. I had already subbed a few players in, and then at about the fifth inning of the second game, I turned to one player on the bench and said, “Hey, I need you to go play first base.” He looked up at me and said, “I’m sorry, Coach; I’ve already put on my flip-flops. I can’t play.” Excuse me?! I could not believe he had already given up on the game and had already checked out. He had taken his cleats off, put his flip-flops on, and he was done. He had disengaged from the team and had given up being a part of what the team was doing. In church, are there times we just put on our “flip-flops” instead of recognizing that this is an “us” thing? This is *us* serving together. This is *us* worshiping and praising the Lord together to give Him acceptable worship with this beautiful team we are called to.

Whenever we talk about worship, we instantly think about music. Maybe you are a music person wishing we would sing 48 songs, have the pastor speak for five minutes, and then sing another 13 songs. Others might think that three songs are more than enough. Some of you would prefer only to sing hymns from the hymnal, while others want contemporary worship songs. It is so interesting how our worship preferences can quickly turn into selfishness. We start to think, “Why can’t you worship my way, and sing the songs I like?” We are all different and have different preferences, but we are called to worship as a team. We need to look at what God is teaching us. Hebrews 12:28-29 says, ***“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.”*** However, to fully understand what it means, we need to look at the verses before it.

## See The Two Mountains

Hebrews 12:18-21 reads, ***“For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For***

***they could not endure the order that was given, 'If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.' Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, 'I tremble with fear.'"***

The book of Hebrews was speaking to the Jewish people who had come to know Jesus Christ. They are now in conflict with those who do not know Jesus, because they are calling them betrayers of God. The Jewish people followed the Old Testament laws but did not see Jesus as the Messiah. They were persecuting the Jewish Christians who believed that Jesus was the Messiah and that He fulfilled the Old Testament. Over and over again, we see the book of Hebrews highlight sections of the Old Testament that point to Jesus as the Messiah. That is why it is equally important to study both the Old and New Testaments, the entirety of the Bible.

In Hebrews chapter twelve, we read about two mountains. In this first section, Hebrews 12:18-21, when it speaks of ***"darkness"*** and ***"fire,"*** it is referring to Mount Sinai. Exodus 19:18-20 states, ***"Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. The Lord came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up."***

Here, we see God's power come down, and it is terrifying! In fact, with just a glimpse of God's holiness and power displayed on the mountain, the Israelites became so terrified that they did not want God to speak to them, only to Moses. In Exodus 20:18-21, we read, ***"Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, 'You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.' Moses said to the people, 'Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.' The people***

***stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.”***

The writer of Hebrews uses this illustration of Mount Sinai to have us look back and remember the power of God, remember the ***“consuming fire.”*** Deuteronomy 4:24 says, ***“For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.”*** This should instill in us a proper fear of God. Remembering this mountain is so important when it comes to our worship of God. To truly worship, there must be an awe, a fear of who He is. Now, that does not mean that we fear the wrath of God, because of Jesus, we do not have to face God’s wrath. However, when we see God, there should be a sense of awe and an awareness that God is big, and I am not. He is holy, and I am not. Moses then comes down from Mount Sinai and presents the people with the Ten Commandments.

A few years ago, my wife and I were attending an open house. We had to park some distance from the event and wound up parking next to a two-story church. We came, ate the food, and said hello to everyone. As we started to walk back to the car, we saw very dark, threatening storm clouds heading our way. We made it to the car just before the torrential downpour, and soon after the rain came the wind. This was not a gentle breeze but a full-force, powerful wind like I had never seen before. Suddenly, a large piece of sheet metal flew off the roof of the church and slammed into the side of our car. All I wanted to do was make it safely home, but every road was blocked by trees that had fallen across the road. I had to navigate the long way around to find a road to make it home. I might think I am pretty strong and tough, but I am insignificant compared to the power of that storm. Trees were falling everywhere, electrical lines were exploding, and I was humbled. It was at that moment that I realized just how small I am.

This is the visual picture of Mount Sinai and the worship of God when we bow down in awe of Him. We are good at making ourselves appear big, but we must be humbled. Our worship is looking at this mountain while saying, “God, You are big. You are Holy. I stand



in awe of Your mighty power.” What brings us to worship together is when we have an awe of who God is, especially His holiness and power. This is what Proverbs 3:7 talks about when it says, **“Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.”** We see in the Bible that every time someone gets a glimpse of heaven, they fall to their knees, terrified because of the holiness and goodness of God.

John MacArthur says, “The purpose of Sinai was to bring the people face-to-face with their own sinfulness with no place to hide. The Law is God’s great mirror. When we look at it and see ourselves, we realize how we are immeasurably short of God’s standard of righteousness. There is not a single commandment that we have kept perfectly or can keep perfectly in either act or attitude.”

This alarming scene in Exodus chapter 20 brings me back to the cross. Picture Jesus hanging on the cross, surrounded by the miraculous darkness that God imposed on the Earth. The Bible tells us that the **“sun’s light failed”** (Luke 23:45). Jesus cries out, **“It is finished,”** and dies (John 19:30). The Earth begins to shake violently, and rocks split in half so violently that graves burst open! The massive veil of the temple, 65 feet tall, 30 feet wide, and four inches thick, rips in half from top to bottom. The Bible also tells us the Roman guards **“saw the earthquake and what took place”** (Matthew 27:54). Think about these guards and how they saw what took place. They saw the way the crowd of Jews came to scream for Jesus to be crucified. They saw the way that Jesus responded to the accusations. These guards saw how Jesus responded when they spit in His face, when they mocked Him, beat Him, and nailed Him to the cross. During those first three hours of the cross, they watched the comedy show of people laughing at Jesus. How do you think they responded as they came out of the darkness and the Earth shaking? Matthew 27:54 goes on to say, **“They were filled with awe and said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’”** The word **“awe”** means sheer terror. We find this word earlier in the same Gospel of Matthew, where the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water (Matthew 14:22-33). It is the same wording here, **“They**

**were terrified.”** The cross brought these soldiers to a place where they were in awe of God’s power. The Bible specifically tells us that it brought the centurion, the leader of 100 soldiers, to a place of worship. Luke 23:47 says, **“Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, ‘Certainly this man was innocent!’”**

The author of Hebrews speaks of another mountain, Mount Zion. Hebrews 12:22-24 states, **“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”**

This new mountain, **“the heavenly Jerusalem,”** points to Jesus and His sacrifice. The Christians were being ridiculed for no longer following the Old Testament rituals of sacrifice, but here they are reminded of the **“new covenant.”** Kent Hughes says, “In Christ we have come to its heavenly counterpart.” This mountain has changed everything. They do not have to keep bringing the animals for sacrifice. Jesus is the perfect sacrifice. His **“sprinkled blood”** covers it all.

## **Let Us Draw Near**

When I was seven years old, I went to visit my brother in the state of Washington, and 85 miles away was Mount Rainier. If you have not been there before, let me tell you, it is unbelievable. Even to this day, I can see the image of that magnificent mountain rising into the sky. I was in awe.

To truly worship the Lord, we have to see both mountains. We see the holiness of God, and we see the grace and goodness of Jesus. It is combined with wonderful worship. If we come to God with flippant worship saying, “Yup, Jesus loves me, I am good,” and do not come

in awe, we are missing what worship truly is. If we come to God in terror and fear, not ever knowing the amazing grace and love of Jesus, we do not know true worship that way either. It is seeing both of the mountains. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, we read, ***“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*** Philipians 3:20 adds, ***“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”***

As you read this, you will see that it speaks of the Kingdom and the heavenly Jerusalem. We know that Christ is coming back and will set His earthly Kingdom here. One day, Jesus will return, and He will rule. The curse of this world will be lifted. There will be no more sickness. Things will change, and Jesus reigns; how wonderful! Now, we are still a part of that Kingdom. Yes, His earthly rule is not yet here, but because of Jesus, we now have our citizenship in that Kingdom (Matthew 5). For this reason, we are called to Kingdom-living now. We are called to worship God now.

Hebrews 4:16 says, ***“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*** Many of us only see one mountain and are terrified. We are too afraid to come to God, but if we look at the second mountain and see Jesus, we find the mercy and grace that only He offers. That is what leads us to true worship. It is what destroys the fake worship. Whether we are serving Him with our mouths or our actions, it moves to glorify Him and give Him our praise. We read in the first part of Hebrews 12:28, ***“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.”*** Everything else is going to be shaken. The galaxies and stars that were created will shake. He will make a new heaven and a new earth. He says let us come and receive a Kingdom that cannot be shaken. Because we know Christ, we have this firm foundation for the future. Let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe because our God is a consuming fire. That is what true worship has to be. See the two mountains.



## Let Us Offer

When we get to Hebrews chapter 13, we see the practical side of worship. What does this look like in our everyday lives? Hebrews 13:15-16 says, ***“Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”*** What is that sacrifice? What does it look like?

Worship is:

### 1. The fruit of our lips.

We are to speak and sing praises to our God. Speaking our praise out loud is important. Jesus said, ***“Whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven”*** (Matthew 10:33). Romans 10:9 says, ***“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”*** We need to use our lips to praise Him. Some of you sing and love it, while others do not. Learn to praise the Lord and acknowledge Him with your lips.

My dad was such an example of this to me. One way was that he would whistle hymns to the Lord all the time. He would acknowledge God with his lips and worship Him. We all need that challenge. My dad has gone home to be with the Lord, but one of my fondest memories is waking up on Sunday morning and hearing my dad sing hymns to the Lord from the other side of the house. Sometimes, we come into worship thinking that we just have to get through it, but we have to stop and consider how we will praise the Lord with our lips. It is not just in singing at a church gathering, but do you praise Him out loud in your home? Does your family hear you praise and give thanks to the Lord?

Ephesians 5:19 encourages us to be ***“addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making***

***melody to the Lord with your heart.***” Move the focus of your prayers from asking God, to praising Him for all He has done. How can you thank Him today? Colossians 3:16-17 says, ***“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”*** This is the team worship we are called to. It is a public confession of how good God is.

## **2. Not neglecting to do good.**

It is not just the words of our lips but our actions and how we live. Worship is our words and our works together. We also worship Him by what we do, whether it is serving in the church, at home, or at our workplace. James 1:27 says, ***“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”***

I learned a lot about this part of worship from an 83-year-old man named Mike. Mike was my dad’s right-hand man at the church. He served selflessly and always did whatever was needed. I could see his heart for the Lord when he would weep as children came to events. He was so excited for them to hear about Jesus. He never had great health, but he in whatever he could do, he would serve. He was faithful in teaching and stepped into any area that needed him. He worshiped the Lord through serving. He was an example of a true deacon, someone who served no matter what it took. In 1 John 3:17, we read, ***“But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?”*** We cannot just say it; we have to live it. Worship is when we come together in team worship and serve together.

Some of my favorite times of the year are when we do large events at The River Church, like the Eggnormous Helicopter Hunt and

Trunk or Treat. Thousands of people come, and it takes a huge crew of people to volunteer to serve. It is a heavy lift to pull off the event, clean-up afterward, and get everything ready for the next day (Sunday) at each location. I love it because it is all of the church serving, making memories, sharing the Gospel, and celebrating what the Lord has done. It is a wonderful tiredness. If you do not know that feeling or if you do not have a church where you can have team worship, let me encourage you, you need to find it. Find a place to share the gifts and talents the Lord has given you. Find a place to serve like Mike. If you do not have that, I believe you are missing out because that is team worship. It is all about doing it together. In Ephesians chapter five, we read about how beautiful it is when each person brings their gifts, and the body of Christ works together and grows. That is why the church is so important.

Romans 12:1-2 says, ***“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.”*** I like how the King James Version says, ***“which is your reasonable service.”*** (KJV) This is practical worship, what we are called to. If you know the Lord, if you see the two mountains (God's holiness and His grace through Jesus), then this is how you should live.

The characteristics of worship:

- Living
- Holy
- Set apart for God

It is not a halfway commitment. If we know Christ as our Savior, we are crazy to give Him half-worship. If we truly believe He has saved us, then our response should be whole-hearted.

The demands of worship:

- Not conforming to the thinking of this world
- Allowing God to transform you

We cannot find the Lord's will in the world's agenda. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, we read, ***“And 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.”*** Is the world directing you, or are you allowing God to transform you? We will not have the strength to act like Christians until we are Christians. The strength comes from the Holy Spirit. He gives us the strength we need, and we have to lean into His strength.



