



21

**DAYS OF
PRAYER**



TABLE OF CONTENTS

To Our Central Family	3
Learning To Pray	4
Prayer Outline #1.....	6
Prayer Outline #2.....	7
Who to Pray For.....	8
Week One	9
Jan.07 John 1.....	9
Jan.08 John 2.....	10
Jan.09 John 3.....	11
Jan.10 John 4.....	12
Jan.11 John 5.....	13
Jan.12 John 6.....	14
Jan.13 John 7.....	16
Week Two	17
Jan.14 John 8.....	17
Jan.15 John 9.....	18
Jan.16 John 10.....	19
Jan.17 John 11.....	20
Jan.18 John 12.....	21
Jan.19 John 13.....	22
Jan.20 John 14.....	24
Week Three	25
Jan.21 John 15.....	25
Jan.22 John 16.....	26
Jan.23 John 17.....	27
Jan.24 John 18.....	28
Jan.25 John 19.....	29
Jan.26 John 20.....	30
Jan.27 John 21.....	32
Jan.27 Join Us For Encounter	33

To Our Central Family,

We live in a busy, often hectic, world. I have learned that, in order to navigate the twists and turns that life throws my way, I need to take time every day to slow down and be reminded that I have a Heavenly Father who is in control. This is the power of prayer. It is through prayer that we receive comfort, guidance, and strength to live the victorious life that Jesus offers each and every one of us.

For that reason, we have set aside twenty-one days in January to pray. It's a chance for us to stop, refocus, and reset all we do. Each morning from 6-7am, many will join us at our church café and across our region to pray. Our hope is that, as you discover the beauty of daily conversation with God, you'll experience His presence and your life will be changed

Once you learn how to pray, prayer can become a part of everyday life.

And then...
Before the day begins—
Before you go to bed—
Before you go to work or school—
Before you send that text—
Before you eat, drive or travel—
When bad things happen—
Before bad things happen—
In every situation—PRAY FIRST!
Prayer changes everything!



Bill Markham

LEARNING TO PRAY

Jonathan Gallo

WHAT PRAYER IS

Prayer is simply talking to God. It's speaking and it's listening. It needs to flow from our heart (Psalm 18:6; Mark 15:34), simply (Matthew 6:7), honestly (Psalm 38:9; Proverbs 16:2; James 4:3) and humbly (2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalm 66:18).

WHY WE PRAY

As we pray, we develop a close relationship with God (Mt 6:5-13; John 17:11, 20-21), are filled with peace (Phil 4:6-7), strengthened to fight temptation (Matt 26:1), encouraged when we are tired (Luke 18:1), prepared to hear God's voice (John 14:26), ready to receive His wisdom (James 1:5) and positioned to have our needs supplied (Mt 7:7,8; John 16:24).

TYPES OF PRAYER

Just as human communication varies depending on the setting - so does prayer. It can be pre-scripted or spontaneous. Jesus promised that God hears us each time we pray and He knows what we need before we ask (Matthew 6:7-8). Jesus modeled many types of prayer (Matthew 6:5-13; Luke 18:1; John 17; Ephesians 6:18). Here are some common types of prayer we find in the Bible.

Praise or Adoration - when we recognize God for who He is (Matthew 11:25)

Thanksgiving - when we thank God for what He has done (John 11:41)

Petition - when we pray for needs and wisdom (Hebrews 5:7)

Agreement - when we pray God's will as revealed in His word (Acts 4:23-24)

Intercession - when we pray for others (Luke 22:32; John 17)

Listening - when we wait to hear God speaking to us (1 Kings 19:11-12)

OTHER ELEMENTS

Here are a few other elements to consider as a part of your prayer time experience.



Music | Music is an emotional language that can help us get our mind focused on who God is and what He has or can do in our life. Getting a playlist of instrumental or worship music can help drown out the noise of the world around us and get into a concentrated space.

The Bible | The Bible is a record of God's interaction with people in history. These conversations are recorded for us to glean more about His character, nature, purpose, and thoughts. As you begin reading you will find your own ideas challenged and will begin to learn more about who God is.

Location | You can spend time anywhere that helps you connect to God. Some people dedicate a space at home. Others use headphones as they travel by bus or subway to work. Still others spend time with God as they walk through a park or forest. Wherever you choose, a daily quiet time is practiced alone where God is the focus of your quality time.

Journal | Writing down the things that you are thinking, praying, pondering, or learning is a great way to summarize and remember your experience for time to come. Some people like to write down their thoughts in a journal and others use apps they can search in the future.

Intentionality | Setting down quality time with God is not something that happens unless you make it a priority. If you have never done it, start with as little as ten minutes a day. Don't get down on yourself if you miss a day. Remember it's a lifestyle change that takes time to develop.

Scripted Prayers | Sometimes scripted prayers are a great way to learn to pray spontaneously. The book of Psalms is filled with scripted prayers used by Jewish people for thousands of years (including Jesus and his disciples).