# Questions

1. Would you say you are a person that likes to worship? Please explain what you mean.
2. Are there specific styles of music that draw you to worship? Are there styles of music that you struggle to worship with?
3. Has there ever been something in your life that you were not really afraid of, but then an event happened that caused you to be overwhelmed with fear?
4. Do you struggle with the fear of the Lord? Why or why not?
5. How would you define worship with reverence and awe?
6. When you imagine Mount Zion, what does it mean to you?
7. Do you ever struggle with only seeing one mountain? If so, why?
8. What are some ways that you can worship God with your lips this week?
9. What are some ways you can worship the Lord with your good works?

## Notes







# Devotion 1

## *Acceptable Worship*

DAVID HUDGENS

Hebrews chapter 12 shows us a powerful contrast. One side is Mount Sinai, a place of fear where God's holiness kept people at a distance. The other is Mount Zion, the heavenly city, where people can come to God with confidence, joy, and hope. The author isn't just telling history—he's showing two very different ways of approaching God.

It is against this backdrop that we hear the invitation in Hebrews chapter 12, ***"Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe"*** (Hebrews 12:28). The Greek word translated here as acceptable carries the meaning, "well-pleasing." That word forces us to pause, because it raises an important question: what kind of worship is actually pleasing to God?

To answer that question, Scripture first clarifies what pleasing God is not. What pleases God is not primarily a matter of external performance. That is, worship is not made acceptable by impressive music, emotional intensity, sincerity, or careful execution. The issue, Scripture tells us, runs much deeper than outward expression. Paul points out this reality directly in Romans 8:8: ***"Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."*** In other words, the problem is not that we try too little, but that apart from Christ, we are unable to offer anything truly pleasing to God at all. Left to ourselves, acceptable worship is beyond our reach.

However, this is precisely where the good news of the gospel speaks its liberating word. The marvelous mystery revealed in Christ is not

only the forgiveness of sin (though it is certainly that), but also the unveiling of an entirely new way of life. Through Jesus, we are invited out of fear and judgment and into reconciliation by grace through faith. Hebrews reminds us that we enter into this reconciliation not through a mountain that burns with fire, but through Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, whose own blood speaks a **"better word"** (Hebrews 12:24).

Because of Christ, pleasing God is not about what we can achieve through our own effort or strength. As Paul explains in Ephesians, the life that pleases God is one in which believers walk as children of light, learning to discern what is pleasing to the Lord (Ephesians 5:1–10). This kind of life (marked by love, holiness, and truth) is not an attempt to earn God's favor, but the fruit of belonging to Him. It is the posture of someone who has already been welcomed into God's family.

The book of Hebrews brings this truth to a beautiful conclusion with a benediction that gathers everything together, ***"Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ"*** (Hebrews 13:20–21). What God desires, He Himself provides. What God calls pleasing, He graciously works in us through Christ for His glory.

Finally, this brings us back to Hebrews 12:28. Acceptable, or well-pleasing, worship is not something we manufacture and present to God. It is the natural response of those who know and understand what they have truly been given in His gift of grace. We worship with gratitude because we have received an unshakable kingdom. We worship with reverence and awe because the God who welcomes us is holy! We worship with confidence because Christ Himself mediates our approach to God and transforms our lives.

True worship flows not from self-achievement or performance, but

from a grateful heart formed by grace. When we know the gift we have received, worship becomes our joyful and fitting response to our holy and righteous God.



## Devotion 2

# *Continual Praise*

PASTOR PATRICK BICKNELL

One of my favorite things to do when I have free time and when I have (hopefully) been a responsible adult and taken care of all that needs to be done in the house, is watch movies. I will literally watch just about any movie. I love going to the movies, and I love rewatching movies. It is one of my favorite things to do. An interesting thing about movies is that we get to see the whole character arc of the people we are watching. Most of the time, the story is completed when the movie ends. We see the main character's introduction, the struggle they go through, the montage of how they fix it, and then, at the end, everything is resolved and they all live happily ever after.

Sometimes, we can think that will happen for us in real life. We act like we can reduce our walk with God to a movie plot where all we need to do is say a well-meaning prayer, be part of a passionate worship night, and we will be all set in our Christian walk. Yet, this is not the case. In the Scriptures, we are taught to continually offer up praise to God and live for His glory. Hebrews 13:15 says, ***“Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.”*** It is important for us to understand that our praise, worship, and reverence for the Lord is something we should need and want to do ***“continually”*** for the rest of our lives.

To maybe help make the example clearer, let's think of marriage. If a husband and wife are married, should they only profess their love for each other on their wedding day? Or on their anniversary each year? How deep, strong, and healthy of a marriage would that be? The same is true for our relationship with God. When you have a

real experience with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and your dead soul is awakened to the beauty of the grace of God, there is no other way to live. Every fiber of your being, everything that you do, should be an opportunity to continually bring worship and praise to God. It makes me think of a verse in 1 Corinthians 10:31: ***“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”*** In the big and small things in your life, do it for His glory. Let us continually praise Him.

## Devotion 3

# *The Fear Factor*

PASTOR GARY WRIGHT

***"But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread."*** Isaiah 8:13

Fifteen years ago, my friend Mike asked me to take over the middle school boys class at the church we were attending. Three things immediately went through my mind. I have never taught before, I am an introvert, and honestly, I have no interest in leading those boys. I told Mike I would pray about it. I truly was not using that as an excuse not to do it. I prayed for three or four days and got very little sleep. After praying through those days, I knew that God wanted me to take the class over, but my fear was keeping me from doing it.

From our passage of Scripture, the Israelites of Judah were in fear of being invaded. They had powerful enemies ready to attack. The fear they had of being attacked kept them from trusting God. Much like the Israelites, we have fears of our own: not measuring up, the what ifs, or even teaching a group of middle schoolers. Fear is a powerful thing that can affect a believer's faith. Isaiah encourages Judah and us when he says, ***"But the Lord of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread."*** Kent Hughes explains Isaiah's passage like this, "Dare to treat God as God. Don't respond to life in a way that makes God look helpless and weak and worthless."

Years before Isaiah wrote this passage, God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai. God demonstrated His power on the mountain with thunder, lightning, thick clouds, loud trumpet sounds, fire, smoke, and violent trembling of the Earth. God's power



was so impressive that Moses himself was in fear. ***"Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, 'I tremble with fear'"*** (Hebrews 12:21). The Israelites were in awe of God's power. We should be in awe of His power as well. God is all powerful; He was bigger than Judah's worry of being attacked and He is bigger than the things we fear in our lives.

Fifteen years ago I had a choice to make: would I lead the middle school boys class and trust God, or would I allow my fear to rob me of my faith? I told Mike I would come alongside him and see how it went. As I worked with Mike and began to teach, I learned that I had to rely on God's power (not my emotions), to give me the strength to do what He wanted me to do. Sometimes we can be fearful, but we need to be careful not to let our emotions steal our faith.

***"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."*** Matthew 10:28

## Devotion 4

# *A Joyful Heart Of Worship*

JOANNA MONTGOMERY

Standing in the crowd, listening to voices singing, the auditorium filled with music and voices praising the Holy God of Heaven, I am often overwhelmed to the point I cannot sing. Instead, I can only stand in awe of the God who loves me and provides salvation for me. This scene is often what people consider worship, and it is worship if our hearts are truly in it. However, it is not the only way we can worship.

Worship is a state of the heart and should be in everything we do. We are fortunate to live in an age of grace. We have the historical fact of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament Scriptures point to that very moment in time, and we have the testimonies in the New Testament proving the Old Testament prophecies are truth. That alone should cause our hearts to worship God.

In Hebrews 12:22-24, we read, ***“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”***

With Christ as our Lord, we are already enrolled in Heaven where joy and freedom flourish. The blood of a perfect Christ was shed to redeem sinners, so we can live a perfect eternal life. Through Jesus, we can be in the presence of our Holy God. God is all-powerful,

full of justice, and cannot overlook sin. However, through the new covenant of the shed blood of Jesus, the redeemed dwell with God on Mount Zion, a glorious place where those made perfect through the sacrifice of that blood will live eternally. We have the promise of a loving, righteous, forgiving relationship with our Savior.

If we have a sinful thought or behavior, we know we are already forgiven, which moves us to be obedient and immediately repent of any sins, and that is worship. We know Christ already paid our penalty and we live in joy as Jesus lived. When we sin, we do not have to mourn, beat ourselves up, or wallow in self-pity. We repent of the sin, then joyfully go through the world telling others about this amazing gift. That is worship. We worship when we realize God's wonder, power, and majesty. We enjoy God's grace and mercy and seek to glorify Him and recognize only He deserves our adoration and our honor. That is how we worship, not to get something from Him, but just because He deserves it.

Although worship can be in the form of singing, worship is acknowledging that God is all-powerful and should receive glory through everything we say and do. Knowing God's Word and joyfully obeying His commands is the ultimate form of worship. Worship is showing admiration for the God who created us and made all things to glorify Him.

## Devotion 5

# Reverence And Awe

PASTOR JULES SCHIEFERSTEIN

***“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.”*** Hebrews 12:28–29

When you come to church on Sunday, do you come in a spirit of fear and trembling? That’s not how we normally conceive of encountering and worshiping God. It is good and proper for us to worship God for His love and grace to us, but we must also remember that God is the King and Creator of the universe. Through Christ, we have been given the ability to approach God’s throne, but we must still remember that we are approaching a throne. He has a right to all creation, He has a right to us, and so if we reject Him or His Son, we stand under ***“a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries”*** (Hebrews 10:27). Worship in the New Testament is often framed by the context of the fear of the Lord, as we are to bring ***“holiness to completion in the fear of God”*** (2 Corinthians 7:1) and ***“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”*** (Philippians 2:12).

Hebrews 12:28–29 is the conclusion of five warning passages across the epistle to the Hebrews. Throughout the entire book, the author has been encouraging and warning his readers to not fall away, to not return to their former Jewish practices or unbelief because the way that Christ has made is so much better. This comes to a conclusion in Hebrews chapter twelve, where the author compares the covenant made with Moses and the people of Israel at Mount Sinai to the better covenant He has made at Mount Zion through

Jesus Christ.

However, just as this covenant is greater than the one God gave to Moses, it also means the stakes for us are even higher. Moses and the people of Israel trembled before God at Mount Sinai, and now we stand in reverence and awe before Him at Mount Zion. This means that just as Israel was punished for their breaking of the law and rejection of God, we stand under even stricter judgment and greater danger if we reject the Son of God who has mediated the greater covenant. When we approach Mount Zion, we approach a holy God who is judging rightly from His throne, and when He speaks, He will ***“shake not only the earth but also the heavens”*** (Hebrews 12:26). When the King returns, He will bring an end to all things that are not eternal, so that the only thing left will be His kingdom. This reality should motivate our worship and instill in us a healthy fear and respect for the Lord: this is what worshiping in reverence and awe means.

Paul instructs similarly in 2 Corinthians, ***“So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ...Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others”*** (2 Corinthians 5:9-11). If we truly believe in the reality of God’s holiness, this should motivate us to respond in worship with our every action: gathering together, spending time in His Word, spending time in prayer, and sharing the gospel message with those around us. This week, spend time reflecting on God’s holiness, and ask yourself: how will the reality of God’s holiness shape my worship this week? Who can I share the good news with in response to God’s holiness?

## Devotion 6

# *What Lies Beneath*

KATRINA YOUNG

Last summer, we had a major issue going on in our front yard. A section of our pavers in the front of the house began to lift. At first, it was subtle—just a slight wobble when stepping on them. It was noticeable but pretty easy to ignore. Very quickly, we realized that there was an obvious issue that needed to be addressed. The entire walkway, and even parts of the driveway, were beginning to crack and raise up. When we finally started pulling up the bricks, the cause was revealed: a massive tree root was growing underneath the sidewalk, stemming from the tree 30 feet away. These pavers have been lining our walkway for years, perfectly level! The tree out front has stood tall for equally as long. In one short summer, this monster root, hidden underground, was persistent and powerful enough to move stone. This is the image that comes to my mind when Scripture warns us about a **“root of bitterness.”**

Hebrews 12:15 says, **“See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.”** Bitterness doesn’t announce itself loudly. It starts quietly when there is something unresolved in our hearts like a hurt or disappointment that plays vividly over and over again in our memory. We often rehearse those offenses instead of finding the grace to forgive and let them go. Bitterness is something that takes hold when our wounds go unattended and grace goes unused. On the outside we cover it up, we lay our emotional “pavers” back in place, and act as if nothing is wrong, but internally, we’ve made space for a root to sprout in our hearts. Before we know it, bitterness has crowded the very space where the Holy Spirit resides in us. We continue in our day-to-day

life attending worship gatherings and going through the motions of acting out our faith, but what leaks out is gossip, criticism, and negativity, infecting the atmosphere of our home or church. Bitterness isn't always visible, but our actions are. Our words can be heard, and they affect everyone around us.

***"Let all bitterness . . . be put away from you. . . Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."*** Ephesians 4:31-32

We noticed the unevenness and wobble in our path, but we chose to live with it longer than we should have. It was a busy summer, and what was happening beneath the surface was not something we had time to tackle. By the time we finally acted, the damage had spread way beyond a loose brick. What could have been a small repair job, now required a chainsaw, hours of labor, and a complete reset of the walkway. That's what Hebrews 12:15 is warning us about when it says ***"see to it"*** that no root of bitterness grows. Being watchful of the things that might pop up matters. We have to choose God's grace. When we ignore those subtle heart wobbles, the sharp words, the withheld forgiveness, the distracted worship—we allow bitterness to grow unchecked.

Forgiveness is the tool God gives us to help us dig deep and cut away what doesn't belong. It's not always easy, but it is necessary. When bitterness is uprooted, something beautiful happens: our words soften, our worship becomes focused on Him again, and our joy returns. Our circumstances don't magically change, but grace reclaims the ground of our heart. What once disrupted and defiled can be restored when we surrender fully to God's care.

Where have your words or worship felt uneven lately? What might God need to uproot beneath the surface?





5.  
*Let Us  
Rest*

*HEBREWS 3:16-4:4*

PASTOR JAYSON COMBS

Take a second to get this picture in your mind: a beautiful white sandy beach, waves softly crashing in the distance, a perfect 79.6 degrees, a white lounge chair with your towel placed perfectly on top, and the book you have been looking forward to reading at your side. You have your headphones on to block out the noise and your favorite ice-cold drink all ready to go (that would be a Coke for me, or maybe on a crazy day, a Ruby Red Squirt). Is this rest? If not, what would it look like or where would you have to go to find rest? I believe "rest" to be one of America's supreme goals, maybe even a higher value than fame or wealth. We think, "I'll just rest if I can make it to retirement; I'll rest when the vacation comes; or I'll rest when the weekend gets here." Just like the song says, "Everybody's working for the weekend." However, when we come back from the vacation or weekend, we are oftentimes more stressed than when we left. We start Monday more tired or hungover, and many times less rested than when we started the weekend. I would argue that our culture today has more toys, more vacations, more retirement, and less work than ever before. Yet, I would also dispute that we are less rested as a nation than we have ever been. Why is that?

Looking back at the first example, I can almost hear some of you answering this question. There is no rest because I know how much that trip to the sandy beach is going to cost. There is no rest because I know the work that is piling up at home. There is no rest because of a family issue, sickness, or failure. The Bible clearly tells us that rest is important. It also clearly tells us how to find it. The Church must learn to rest, or we will be in trouble. Church, the truth is we cannot afford to be tired.

The goal of this book is to take an in-depth look on how to be The Church. In this next chapter, we will look at Jesus calling us to rest. I hope to explain how crucial it is for the Church to find true rest. When thinking about this and having an idea of rest, we need to ask ourselves some important questions: How does the Church find rest? Are you good at rest? If not, what things are causing you to miss the rest of the Lord?

In Hebrews 4:11, we have the next ***“Let us”*** statement, ***“Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.”***

I love the word “strive” here. It seems like an antonym to the word rest. I enjoy the KJV translation of this passage even better. It says, ***“Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest.”*** This begs the question, “What labor must we do to find true rest?”

First, let us define rest. The literal meaning of rest is “to cease working.” However, when applied to God’s definition, this rest means “no more self-effort. As far as salvation is concerned, it means the end of trying to please God by our feeble fleshly works” (John MacArthur).

MacArthur goes on to say, “Rest is freedom from whatever worries or disturbs you. Some people cannot rest mentally and emotionally because they are easily annoyed. Everything upsets them or bothers them or everything is a hassle to them. Rest does not mean freedom from nuisances and hassles. It means freedom from being so easily bothered by them. It means to be inwardly composed and peaceful. To enter God’s rest, it means to be at peace with God. Free from guilt, and free from worry about sin. God’s rest is the end of legalistic works and experience of peace in the total forgiveness of God.”

## **A Picture of Unrest**

When describing rest, the author of Hebrews takes us back to the Old Testament. In chapter four verse one, he is speaking of the rest that God offered and the Israelites missed. The rest God offered was the Promised Land. Now, it wasn’t just the land, it was a relationship with God, trusting Him, believing Him, and resting in Him. The specific story Hebrews is pointing to is found in Numbers chapters 13-14. The Israelites had come right up to the edge of the Promised Land. They sent twelve men to spy out the land and after 40 days the men came back with the results. ***“At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. And they came to***

***Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the people of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh. They brought back word to them and to all the congregation and showed them the fruit of the land. And they told him, 'We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.'***” Numbers 13:25-27

Finally, the Israelites would find rest. They would no longer be wandering and no longer be homeless. Except that there was much more to their report. Numbers chapter 13 continues, ***“However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there...‘We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are.’ So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, ‘The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height’”*** (Numbers 13:28, 31-32).

Two of the men, Joshua and Caleb, tried to convince the people to trust the Lord. Caleb said it this way, ***“The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them.’ Then all the congregation said to stone them with stones”*** (Numbers 14:7-10).

Caleb says they are ***“bread for us.”*** Kent Hughes remarks that this is basically the expression, “This is a piece of cake.” Twelve spies went to check out the land that God had promised; ten saw stress, and two saw rest. The ten who saw stress, missed God’s rest. Kent Hughes adds, “The Israelites in this section were faced with a new challenge. They simply did not trust God and failed to enter rest. Many, maybe even thousands, were believers of the Lord, but only two really chose to enter the rest of the Lord.”

The warning is that the Israelites had heard the good news; however, they did not trust God enough to enter into His rest. I believe the writer of Hebrews is telling us that we cannot miss the rest of God. So then, what is the rest the Lord offers and how do we find it?

## **1. Trusting in the Lord is what gives our soul rest.**

***“For we who have believed enter that rest...”*** (Hebrews 4:3). As the writer of Hebrews does over and over again, we see this text points out that it is belief in Jesus that will give ultimate rest. As you continue in the book of Hebrews, you will find the author explaining that Jesus Christ is greater than angels, Moses, and Joshua. He desperately desires that the readers will know the peace that only comes through Jesus Christ. In both the Old Testament and New Testament, rest came through belief.

***“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.”*** Ephesians 1:13

***“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.”*** Romans 1:16

Faith is trusting God wholeheartedly. Leon Morris puts it this way, “Faith here in Hebrews 4:2 is the attitude of trusting God wholeheartedly.” A true believer is one who can rest in the word of Jesus Christ. Later on in this chapter, it speaks of Jesus as the Great High Priest in whom our confidence rests.

Kent Hughes says, “First, trusting in Christ's sacrificial death begins our rest. By giving us rest from the burden of guilt for our sins and our gnawing conscience, an almighty God and a loving Savior gives us rest as we place our burdens upon Him. Just as a child sleeps so easily in the arms of a parent, we may rest in the Lord.” This rest that Hughes mentions is when we realize that all that needs to be done in order to have peace with God has already been completed by what Jesus, and only Jesus, did on the cross.

In Matthew 11:28-29, we read, ***“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”***

Have you received this rest? You can know about God just like the Israelites did. You can know the truth of the cross and what Jesus did, but do you believe it wholeheartedly? Have you accepted the rest that is offered from the cross, knowing that the debt of your sins has been paid? It is not something that you work for, rather it is accepting the work that Jesus did. Maybe right now, right where you are, you can find that rest. If you are a Christian, take a deep breath and sit in the promise of Jesus as Savior. He has you. He has covered your past, predestined your future, and He is with you in the present.

## **2. Working through His Word helps us find rest.**

The verse that follows Hebrews 4:11 puzzled me. It is a well-known verse that I have heard quoted many times, but I struggled to understand it in the context of rest. ***“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart”*** (Hebrews 4:12). Morris helped me to better understand by stating, “Living and active shows that there is a dynamic quality about God’s revelation.” God’s Word can reach the innermost recesses of our being. Albert Mohler also gave this insight, “The word is living and effective. It is able to pierce the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Scripture untangles the human heart and unearths sin like no other book can. No other book can discern the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. Only God’s word can do that. The word of God cuts through the sin and darkness of the human heart to restore the spiritual heart for Christ.”

The Word frees us from confusion. It gives us clarity on who God is and on His amazing love. It gives us direction on how to live and



walk; therefore, giving us peace and direction. It gives us the truth, and tells us walking in disobedience to the Word leads to hurt and pain.

A few years ago, I had just finished a round of golf with my son. We were carrying our clubs out to the car as I pulled out my key fob and hit the unlock button, nothing happened. The battery in my key fob was dead. It was one of those key fobs where you don't have to use a physical key for anything. When the car wouldn't open, I hit a little small button on the key fob and pulled out the hidden key. I stuck this little key into the door lock, unlocking the door. As I opened the door the car decided to explode with horns and lights. This really puzzled me because I had used the car's own key to open it! With a dead key fob, I was helpless to shut the car alarm up. Finally, after a few minutes, it stopped, but not before I got some vicious looks from other golfers in the parking lot.

My son then opened the passenger door and it started all over again. I remember sitting in the driver's seat with no clue how to start the car. I opened the glove box and pulled out the car manual (I think the plastic wrap was still on it). I found the section on how to start the car with a dead key fob. I have to say, I thought the instructions were kind of ridiculous. I live in Southeast Michigan and we have many engineers who work for the big three car companies. I blame these ridiculous plans on them! The instructions said to look to my right and find the cup holder. In the bottom of the cup holder there is a rubber insert and to pull out the rubber insert. Then, set the key fob in the cup holder. Honestly, at this time I was pretty annoyed. I was annoyed that the car alarm went off because I opened the door with the key. I was annoyed at these ridiculous instructions. Reluctantly, I set the key fob in the cup holder. The next instruction said, "Press the start button." So, I did and the car started. The instructions worked. I may not have understood the why or how, but it worked.

The author of Hebrews brings us back to the Word of God to find rest. Why? Because it works. You may not understand it all, but the Word of the Lord is true and in it you will find rest. This is why the

Israelites did not find rest. They did not believe His Word to be true. Therefore, they did not follow in obedience and they missed God's rest. ***“Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience”*** (Hebrews 4:11).

Albert Mohler, Jr. says it beautifully, “This is one of the things we do every Sunday in corporate worship when we sit under the preaching of the Word of God. This is what we do when we sing together. This is what we do when we pray together. This is what we do when we fellowship together. We gather in corporate worship to encourage one another to be fully satisfied in Christ and in Him alone, lest we fail to enter His rest.” The Word untangles our lives around sin and sets us a path to follow Him.

### **3. Serving the Lord is rest.**

There is one more point that I believe to be so important. In our world today, we think rest is found in doing nothing. I believe that if we are followers of Christ, we will have unrest in our soul if we do not serve the Lord. By serving and loving one another, we will have rest.

To the Church in Corinth, Paul says, ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort also. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort”*** (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

I love verse four; we have received this comfort so that we may be able to be a comfort to others. I truly believe you will find great rest when you strive to serve Jesus. When you strive to comfort others



by sharing the amazing comfort you have received in Christ, you will have rest. God's rest offered to the Israelites was not for them to go to a land and do nothing. The goal was to go to a land, where they could trust the Lord and grow their relationship with Him. The rest that God offers here is not a “do nothing” kind of rest. It is striving to grow, laboring in the Word, serving the Lord, and trusting in Him kind of rest.

Church, let us find true rest in Him.

# Questions

1. How would you define the word rest?
2. If you could take one week to rest, what would that look like?
3. On a scale of 1-10, how good are you at resting? Why?
4. What do you think steals your rest?
5. How is there rest in salvation? How do you forget about this rest? How does it affect you?
6. Do you ever struggle to apply the rest of salvation? Explain.
7. How does the Word of God help you rest? Can you give an example?
8. How has serving the Lord brought you rest? Has there been a season in your life where you have stepped away from serving and it affected your rest?
9. What are a couple things you could do this week to help you rest in the Lord?

## Notes





# Devotion 1

## *They Missed His Rest*

PASTOR JOHN CARTER

At first glance, Numbers 4:7–10 feels like an odd place to talk about rest. The passage is technical, precise, and procedural. It describes how the priests, Aaron and his sons, were to cover the sacred furnishings of the Tabernacle, especially the table of the bread of the Presence, before the sons of Kohath carried them to the next destination laid out by God. Everything was wrapped carefully. Nothing was rushed. Nothing was exposed. Nothing was handled casually. Yet, hidden in these details is a profound picture of what it means to rest in God.

This passage shows us a people surrounded by a structure that was meant to produce rest. God gave clear instructions. He established order. He defined boundaries. Nothing about His presence or His provision was left to uncertainty. And yet, as the book of Hebrews later explains, some still missed God's rest.

The natural question to ask is, "Why?" Hebrews expounds for us that the problem was not ignorance; it was unbelief. That unbelief expressed itself through disobedience. Hebrews tells us plainly that those who came out of Egypt heard God's voice, saw His works, and walked within His instructions, yet their hearts remained rebellious. They knew what God had said, but they did not trust Him enough to really obey or fully believe in faith what He was leading them toward (Hebrews 3:16-19).

One detail in Numbers chapter 4 stands out in a powerful way. Even while the table was being transported, the bread remained on it. This is a picture for us to see provision was not removed during the

journey. God did not say, "We will restore nourishment once you have arrived." He kept the bread in place to show that His provision travels with His people. This is the root of rest, knowing that God's faithfulness does not pause in seasons of transition. His presence does not disappear when life is unsettled.

Israel deeply struggled to believe this truth. They became skilled at carrying God's presence outwardly while resisting trust inwardly. This same tension confronts the modern church. We can look faithful in a gathering while our hearts remain restless throughout the week. Like Israel, we rush ahead when God calls us to wait. We complain when He is proving faithful. We grasp for control and live in fear of circumstances. At the heart of it, we, like the Israelites, often want rest without submission, promise without patience, blessing without trust.

This is why Hebrews says they could not enter God's rest. Not because rest was unavailable, but because obedience and belief have always been two inseparable concepts. They trusted the form of God's instructions while questioning the very God who gave it to them. Disobedience, Hebrews tells us, flowed from their unbelief.

The tragedy in this story is that rest was built into the journey itself. God was teaching His people, step by step, that His presence did not need to be managed, hurried, or improved. Their role was simple: trust His word, follow His instructions, walk in obedience. We see this same posture laid out in the Great Commission, where Jesus sends His disciples out, not with anxiety or self-reliance, but with a promise: ***"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...and behold, I am with you always."*** The mission flows from His authority and is sustained by His presence. Our responsibility is obedience, not control. We have to trust that God is God and we are not. That warning presses just as hard on the Church today. We too often want God's promises without His process, His blessings without His boundaries, and His peace without surrender.

For us to grow in Christ, we must learn this posture of rest. Numbers

chapter 4 reminds us that God's design for rest has always been rooted in reverence. The holy things were covered, not hidden in shame, but protected in honor. God never disregards the holy things. He is trying to teach us to trust in His process (1 Peter 1:14-16). God was, and is still, teaching His people that what is holy is not meant to be controlled, but submitted to. It is in that submission, not in our striving, that God invites His people to experience true rest.

True rest does not come from exposing every fear or trying to manage every outcome. It comes from placing what is sacred back into God's hands and refusing to carry what He has not asked us to bear. It is believing that what God has spoken and what God has done is sufficient. God's rest is found in trusting His redemptive plan and having faith that His purpose is not restrictive, but life-giving.

Rest, then, is not the absence of responsibility, it is confidence in the One who assigns it. We rest not by escaping what God has called us to do (Reach, Gather, and Grow), but by trusting the God who has already gone before us.

God's rest looks entirely different from the world's version of rest. It is not an escape, a distraction, or a collapse. It is a steady, settled confidence that Jesus is present, that He is sufficient, and that He is faithful to His promise (Hebrews 4:1). When our eyes are focused on Him, even the weight we are called to carry becomes ordered, purposeful, and manageable.

For the sons of Kohath, that weight was the holy things of God's tabernacle. For us, it may be found in parenting, workplace responsibilities, our communities, and yes, even in how we serve in ministry. Our callings may differ, but the posture remains the same.

The invitation of Hebrews still stands. Let us enter this rest by carrying only what God has asked us to carry, in the way He has asked us to carry it, with our eyes fixed on the peace and truth of Jesus Christ. Not as unbelieving, disobedient, and rebellious people. ***"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts"*** (Hebrews 3:15).



Trust Him. Obey Him. Enter the rest He has already prepared for you and me through His Son Jesus Christ.

## Devotion 2

# *Free To Rest*

KATIE PETTIBONE

***"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."*** Matthew 11:28

When Jesus says, ***"All who labor and are heavy laden,"*** He is speaking to the sinner. He is speaking to the people who for so long had been taught that salvation had to come from their own works. But here, Jesus is correcting that. He reminds us that we do not have to work to receive the salvation we so desperately need, because He is the source of that salvation. Looking back at my life, I can attest to the fact that it was never the work or the hours that I put in that made me "deserve" salvation. It was always only Him and I can rest in that.

Finding rest in knowing that I don't have to work for my salvation is very freeing, but there's another side of this passage too. See, in our world today, society tells us that a busy culture is a productive culture. Employers will give out a certain amount of vacation days, and those vacation days better be spent resting and doing things like traveling to get your mind off the everyday. Even weekends are spent on spa days, naps, or "me time." All of these sources of "rest," apart from Jesus, will never give you the rest you truly need. We also need to take the example of God resting on the seventh day in the creation story, but never forget that Jesus says, ***"Come to me... I will give you rest."*** When life is spent living away from Jesus, you won't experience the rest you need to deal with the hard things you will face. This is a truth that I have had to face as well.

Jesus can bring us through any storm of life, no matter what it is,

Jesus is the way through those storms. For example, in Mark 4:35, Jesus is sleeping on a boat while the disciples are freaking out about a storm. Water is getting into their boat and the disciples are asking Jesus if He even cares that they might die. Jesus wakes up and all He has to say is, ***"Peace! Be still!"*** and the sea calmed (Mark 4:39). Our Savior is so powerful, that by His voice the wind and seas obey Him. We can also find hope in John 16:33 as it reads, ***"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."*** Jesus has already won the battle! Why do I need to spend another minute worrying about my life when I know the all-powerful Jesus, my Savior, has already overcome my battles? We can find rest in Him.

So, let's take a step back and think about all of this. Yes, we are all sinners, and there is nothing we can do to take that sin away. There is no job, no task, no work that can make you deserve salvation. It is only through Jesus and Him alone! Jesus has so freely given us salvation through His sacrifice and offers us rest when we walk with Him. He has the power, strength, and guidance to overcome any battle, for He has already overcome the world!

Have you stopped and rested in the Lord lately? If not, why is that? Identify what might be taking that time away from you. Take time and read His good Word and spend time in prayer today. If you feel unrested, take heart! Jesus will give you rest. All you have to do is go to Him.

## Devotion 3

# *Peace With God*

MARC DELCAMP

As I was entering the last few years of high school and beginning young adulthood, I grew a fondness for stargazing. I didn't get to do it often, but when I did, I made sure to soak it all in. One of the reasons I loved stargazing so much was because it gave me a moment to stop, slow down, and experience peace while admiring God's creation in the midst of a busy life. Today, we are talking about peace, not the peace we get from doing things we enjoy, but the peace that comes from being in the presence of God Himself.

As Paul leads up to chapter 5 in Romans, he makes a few main points. First, everyone is guilty before God. Second, because we are guilty, we all need God's grace (Romans chapters 1–3). In Romans chapter 4, Paul uses Abraham as an example to show that we receive this grace through faith, not works. That brings us to chapter 5, ***“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”*** (Romans 5:1).

In this verse, Paul introduces the peace we now have with God. This peace doesn't come from slowing life down or escaping responsibilities. It comes from understanding that once we are justified by faith—believing that Jesus died, rose again, and accepting Him as our Savior—our eternity is secure. And that security isn't found in things that will fade, but in the Creator of all things, who never fades (Isaiah 40:28).

How amazing is the peace we can have knowing that we were once destined for eternal punishment, but are now completely secured in

the very hand of God! ***“My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.”*** John 10:29

So, as you go through your day, ask yourself: What is one way you can experience peace with God? What is one way you can intentionally spend time in His presence?

God is peace. When you spend time with Him, you grow in your ability to experience that peace more and more.

## Devotion 4

# Peace Of God

ZACH HONNEN

***“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”***

Philippians 4:6–8

**“Peace.”** This word means many different things to many different people. For some, peace is silent resentment, the quiet between storms where nothing has truly changed, but at least no one is yelling anymore. For others, peace is the product of hard work and perseverance. It is the calm after the storm.

When we look at the biblical definition of peace, it looks different. It looks like thirteen men on a boat in the middle of a storm, and twelve of them are panicking, fearing for their lives; but one man is asleep, no concern, no fear, no anxiety, just calm. When the others wake Him, He does not respond with panic or anxiety. He speaks and says, **“Peace! Be still!”** (Mark 4:39). In this excerpt of Jesus's life we see that peace is not based on circumstances or the storms around us. It is an internal reality, an internal state of being rooted in God.

The Greek word for peace carries the idea of quietness, calmness, and being made complete or whole. To have the peace of God that

surpasses all understanding is to be made one in Christ. His ways become our ways. His thoughts become our thoughts. We no longer view the world through the lens of selfishness or fear, but through surrender, trust, and rest.

The only way to live in the peace of God is through surrender to Christ. It is being honest and truthful about our fears, anxieties, anger, and frustrations. God does not ask us to put on a mask of peace. He does not ask us to pretend everything is okay. He invites us to bring our requests to Him, trusting that He is in control. Our fears and anxieties are already known to Him, but He invites us to hand them over so He can carry them for us.

Today, set your mind on whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is excellent, and whatever is worthy of praise. Set your mind on Christ, on His goodness, on His love, on His victory, and on His power and majesty.

Take time today to make a list of your fears, anxieties, pain, anger, and frustrations. Offer that list to God as an act of surrender. Then shift your focus to who He is, what He has done, and how He is at work in your life. There is likely far more to thank Him for than we realize.

## Devotion 5

# *Rest From The Struggle*

PASTOR KEATON WASHBURN

Almost everyone today struggles with information overload. It is said that a single edition of the New York Times contains more information than the average person in the seventeenth century would come across in their entire life. We were not made to constantly consume; yet, so many, from the moment they wake up to the time they fall asleep just scroll, scroll, scroll.

In Revelation chapters 12–14, we read about a battle between the Dragon and his agents and God and His people. Chapter 14 specifically tells of believers and non-believers during the Great Tribulation. Revelation 14:11-12 says, ***"And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name. Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus."*** While this is not easy to read, it is the truth nonetheless. It seems more and more often, people are rejecting this truth that those who serve the Beast (non-believers) are facing torment and separation from the Lord for eternity. Rest is not the natural state of people. The statement you will find on gravestones, "Rest in Peace" will not be true for all.

However, verse 13 says, ***"And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!'"*** This is speaking of those who, amid the Great Tribulation, while the world is revolting against God, turn to the Lord in faith. How does this happen? While



the world is burning down, many will see this and respond in faith and dependence upon God. God does this even today. He uses our struggle to cause us to long for something greater. You know that ache in your heart, that there must be more to this life than the nine-to-five grind? That there has to be more than heartbreak, marital trouble, and stress? That there must be more than the brokenness you see scrolling Facebook or the News all day? That is God setting your desires and your gaze upon Him, the only Eternal One.

Take a break. Put the phone down. Turn off the TV tonight. Shut off the gaming system. Set your mind on the truth that lasts. Take your concerns, your cares, and your anxieties and lay them at the feet of the One who died for you so that you could rest in Him in this life and in the life to come.

## Devotion 6

# *Resting In The Referee*

PASTOR RYAN STORY

If you're a Lions fan, you know. You know the feeling when the game is on the line, you see a clean play, and then spot that dreaded yellow flag. We have all seen a game-changing play; we shout for joy, give high-fives, and clap with excitement, only to have the refs then throw a bogus flag. Every Lions fan knows the feeling of going from celebration to frustration in seconds. I'm teaching my sons that to be a Lions fan is to spend the whole game bracing for the next bad call to ruin the game.

Life often feels like that fourth quarter of a primetime game where the officiating is completely one-sided. We get hit with calls that feel unfair: an unexpected bill, a misunderstanding in our marriage, being passed up for a job opportunity, or a relationship that goes completely sideways despite our best efforts. We stay stressed for days because we are trying to be our own referees, arguing that every play is unfair. In those moments we lose so much rest and peace for days, weeks, or even months. Paul, moreover God's Word, gives a different "refing" strategy in Colossians 3:15, writing, ***"And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful."***

The Greek word for rule here is "brabeuo." It literally means to act as an umpire or to referee. Paul doesn't describe peace as some fuzzy, passive state we hope to stumble upon while emptying our brains. God's Word describes the peace we have because of our relationship with Jesus as a functional, ruling authority that is gifted to us to rule our hearts, ultimately giving us rest.

So often, we aren't restful in life because we view rest as something that only comes whenever there isn't anything that is stressful, cumbersome, or difficult going on. There are times we can think, "God got the call wrong. There is the wrong flag thrown. There is no way that God's peace can rule in all this."

In the game of life, when it feels like the flags are flying against you, stop arguing with the Referee . You aren't the one in charge of the officiating. Instead, submit to that "Divine Umpire." As believers, we need to let Christ's peace have the final word over our hearts today. Jesus's peace was already secured when He rose from the grave. Jesus's love was already joyfully demonstrated when He died on the cross. While there are moments in life that go not the way we had hoped, our Jesus hasn't gotten the call wrong yet. In fact, it is possible to have rest and peace on this side of eternity, even if you are a Lions fan.



6.  
*Let Us  
Pray*

*HEBREWS 10:19-25*

PASTOR JAYSON COMBS

***"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."***

Hebrews 4:14-16

"Attention passengers: please hold on to the handrails. The transit is about to be in motion." I don't know about you, but for me, when I hear that, I instantly think, "Can I make it without holding on?" The Christian life for the early Jewish Christians was not easy. As you read the book of Hebrews, the author gives direction through encouragement and truth about why they should not turn back. He wraps up the letter by saying, ***"I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly"*** (Hebrews 13:22).

Richard Phillips says, "Exhort his reader he does, often sternly and always urgently, but he also is careful to explain the reasons for his commands, as well as to offer the resources to do them."

Here in chapter four, God's Word instructs us to hold on firmly, ***"Let us hold fast our confession."*** Don't lose grip. The Bible never says our Christian walk will be easy. It actually says the opposite. Here we have the command to hold tightly to our confession. Hold tightly to what we believe. Phillips says, "Christians, of course, acknowledge earthly blessings and enjoy them in good measure. But we are people who have set our hearts on the heavenly rest. We have stepped onto the spiritual battleground, with enemies like the flesh, the world, and the devil. We accept that this is the time of our labor, the time of sacrifice, and willing self-denial for the sake of our discipleship to Christ."

The first fifteen or so years of ministry for me were spent focusing on students. It was something I immensely enjoyed. I was one of

those guys who had no dreams of becoming a senior pastor. I loved the calling. Camp was always a big part of our ministry. We would take kids to winter camps and summer camps every year. One of my fond memories was tug-of-war. We would find the muddiest hole at the camp, and we would fill it with water. I have some wonderful pictures in my office of that event over the years. After a while, we would put the rope down, and it would just become a wonderful mess of mud. Thinking of the rope, it was muddy and wet. To grip that thing, you would have to give all the grip strength you had. But tug-of-war was never by yourself. It wasn't one person on one end of the rope. It was a team. It's an awful thought to think of holding that rope all by yourself. No, there was a group of people in front of you and behind you, pulling together in one accord. I believe this to be the picture here in Hebrews chapter four. It doesn't say, "YOU, hold the rope." The common theme throughout this book appears again. It says, "Let US hold the rope." And here again, the author shows us the strength to be able to do this.

## The Great High Priest

***"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession."*** Hebrews 4:14

How do we hold on? Verse fourteen tells us that because of Jesus, the High Priest, we can hold on. The Jewish Christians reading this would automatically know the reference to the high priest. Once a year, the Jewish high priest would symbolically bring the people's sins before the Holy of Holies. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat to atone for the sins of the people. The high priest would first have to make a sacrifice for himself. Then the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies. As John MacArthur says, "The process never ended, never completed, because the priesthood was not perfect and the sacrifices were not perfect." Here, the author of Hebrews is saying that Jesus is the Great High Priest. Once and for all, by His blood we have received forgiveness of sin. Hebrews 9:12 says, ***"He entered once for all***

***into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.***" The blood of goats never takes away sin (Hebrews 10:4). All this was pointing to Jesus, that through His blood, as Acts 20:28 tells us, He has obtained the church.

What is also so encouraging is that Jesus, unlike the high priest in the Old Testament, does not need to leave. He is holy and sinless and stays at the right hand of the Father. He continually intercedes for us. The process of salvation is complete, once and for all, for those who will come and receive Jesus as their Savior. Those who confess their sins and believe in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, shall be saved. The work is done, complete, it is finished. We may hold on to our confession because Christ has saved us. Religion says work, and you may be saved. The Bible says that because of the work of the cross, we may receive salvation.

## **The Sympathizing Savior**

***"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."*** Hebrews 4:15

The author of Hebrews says Jesus is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. John MacArthur writes, "His divinity did not prevent Him from experiencing our feelings, our emotions, our temptations, our pain." Kent Hughes remarks, "Jesus made like his brothers in every respect—not an almost man, though he was sinless—he had a real human body, mind, and emotions with their inherent weaknesses. He was ignorant and was taught. He learned to walk—he lived with a human body, mind, and soul—with all their limitations except for sin."

The Personal God came down, yet never sinned. R. Albert Mohler, Jr. said, "Jesus never crossed the line. He was tempted in every respect that we have been tempted, but never once did He permit that temptation to become sin in His heart, in His thoughts, or in His



actions. Thus, temptation that resists or rejects sin falls short of sin, while temptation that gives over to sin is sin. He always resisted.”

Looking at this truth brings to mind a phrase, “You wouldn’t understand because you haven’t gone through what I have.” Over the years of being a pastor, I’ve seen many people connect in the church because they have the same experiences. I’ve watched older ladies care for younger women. I’ve seen older men care for and shepherd young men. Their experiences helped them connect and care. I believe this verse is showing us that Jesus connects with us. He knows our struggles. He isn’t far off. He cares.

## **Let Us Confidently Come**

***“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*** Hebrews 4:16

Let us now come before the Great Holy God with confidence, without hesitation, because of our Great High Priest. I think the Jewish Christians would understand this idea better than those of us living in America. The idea of going before the Holy God should be a terrifying thought. The all-knowing, all-powerful God, who are we to stand before Him? It should humble us. Yet, with that thought in mind, because of Jesus, we may draw near with confidence. Kent Hughes says it so well, “The writer believes Jesus’ high priestly ministry on behalf of the believers, correctly understood and implicitly believed, would be a great anchor in the coming storms.”

Hughes goes on to say, “We receive mercy—for our past failures—and grace to meet our present and future needs. We receive the full heart of God as He mercifully meets us in our sins and misery—and heals us. Then we receive the full hand of God’s grace—His unmerited favor and loving regard that just keeps coming and coming.”

Jesus personally knows the difficulty; He is calling us to turn to

Him, the Intercessor for us. Phillips asks, “What does it mean to approach? It means to come to God in prayer on the basis of Christ’s high priestly ministry, that is, His propitiating sacrifice and present intercession.” I believe this is so important to holding firmly on to our confession. We must learn to come and pray. Again, I point out that it doesn’t say let you pray; it says, “**Let us.**” That rope that we grab onto is muddy and wet. We don’t grab it alone. We, as the church, come together before the throne. Together, we draw near.

Many years ago, I was at a family camp and heard a man by the name of Tom Harmon speak. He very much challenged me in the idea of what prayer looks like. I’ll never forget it and use it all the time. He listed verses in the New Testament on prayer and focused on the word in each of those passages that described how the person was praying. Here’s the list:

- *Constantly* - 1 Thessalonians 1:2
- *Fervently* - James 5:17
- *At all times* - Ephesians 6:18
- *Without ceasing* - Romans 1:9
- *Continuing diligently* - Romans 12:12
- *Earnestly* - 1 Thessalonians 3:10
- *Struggling* - Colossians 4:12
- *Steadfastly* - Colossians 4:2

I was so challenged by how the New Testament describes prayer. I believe this is what it looks like for us to confidently and boldly pray. As I started to study this verse in Hebrews, I wondered how many times the Bible addresses corporate prayer, praying together. Here is what I found:

***"I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf."*** Romans 15:30

***"All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his***

**brothers."** Acts 1:14

**"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."** Acts 2:42

**"Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."** James 5:16

**"And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, 'Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them.'"** Acts 4:24

**"Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints."** Ephesians 6:18

**"We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers."** 1 Thessalonians 1:2

**"That together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."** Romans 15:6

So, I've added a new list to my biblical description of prayer:

- Striving together - Romans 15:30
- One accord, together - Acts 1:14
- They devoted - Acts 2:42
- Lifted their voices together - Acts 4:24
- We give thanks - 1 Thessalonians 1:2
- Together with one voice - Romans 15:6
- Pray for one another - James 5:16
- Supplication for all - Ephesians 6:18

Even when Jesus gives us the perfect example of how to pray, He starts by saying, **"Our Father in heaven..."**

The original receivers of the letter of Hebrews' grip strength was fading. The Word appealed to them and encouraged them in the true hope they have in the High Priest, Jesus Christ. How did He tell them to hold on? By coming together and praying. You may be reading this and, if you are honest, you may say, "I just don't understand prayer." In the book *"Spiritual Leadership,"* J. Oswald Sanders says, "To try to explain exactly how prayer works, and you will quickly run against some very difficult puzzles. But people who are skeptical of prayer's validity and power are usually those who do not practice it seriously or fail to obey when God reveals His will. We cannot learn about prayer except by praying."

May we be challenged with the call to pray corporately, to pray in a group for one another, to pray in unity throughout the week. Let me challenge you practically with what that looks like. I believe that, biblically, it looks like this: before and after the gathering of the church on Sunday, people should gather to pray in connection with one another. Then, after the gathering, there isn't a rush to leave, but a time to pray. Praying together can also be a purposeful plan to lift each other up in prayer throughout the week. It will mean spontaneously being moved by the Spirit to pray for someone and stopping then to pray. It will be earnestly, fervently, and diligently holding the rope together. It will be to see your brother or sister in a time of weakness, struggling to hold the rope, and you stand right next to them, praying for them and encouraging them. It will be telling them that you are confidently bringing them before the Lord.

Let us pray for one another. So many people miss out on this. This is something I have seen the church that I pastor grow in. I watch as the church has grown into a place where it is common to see people praying together. Are you missing out on this?

Let us firmly hold on to the confession of our faith. How? By being the Church together, holding the rope, struggling together in prayer, lifting one another up to the Almighty God.



# Questions

1. In sports, school, or work, who was your favorite teammate? Why?
2. Has your grip strength ever been tested? If so, how?
3. When has holding on to your faith been difficult?
4. Can you think of specific people that helped you hold on?
5. What does it mean to you to know that Christ can sympathize with you?
6. Have you ever found someone in the church that because of their experience helped you in your walk with the Lord?
7. How often do you pray together with people? Why is that difficult for you?
8. What would striving together in prayer look like in the church?
9. What do you do if you don't know what to pray?

## Notes







# Devotion 1

## *Praying Constantly*

PASTOR CHUCK LINDSEY

Hebrews 10:19 tells us that we can boldly come to God anytime we are in need. Most of us have no trouble with that! If we are in need, we run to Him. While this is good and right to do, the Bible also tells us to ***"pray without ceasing"*** (1 Thessalonians 5:17). The idea of praying continually means that we are always praying. At first read, that seems an impossible thing to do. How will I ever get anything done (at work, at home, with the kids, etc.) if I am praying all the time?

Where do you pray most?

The command to ***"pray without ceasing"*** does not mean that we must kneel next to our bed all day or sit with our heads bowed and eyes closed for hours on end. It's telling us to make prayer our attitude, to be constantly ready to talk to the Lord about anything, all things. And this is possible because prayer does not require a certain posture, such as sitting, kneeling, or lying down. It does not require our eyes to be closed or our hands folded. It does not require specific or scripted words to be effective. To pray is to simply connect to the Lord in a relational way. To pray without ceasing is to be continually connecting with Him throughout the day in whatever happens. As an example: Before you make or take that phone call, pause to send up (audibly or inaudibly) a prayer of need: "Lord, fill me with Your Spirit, help me to honor You." After you make that call, let a quick, "Thank You Lord for Your leading," pass from your heart to His. As you're driving, lift the members of your family and their needs before the Lord. When you get home, ask Him to move among your family, and on and on we could go.

What are some examples of simple ways you have prayed? How God has answered this week?

Now, to be this connected to any human being would very likely exhaust that person! But not so with our Lord. He invites this. He wants this. He wants us to be this connected and more with Him. We are never exhausting Him! Many people have the idea that they have a limited number of prayer requests they can use in their lifetimes. They don't take the small things to God (i.e., lost car keys) because they want to make sure that when something big happens, and they really need Him, they haven't "used up" His attention. This is a very human way of thinking and is not at all who God is. He wants you to come to Him to find your car keys, just as much as He wants you to bring to Him your sick child. In each thing, we have His entire focus. He does not need to split His focus among eight billion people. You have His full attention as you come to Him. Think of it: you (yes, you) have the full attention of God Almighty, and He is never tired of giving it to you. This is why Hebrews 10 tells us to **"draw near,"** and to **"have confidence to enter,"** His presence, because He invites you to do so. So, do it, go to the Lord all day, throughout the day. Be in connection with Him. Pray without ceasing.

## Devotion 2

# *Prayers That Shake Thrones*

PASTOR JOSH YATES

***"And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus."***

Hebrews 10:19 (NLT)

***"So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most."*** Hebrews 4:16 (NLT)

***"Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Elijah...prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth."*** James 5:16-17

Daniel Henderson, a professor of mine from Liberty University, stated in one of his many books on prayer (and in his class with us), "A lack of prayer in your life is your own personal declaration of independence from God."

Yeah...Ouch! While I believe that statement to be extremely true, I wonder if the reality is that we don't really believe that prayer works. Does prayer actually change anything? What do we really believe about our God?

Church father, Chrysostom, spoke about prayer:

The potency of prayer has subdued the strength of fire,  
it has bridled the rage of lions, hushed anarchy to rest,  
extinguished wars, appeased the elements, expelled

demons, burst the chains of death, expanded the fates of heaven, assuaged diseases, dispelled frauds, rescued cities from destruction, stayed the sun in its course, and arrested the progress of the thunderbolt. There is (in it) an all-sufficient panoply (a full set of equipment), a treasure undiminished, a mine which is never exhausted, a sky unobscured by clouds, a heaven unruffled by the storm. It is the root, the fountain, the mother of a thousand blessings!

We have a full audience with the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the Creator of the Universe. How do we know this? Jesus died for our access! Before Jesus died, access to God was inhibited by the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. The only one who had access to God was the high priest, and that audience was only allowed one time per year to atone for the sins of the people. The presence of God was with His people in the Temple, but veiled by the temple veil. It was huge, ornate, and thick. It separated the people from the glory of God because no one can be in the presence of God and live.

All of that changed when Jesus died for us. God placed my sins and your sins on Jesus when He died in our place. At that very moment, that temple veil was torn from top to bottom, giving us complete and total access to God Himself through Jesus and by the Holy Spirit who now dwells in us!

Now we can come boldly before the Great I Am! The One who has been and always will be. He has made us His sons and daughters, and we have that kind of access. We can pray big prayers, honest prayers, passionate prayers, fervent prayers, prayers for healing, prayers for help, cries for change...and God hears us! Take all of you to God in prayer, boldly and passionately. Prayer moves mountains, it moves rulers, and it moves even God Himself. More than all of this, prayer changes YOU. Take it all to God today and expect Him to move in and through you.

## Devotion 3

# *Earnest Prayer*

GRANT GRIMES

***"As we pray most earnestly night and day."*** 1 Thessalonians 3:10

How should I pray? That's the question, right? We are told as Christians that prayer is an essential discipline; however, for many of us, this discipline is a short thought at dinnertime, asking the Lord to bless our greasy pizza to the nourishment of our bodies, or perhaps a quick prayer for our family before going to sleep. Now, I don't bring up these two examples flippantly (I have prayed both of those prayers before), but I bring them up to highlight the struggle many of us face.

The struggle to pray ails both the seasoned believer and those new to the faith. When Paul says, ***"As we pray most earnestly,"*** right off the bat, we see what prayer is meant to be... earnest. We are meant to have a sincere and serious conviction about our prayer life. So often, prayer becomes a casual, ritualistic thing Christians do at dinner or bedtime, and our times of prayer become void of substance, commitment, and intentionality.

Think of things in your life you are committed to or work at. What are you sincere about or have a serious conviction for? It might be your marriage, your job, or your family. Does the amount of work and dedication you pour into those areas match up to how you pray?

Paul didn't just say pray; he gave us the description of how we should pray, and how often, ***"night and day."*** To be serious and convicted about prayer means that you are driven to go to God, not

just driven in the moments of trials but driven in the triumphs and celebrations of God's blessings. When life happens, as it inevitably will, you go to God.

If this is how we are meant to pray, you might be asking, "How do I implement this into my life?" The simple answer is: start praying. Begin disciplining yourself, and grow the prayer muscle memory. You might feel inadequate when praying to God or struggle to take prayer seriously, bring that before the Lord, too. Do not just sit on the sidelines of life because you think that you are not good at something or do not yet know how to effectively put a discipline into practice. God isn't focused on the eloquence of our words but on the intensity of our hearts.

## Devotion 4

# *Laboring In Prayer*

PASTOR JUSTIN DEAN

Some of the greatest things in life require hard work and dedication. Something about putting in the work makes the payoff even sweeter. Though many would agree with this sentiment, when it comes to living it out, people often change their tune. Time and time again, we grab for what is quick and easy rather than putting in the time and effort for what is best.

What is something that you are proud of? What makes you proud of it?

Are you someone who gives up easily? Why or why not?

***"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." Hebrews 10:19-22***

Here we see the incredible privilege we have to go before God in prayer because of the sacrifice of our High Priest, Jesus Christ. What a wonderful gift given to us through His sacrifice! It is a gift of access; we get to have deep communion with the God of the Universe. Oftentimes, when we think of prayer, we think of it as a simple way to lay our needs before the Lord. This can be a facet of prayer, yes, but it is not the only aspect of our prayer life.



Paul, when writing to the Colossians, speaks of a man among them who is an incredible prayer warrior. Take a look at how Paul describes him. ***"Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God"*** (Colossians 4:12). I find it fascinating that Paul uses the word ***"struggling"*** to describe this man's prayers for the Church. He is laboring in this "fight" of prayer before the Lord for them. Epaphras's prayers are hard work.

What do you think it would look like to labor in prayer? Have you ever prayed this way?

This struggle is a day-in, day-out, consistent labor of love in prayer. When I think of someone who is a prayer laborer, I think of my grandmother. Every day she prays for each of her children, their spouses, her multitudes of grandchildren, and even her great-grandchildren. She uses the privilege she has because of the work of Jesus to go before the throne on behalf of others, and does so consistently, without fail.

Who in your world would you consider a prayer laborer? Why?

A struggle is a constant fight, and to struggle in prayer is to continue that fight in earnest. Many of us tend to be flaky when it comes to prayer, pulled to and fro by the tides of our desires and discouragement. Deep prayer warriors remain constant and steadfast as they go before the Lord and lay things before Him.

Let me challenge you to write a few names or requests down that you need to struggle in prayer for. Spend some time praying for them each day this week, starting right now.

## Devotion 5

# *Steadfast Prayer*

JEANNIE YATES

I have to admit, I am a little bit of a word-nerd. I like games like Wordle, crossword puzzles, and Scrabble. I even have a word-of-the-day calendar on my desk. As I write this, today's word is dysphemism, which is an "expression that uses intentionally harsh language to describe something more or less innocuous." (That is for my fellow word-nerds.) Steadfast is not a word you hear used a lot today in normal conversation, but we do see it often in Scripture. It refers to being resolutely firm, loyal, and unwavering in purpose, belief, or attitude, and is used to describe a dependable commitment, loyal ally, or immovable beliefs. For example, in James we read, ***"Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial..."*** (James 1:12) and in Colossians, ***"...continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard."*** (Colossians 1:23).

As we look at Hebrews chapter ten, we see that because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, we can draw near to God with full confidence in His forgiveness and redemption. It is because of that open access that we are encouraged to ***"Hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful"*** (Hebrews 10:23). We can draw near to God through prayer, worship, and His Word. Prayer is one of the primary ways we ***"hold fast."*** I don't know about you, but when it comes to prayer, I quickly lose focus and patience. When answers are delayed, circumstances remain unchanged, or God simply says, "No," I can be tempted to lose heart in prayer, but prayer is an act of perseverance.

Steadfast prayer doesn't just happen; it grows when you stick with

it and regularly turn your heart to the Lord. Colossians 4:2 reminds us to, ***“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”*** This verse highlights three key themes of prayer. First is to ***“continue steadfastly.”*** Other translations say to ***“devote yourselves,”*** (NIV) or ***“continue earnestly”*** (NKJV). This type of prayer requires intentionality. If we do not persevere and remain immovable with prayer, we will be easily swayed and distracted by the world around us. The second is to be ***“watchful”*** or spiritually alert. Are you attentive to how God is working and sensitive to His leading? Look expectantly for God to move and act around you. The third theme is prayers of ***“thanksgiving.”*** Thankfulness guards our hearts from discouragement and reminds us of God’s faithfulness.

Steadfast prayer is not about perfect words or uninterrupted focus, but about continually returning to God. What might change in our hearts if we viewed prayer not as a task to complete, but as a natural response to the goodness of God? When we draw near with prayer that is resolutely firm, loyal, and unwavering in purpose, belief, or attitude, our prayers become a testimony of trust in the One who holds all things together (Colossians 1:17).

## Devotion 6

# *Prayer With Confidence*

SIERRA COMBS

As a child, I was obsessed with *"The Sound of Music"* and would often march around singing one of its songs called, "I Have Confidence." The lyrics begin not with certainty, but with questions and doubt. "What will this day be like? I wonder. What will the future be? I wonder...my heart should be wildly rejoicing, oh, what's the matter with me?" The song then builds towards convincing oneself of confidence before stepping out into the unknown. Long before I understood what confidence really meant, I was declaring it and hoping that it would be true. I think that many of us approach prayer in the same way. We want to be confident when we come before God, but we are often unsure where the confidence is supposed to come from. We hesitate, overthink our words, or maybe even secretly wonder if God actually hears us or wants to hear from us. If you have ever struggled with these thoughts, I have some great news for you! Scripture offers us a far more solid foundation for confidence than anything we could come up with on our own.

In Hebrews 10:19-22, we are reminded that our confidence in approaching God is not rooted in ourselves at all. ***"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith."*** Our access to God has already been secured! The door has not been cracked open by our eloquent words, our good works, or our sincerity; it has been thrown wide open by (and only by) the finished work of Christ.

We can draw near to God not because we feel ready, but because we have been invited. This matters because so often our confidence in prayer rises and falls with our circumstances. When life is going well and feels steady, prayer feels easier. But when we are distracted, weary, and discouraged, our confidence fades. Hebrews reminds us that confidence isn't something we summon in the moment; it is something we stand on because of what Christ has already done.

Prayer is not entering a courtroom to plead our case to the judge, but instead entering a throne room towards a King who is waiting to welcome us in! 1 John 5:14 deepens this assurance: ***"And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us."*** John emphasizes that confidence doesn't come from knowing how or when God will answer; it comes from knowing that He hears us. To pray according to God's will is not to pray timidly, but to pray trustingly, aligning our hearts with His character and believing that His wisdom is greater than our understanding. We can have confidence knowing that the God of the universe sees and knows all things and will work everything together for the good of those who love Him. Both of these passages hold beautiful truths: Hebrews tells us to come boldly, and 1 John tells us we are heard faithfully. We do not pray to convince God to care; instead, we pray because He already does. How amazing is that?! This is the kind of confidence that is freeing. It isn't about what we bring to the table, and we don't have to measure God's nearness by the outcomes. When our confidence rests in the Lord, prayer becomes less about performance and more about presence.

As we pray, we will still likely wonder what the day may be like, what our future may be. We might still carry fears and questions and worry. But unlike a child trying to sing confidence into existence, we enter the throne room grounded in truth, because the door is wide open. God is waiting in that very place to hear us. Hebrews 10:22-23 reminds us, ***"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith... Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful."*** We can pray

confidently not because we know what God will do, but because we know that we are welcomed, heard, and held by a faithful God.

7.  
*Let Us  
Go*

*HEBREWS 13:8-14*

PASTOR JAYSON COMBS



Welcome to what I believe to be the most difficult ***“Let us”*** statement of the bunch. This last one that we will study is soaked in Jewish tradition. Those to whom the letter is written have a much better understanding of the Jewish laws and tradition than most of us. It seems there is a conflict over food. We as the reader don’t know what it is, but we would guess that it has to do with the Jewish law. As happens many times in this book of Hebrews, there are Jews who are trying to pull the new believers away from Christ and back to the Law. The writer, as he often does, refocuses the people on Jesus.

***“Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them. We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.”*** Hebrews 13:9-14

In verse ten, he brings us to an altar. I believe more specifically he is alluding to what the Old Testament calls the Day of Atonement. This was when the priest, once a year, would sacrifice a goat and, as Nelson's Bible Dictionary states, it was a “recognition of people's inability to make any atonement for their sins.” We know that this atonement was just a foreshadow of the work of Jesus on the Cross. There is only forgiveness through the perfect sacrifice of the Lamb, Jesus. In the description of the Day of Atonement we read that the carcass of that animal is to be taken outside the city (Leviticus 16:27). Hebrews 13:12 brings the focus back to Jesus and says that Jesus was taken outside the gate. Why? I believe Ephesians 2:12-16 explains the why very clearly. ***“Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no***



***hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility” (Ephesians 2:12-16).***

Because of what Jesus did on the cross, He has offered to all a new life in Him. Earlier in Hebrews, he explains this very clearly in chapter nine, ***“For then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him”*** (Hebrews 9:26-28).

Again, God's word is challenging the Jewish reader that if they stay inside the camp of the Jewish law, they will miss Jesus and they will miss salvation. Only if they come to Jesus, only if they come outside of the camp of their beliefs will they find the Messiah, the Savior, life, and forgiveness. The author is saying, “Come on... let's go with Jesus. Go to Him, trust Him, follow Him, and be like Him. He is the Savior.”

What does this mean for the church today? I want to be careful how far I can stretch this point, but I believe there are great truths for the church today.

## **Let's Go To Jesus**

In this past week, I've never been more challenged in my life to take a slow look at the cross. I know the truth of what Christ did for

me on the cross, but how do you slow down to realize what He did for us **“outside the camp”** on the cross? As a church, let’s slow down to see Christ on the cross, to look to Him and really know what He has done for us. In American culture, is there anything more misunderstood than the cross? Think about it; we have cross jewelry, cross tattoos, cross bumper stickers, and cross t-shirts, but how many people have no clue what it actually represents? I was working out in my gym one week, and a man came in with a cross logo on his shirt and on his hat. I had seen this man before with the same shirt on, so I had to ask. My question was simple, “What does that mean?” Church, do we know the answer to this question? What does it mean to go to Jesus on the cross? I was challenged by A.W. Tozer to slow down my gaze at the cross, to see, remember, and to understand what it truly means. His quote that sparked this thought was this, “Neglected Christian truths can be revitalized only when by prayer and long meditation we isolate them from the mass of hazy ideas with which our minds are filled and hold them steadily and determinedly in the focus of the mind’s attention.”

Church, let us bring our focus to Jesus. Come to the cross where He took our sin upon His sinless life. Where He became sin for us who knew no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). The cross is where Jesus, because of our sin, was forsaken by God. Because of God’s holiness, Jesus hung alone in the darkness for our sake. Jesus never stopped being God, and the Trinity wasn’t severed, but for that time, Jesus bore our sins on the cross with God looking away. Let us cry out, “Thank you, Jesus!”

May we go to Him, trusting Him and serving Him. To use a phrase that is used over and over again in our culture, said with much emphasis and a loud voice, I now say with the same enthusiasm, Church, “Let’s go!”

I think “let’s go” is one of the most overused phrases in our culture today. It makes me think back to when I was in grade school and all of our overused phrases. I remember in middle school it was “Not!” Then the Budweiser commercial came out and everyone would yell

“What’s Uuuuuuuup?!” Maybe you had one growing up. Currently, I would consider “bruh” as the most overused word, but not far behind is the saying “Let’s go.” (This will most likely date this book!)

When I think of the phrase, “Let’s go,” I think of Dude Perfect. They are YouTube influencers who are famous for performing amazing trick shots. Almost after every difficult shot made, one of them would run around in crazy excitement, yelling, “Let’s go!”

Can I express this excitement to you? The book of Hebrews is almost over. This book you are reading is just about done. As a church, let’s go to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. Let’s go to Jesus, the one who rips the curtain of separation between God and Man in half, the one who heals us by His shed blood. Let us be a Church that goes to Jesus. I challenge you to read each Gospel account of the cross found in Matthew chapter 27, Mark chapter 15, Luke chapter 23, and John chapter 19. Let it sink in and know the power of the cross today.

## **Let’s Go Outside the Camp**

It seems that this letter written to a church of Jewish believers had made life very difficult. The outside pressure had become so loud that some were contemplating going back to the old ways. Kent Hughes says it so well, “Their Christianity had not been a worldly advantage. Rather, it set them up for persecution and the loss of property and privilege, and now could possibly even cost them their lives.” They were tempted to stop meeting together, tempted to stop looking to Jesus, tempted to not run the race, and here, the writer says to come outside of the camp to Jesus. I believe this is a picture of coming out of their old ways, and coming to wholly follow Jesus. Arthur Pink said, “To go forth unto Christ without the camp means for the believers to make a complete break from his former manner of life, to renounce everything which is opposed to Christ, to relinquish whatever would hinder communion with Him.”

Today, most of us are not tempted to go back to the Old Testament

way of life. What we are tempted to do is to go back to the old, human ways of life. What are those old ways for you? What things are drawing you back into the old ways of life?

***“Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”***

Ephesians 4:22-24

***“Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices.”*** Colossians 3:9

Reading this passage, I can't help but think of a song I was taught in kids' church way back in the day. I have no clue what the official title to the song is; we just called it "The Robe Song." It goes like this:

Well, the best thing in my life I ever did do  
Was take off the old robe and put on the new.  
The old robe was dirty, all tattered and torn,  
And the new robe was spotless and never been worn.  
Well, the best thing in my life I ever did do  
Was take off the old robe and put on the new.

Realize that for the people that received this letter, to go outside the camp was a radical change in life, one that would cost them. As a church, let's dive into this radical living of life, to leave the old behind and to put on the new. What will that take?

When I first got married, some 20 years ago, my wife was a substitute teacher and I was a student director at the church. With our massive income (said with sarcasm!), we tried to find a house in our town that at least had walls that were not leaning. Everything else was negotiable. We spent months making the house livable and were able to move in the week after our wedding. The next year, my wife inquired about planting a garden. We had a sizable back yard, so I did not think too much of it and I figured I could make that happen.

The back corner of our backyard was a perfect spot. All I needed to do was remove the one plant that was growing there. In all my life, I had never seen a plant like this before. It grew in what I can best describe as stalks. It looked a little like bamboo, but was way more flimsy. As I started removing this plant, I realized that its root system was huge. It took me days to remove most of it. The scary and frustrating part of removing this plant was that just a few days after I removed a sizable amount of this plant and its roots, it all started to rapidly grow back! Even out of the stumps that I removed from the ground, this plant continued to grow. At that moment I did what all of us do when we are trying to figure something out; I Googled it. The more I read about the plant, the more scary it became. I came to find out that the plant was a Japanese Knotweed. One person on an online forum remarked, "My dad battled Japanese Knotweed for 25 years. He has passed away, but the knotweed lives on."

I have told this story many times over the years. Just recently, I had someone in the church tell me that they found out that some banks will deny mortgages on a house if the knotweed was present near the foundation of the house. The root system of this plant can wreak havoc on foundations and drain systems. It is crazy to think of the power of this little plant and the destruction that it can bring. I had approached the neighbors about trying to get rid of the plant, but because one of them liked it, the plant remained.

It's been twenty years since we bought that house. We have since moved multiple times, but I can still drive by that house today, look in the back yard, and see that wonderful plant. The only way we were able to get rid of that plant was to move.

Are you willing to move? This was the difficult question the people in the church had to answer. Were they willing to move outside of what was comfortable, outside of what their family wanted, outside of what their friends were doing, and follow Jesus?

## Let's Go and Be Persecuted

The end of this verse gets even more radical. It wraps up by saying let us go and ***“bear the reproach he endured.”*** As I wrap up this book, I'd like to end with one final question. Are we as a church willing to go and be like Jesus? Again, Hughes says it well, “Jesus' death means he is accessible to anyone in the world who will come to him. Jesus planted his cross in the world so all the world could have access. And there he remains permanently available!” Is it not the heart of the church to point people to Jesus, to reach out to a world that is lost and needs a Savior? Are we willing to live this life even when it costs us? Scripture reminds us that this is not “if,” but “when.” ***“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”*** 2 Timothy 3:12

Not some or a few, but ALL who live a godly life will be persecuted. I had dinner with a younger man in the church. He is young in his faith, but as his pastor, it is so exciting to watch him grow. He said that his coworkers are starting to notice a change in him and they have started asking him questions. He said at one point he had to tell them that he is like a toddler in his faith and doesn't know it all. I smiled at the excitement of his growing faith. He then asked me what to do when he is mocked. He said people are now looking to take advantage of him because of his beliefs. I again smiled and told him there is a joy to be persecuted for Christ. Acts tells us, ***“Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name”*** (Acts 5:41). The next verse to me is so powerful: ***“And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus”*** (Acts 5:42).

Our lives are a testimony that hopefully points others to Jesus. Church, let us have a focus to teach and preach that Christ is Jesus. Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount recorded in the Gospel of Luke, ***“Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy,***

***for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets” (Luke 6:22-23).***

Here are four vital things we need to learn to do in order to grow in Christ and help others to come to know Him as their Savior:

### **1. Learn to share your story.**

Some of you have crazy, powerful stories of how the Lord saved you—share them. Others have quiet, beautiful stories of His call—share those too. Whether you have a crazy story like my father, who was an addict far away from the Lord and one day the Lord got in his truck and saved him, or a simple story like mine, about parents who loved the Lord and raised me to follow Him. Both stories are beautiful. Either way, take time to walk through it. I even suggest you write it out so that you will be able to share how you received Christ as your Lord and Savior clearly and precisely.

### **2. Learn to share your life.**

More and more these days I see Christian families wanting to find a bunker some place away from the world to raise their families. We are moving our jobs to our homes, our kids' schooling away from all other kids, thinking this is what a Christian life should look like. Now I'm not saying working from home is bad, or homeschooling is bad, what I am saying is that the church must have an impact on the world around them. Christ didn't live in a holy bubble. He was known as one who hung out with the sinners. I believe to be like Christ is to be salt and light in this world. Let us learn to share our lives with people who do not know the Lord so they may see the good news of Jesus in our lives. Just as Matthew 5 says, ***“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven”*** (Matthew 5:14-16).

### 3. Learn to share the truth.

More than just sharing our story, more than just sharing our lives, we must learn to share the truth of the Gospel. To know Scripture, and the truth on how someone can believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. Here are a few of the passages that I use:

- Romans 3:23
- Romans 6:23
- John 3:16
- Romans 5:8
- Romans 10:9-10

### 4. Start to pray.

As a church, let's pray for the unbeliever. If you are reading this book in a small group or for a bible study, who can you start to pray for as a group? Share their names with each other. ***“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”*** 1 Timothy 2:1-4

Let us be the church that lives and loves like Christ, to let the world know of His amazing love. Let us go into the world and preach the gospel of Jesus. I yell with much enthusiasm, “Let's go!”





# Questions

1. Who grew up going to camp? What is your greatest memory? What is the worst memory?
2. When in your life would you say that you fully went to Christ?
3. Why do you think it was difficult for the Jewish believers to leave the Camp and fully follow Christ?
4. Why do we as Christians struggle to “leave the camp”?
5. Have you ever been persecuted for Christ?
6. Is persecution what is holding you back from sharing?
7. Who can you share your story with?
8. What part of the gospel do you need help with in sharing?
9. Have you ever shared your story with someone? Explain.
10. Who is the person you need to start praying for?

## Notes





# Devotion 1

## *Expectation*

PASTOR RYAN STORY

We had just finished dinner as a family, and I asked my two oldest sons to begin to clean the kitchen table, take everyone's plates to the sink, rinse the food off, and load the dishwasher. I asked my youngest to simply take the condiments back to the refrigerator. My two oldest asked, "How is this even fair?" I informed them that, "I have a different expectation for you, because you are both older and you know better. A four-year-old cannot load a dishwasher, nor can they even see over the sink." Even though they did not like that they had a different expectation, they understood. Likewise, as those who are followers of Christ, we have a different expectation than the world.

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul addresses immoral living within the church. He draws very distinct lines when it comes to associating with the world and associating with those who claim to be a part of the church, but are living in sin. In verse 11, God's Word reads, ***"But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one."*** While there is still grace, forgiveness, and restoration for a brother or sister in Christ who falls into sin, God's Word is very clear; do not keep close company with a person who claims to be a believer but is living in a manner unfitting for a Christ follower. The expectation for a believer is that one does not go back to the lifestyle of sin that Jesus has saved them from. The expectation for a believer is to not associate with one who claims to be set free from sin, but is clearly still tangled in the world.

In verses 9 and 10, God's Word reads, ***"I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world."*** This passage of Scripture instructs a very important truth. We, as Jesus' Church, should not expect godly behavior from ungodly people. Additionally, God's Word does not warn followers of Christ to disassociate with the lost because of their sinfulness. Wisdom should be taken when it comes to allowing the world to have influence over ourselves, and we should not be friends with the world or condone anything unbiblical or contrary to Christ. Paul states that in order to disassociate from unsaved sinners in a sinful world would mean we would need to go out of this world, which is impossible and not what we are to do as believers. While we are still on this side of eternity, there will be sinful people. Paul's view is that the expectation of a person who is spiritually lost is to act like a lost person. The only thing that can change that is the person who is lost coming to a place where they repent and believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We live in a world where many are lost. As Jesus' church, our expectation should be to be less of a holy huddle trying to seclude ourselves from their immorality. We should see their sin and be broken and moved to preach the Gospel to them!

Sadly, much of the church approaches holiness and Christian living through avoidance—trying to distance itself from the world as much as possible. God's expectation has never changed. The sick are sick, and we are the ones who understand the cure because the cure has saved us.

***"And Jesus answered them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.'"*** Luke 5:31-32

## Devotion 2

### *Salt*

JOSHUA PETERSON

***"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet."***

Matthew 5:13

I am not a good cook. I am a single man who is very content with eating basic foods that don't require much setup. I like making meals like peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, ham and cheese sandwiches, Kraft mac and cheese, and microwaved hotdogs. Even though I am not a good cook, I sometimes use salt to season my meals. I use it on fries, burgers, and even mac and cheese. When I add salt to my food, it adds flavor. Salt is good for adding flavor to food, and it was also used to preserve food.

Yes, salt is great for adding flavor and preserving food, so why does Jesus tell those who are in the crowd during the Sermon on the Mount, that they are the ***"salt of the earth"***? Why is faith in Christ compared to salt? Salt preserves food from going bad, so followers of Jesus are meant to help the world from being completely separate from God. The world is already evil and far from God, but if there were no Christ-followers in the world, then there would be absolutely no hope for the Gospel to take root. God chooses to use us, despite our brokenness, to lead people to Christ and to help preserve the righteousness that we are created to follow. Salt also adds flavor, which means, when compared to our faith, we are to live in a way that gives God honor and glory.

Jesus warns that when salt loses its taste it is no longer good and



it should be thrown out and destroyed. Jesus has a high standard for His followers. We should always be examples of righteousness. Why would God use us if we are not living in a way that showcases righteousness? Why would God use us if we don't have a high standard of moral living?

Christ wants us to be the salt of the earth. He wants us to defend what is right and live righteously. We are saved by God's grace alone through faith, but we are also called to look different after our salvation. Are you living the way that pleases God? If not, this passage makes a clear warning to those who don't live for the Lord. I encourage you to follow Christ's statement and be the salt of the world.

## Devotion 3

# *You Are The Light*

RICH SAWICKI

Matthew 5:14 says, ***“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.”*** Jesus didn’t say, “Try to be the light.” He said, ***“You are the light.”*** That matters. If you follow Jesus, His light already lives in you. You don’t have to earn it. You don’t have to be loud or bold or have all the right words. You don’t have to stand on a stage or preach a sermon. You simply carry His light wherever you go.

Think about light for a minute. Light doesn’t argue with darkness. It doesn’t chase it away with force. It just shows up and darkness loses its power. A small lamp can change an entire room. That’s what Jesus is talking about here. Reaching others doesn’t always look like handing someone a Bible or saying the perfect gospel speech. A lot of the time, it looks like kindness when someone expects judgment, patience when someone else is difficult, hope when the world feels heavy, and grace when people mess up.

Light shows people what God is like. When you live with love, people notice. When you forgive, people notice. When you stay steady in hard seasons, people notice. They may not say it out loud, but they see something different, and that “something” points them to Jesus.

Jesus also reminds us, ***“A city set on a hill cannot be hidden”*** (Matthew 5:14). That means your faith was never meant to be private and tucked away. It doesn’t mean you force it on others, but it does mean you don’t hide who you belong to. You live openly as someone who has been changed by grace. The good news of the Gospel is this: Jesus came for sinners, not perfect people. He

rescued us when we couldn't rescue ourselves. Now He lets us shine His light so others can find the same hope.

So, don't overthink it! Ask God to help you shine right where you are—at home, at work, at the store, with your friends, and even with strangers. Your light might be exactly what someone else needs to find their way to Him. Just shine. God will do the rest.

## Devotion 4

# Proclaimer

ELIJAH EDWARDS

When I was given this assignment to write, the word “proclaimer” stood out to me. I am a bit of an interesting guy, so the first thing that came to my head was the band The Proclaimers and their song “I’m Gonna Be (500 Miles).” Yes, I am only 28 years old, but bear with me. When I began to write this devotion, I started to listen to the song. The core theme of the song is how a man is so dedicated to his love that he would walk a thousand miles for her. I want us to hold onto this idea while we look at our passage.

It says in 1 Peter 2:9, ***“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”***

There is that word again, ***“proclaim,”*** right in the center of this verse. To grasp what Peter is saying here, we need to connect it with the call in Hebrews 13 to go ***“outside the camp.”*** God calls us His people and we have experienced His goodness. Because we have encountered His love, we are sent out to proclaim it to the world. We have been called out of our sin by Jesus, and we too must share that with those who are living in that same darkness.

As believers in Christ, we are not meant to receive the salvation of Jesus and then just hoard it for ourselves. We are called to go and share it with others through our actions, our words, and our lives. God calls us a ***“chosen race,”*** meaning we belong to God, we are His children, and we want others to experience the ***“excellencies”*** of our amazing Savior, Jesus Christ.

Now, this song by this 1980s one-hit-wonder band is obviously not talking about the same thing that the Word of God is talking about. The core message still stands: are we willing to go and proclaim the Gospel? Would we be willing to “walk 500 miles and... 500 more” to share the Good News with others? In the same way that Jesus had grace upon us, do we want that same grace for those around us?

## Devotion 5

# *Consider Your Walk*

CATHY STORY

If you have ever walked with a little child, you may have noticed how aimless they seem to be. When walking as a family, with several small children, someone is always walking too fast, or too slow, or bumping into someone else. It is amazing how, in one short walk, I have told someone they need to slow down, someone else they really need to keep up, and asked another to stay where I can see them. There are times a task as simple as walking can feel like so much more of a struggle than I ever anticipated. Have you ever caught yourself feeling as if your spiritual walk feels like that aimless child? As you have journeyed on, or attempted to start, your walk with Jesus Christ, have you ever considered the path that you are on?

Colossians 4:5 says, ***"Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time."*** Here Paul is giving us some information about where we are meant to walk, and that is towards the outsider. As we focus on turning back to Reach, we are moving towards sharing the truth of Jesus with others! Paul is not telling us to stay away from the unbeliever, but rather to specifically go towards them.

Consider in a day how often you follow this verse. Do you purposely walk towards the outsider, those who do not know who Jesus is? Maybe, thinking about it, you realize that you have found it more comfortable to stay with those who are already within the church and living this truth. Do you take any opportunity, making the most of the time, to share the love of Christ with others? Even at the grocery store, the playground, or your workplace, there are people we encounter and interact with who we can show and tell how Jesus

has changed our lives.

Take some time today to evaluate if your walk is with purpose, or if you are walking aimlessly in showing Jesus to others. ***“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise”*** (Ephesians 5:15).

## Devotion 6

# *Bear The Reproach He Endured*

PASTOR ROY TOWNSEND

Have you ever heard of the saying, “And now, for the rest of the story”? Well, many Christians and followers of Jesus Christ seem to stay super focused on the teaching that we should be inward-focused as a church body. We can see churches that separate from the world and maybe go as far as to have their members live on a compound for their protection. We must be reminded as a church that we are to go out into the world to make a difference. We aren’t to be concerned about our comfort and protection from the outside world. In John 15:18-21, Jesus says, ***“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.”*** These verses seem clear enough to me that the world hated Jesus Christ first, and now the world will, in turn, hate His children.

And now, for the rest of the story, we look to Hebrews 13:12-16: ***“So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have,***



***for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.***” So, I guess the question is, why do Christians so frequently stay inward-focused and not look to go out?

At The River Church, we make it a point to celebrate the mission of the Church, which we teach as a process of being reached with the gospel of Jesus Christ, gathering with the church or saints, and growing in the Word of God and community. However, we must remind the church that this process does not stop there. As we follow through that process, we must go back to reaching. The writer of Hebrews is reminding us that because Jesus Christ ***“suffered”*** and ***“sanctified”*** us through ***“his own blood... Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.”*** Yes, that is the rest of the story. We are to go out and serve even though there is reproach or hatred from this world. Why? First, we teach that this is the command of Scripture for His children to go out into the world, and that means that we can't just stay in the camp. Second, this Bible text reminds us that we don't really have a home here, so let's not focus on the comfort of this world. Our home is a ***“city that is to come.”*** We do this not huddled, protected, and comforted, but we do this through sharing what we have as we reach the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.



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## OUR VISION

Matthew 28:19-20: ***“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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”***

### REACH

At The River Church, you will often hear the phrase, “We don’t go to church, we are the Church.” We believe that as God’s people, our primary purpose and goal is to go out and make disciples of Jesus Christ. We encourage you to reach the world in your local communities.

### GATHER

The goal of weekend gatherings at The River Church is to glorify Christ in all we do! Whether it be through singing, giving, serving, or any of the variety of ways He has gifted us and called us together, Jesus is at the center of it all. We celebrate that when followers of Christ gather together in unity, it’s not only a refresher, it brings life-change!

### GROW

Our Growth Communities are designed to mirror the early church in Acts as having “all things in common.” They are smaller collections of believers who spend time together studying the Word, knowing and caring for one another relationally, and learning to increase their commitment to Christ by holding one another accountable.

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