Partnering | If you have never developed the rhythm and habit of a prayer and quiet time, often it is good to buddy up with someone who is in the same position as you to weekly debrief on your progress. It can be done in person, online, or over the phone. It's a great way to develop the habit.

SAMPLE PRAYER OUTLINE #1

As an example, here is how I generally connect with God each day.

Talk to God

(2 min)

“God I invite you into my day. Speak to me today. I want to hear from you and I want to know you more.”

Read the Bible

(5-10 min)

I choose to read a little bit at a time. I often read no more than a chapter and go over it a few times to get the sense of what its saying.

Write Down Your Thoughts

(3 min)

I want to come out of each time with a thought so I use a journal or app to record my thoughts or questions of what I have read.

Talk to God

(5 min)

I finish off by simply talking out of my heart to God. Express. Confess. Question. Give Thanks. Ask.



**But seek first his kingdom
and his righteousness,
and all these things will be
given to you as well.**

Matthew 6:33

SAMPLE PRAYER OUTLINE #2

Jesus gave us a model prayer as a way of teaching his disciples to pray.

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever”

| Matthew 6:9-13

“Our Father in heaven...”

God wants to be known as our Father (Romans 8:15). Thank Him for the relationship you have with Him.

“...Hallowed be Your Name...”

Recognize who God is in your life. Savior. Healer. Provider. Peace. Thank Him for all He has done for you.

“...Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...”

Submit your life and agenda to God’s priorities. Give the situations in your life to Him to take care of His way.

“...Give us this day our daily bread...”

Ask Him for your daily needs. Let Him know what you have need of and depend on Him for the results.

“...Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors...”

Ask God to forgive you of your sin. Talk to God about the pain others have brought you, forgive them and release them from owing you in any way.

“...And do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one...”

Pray that God helps you resist temptations that come from inside you and from outside of you (Ephesians 6:12).

“...For yours is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever.”

Express your faith in God’s ability to ultimately accomplish His plan and purpose

WHO TO PRAY FOR

Leaders of Our Community

Prime Minister | Justin Trudeau
Chief Justice of Canada | Beverly McLachlin
Governor General | Julie Payette
Premiere of Ontario | Doug Ford

My Mayor

Fort Erie | Wayne Redekop
Grimsby | Jeff Jordan
Lincoln | Sandra Easton
Niagara Falls | Jim Diodati
Niagara-on-the-Lake | Betty Disero
Pelham | Marvin Junkin
Port Colborne | William Steele
St. Catharines | Walter Sendzik
Wainfleet | Kevin Gibson
Welland | Frank Campion

My MP & MPP

Niagara West

includes Grimsby, Lincoln, Pelham, Wainfleet and West Lincoln

MP | Dean Allison
MPP | Sam Oosterhoff

St. Catharines

MP | Chris Bittle
MPP | Jennie Stevens

Niagara Falls

includes Fort Erie and Niagara-on-the-Lake

MP | Rob Nicholson
MPP | Wayne Gates

Niagara Centre

includes Welland, Port Colborne and Thorold

MP | Vance Badawey
MPP | Jeff Burch

Leaders of Our Church

Overseers (PAOC) | David Wells & Lorrie Gibbons

Board | Steve Dekker, Pete Drost, Byron Dodd, Frank Hauck, Mike Idzenga, Braeden Ledwez, Larry Ledwez, Gregg Kiser, Trudy Schroeder

Lead Pastor | Bill Markham

Exec Team | Paul Robertson, Jonathan Gallo, Justin Driedger, Ashley Berti

Staff | Daren Crawford, Lynette Doerksen, Lauren Dam, Melanie Driedger, Corinne Durksen, Derek Elliotson, Lisa Elliotson, Gianpaolo Galessiere, Catherine Gillard, Janina Gordon, Emily Grabatin, Johnny Henderson, Mike Hicks, Sarah Jacobson, Jessica Jordan, Christine Lett, Anna Lipsit, Amanda Lockett, Karlene Markham, Floyd Martineau, Teresa Martineau, Jacqueline McAuley, Grant McArthur, Corrie Nickel, Ade Oladipo, Chantel Orr, Al Patterson, Dan Perna, Michael Pielt, Sarah Pritulla, Andrew Rutledge, Madi Falk

Ministries

Weekend Experience | for lost people to be found and people to take a step towards God

Ministries | groups, volunteers, kids, youth, young adults

Mission | Lunch Angels, Red Frogs, Kids Jam, overseas missions in Kenya, Cambodia, India, Turkey, Honduras, Dominican Republic, Cuba

Our Vision

Inviting people into a life that matters

JOHN 1

01

Mike Hicks

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness can never extinguish it.
John 1:5 NLT

Light, we need it to live, to navigate, and to function; but with the invention of electric light, we all know that lights go out. That's just the reality of light bulbs. Sometimes, lights stop working at the worst possible moment. That's the reality of Murphy's Law and lights. All lights that we know eventually dim and go out some time — all lights except one: Jesus!

Think back to an amazing sunrise or sunset you have seen. It's no wonder some people worshipped the sun as a god. We, who "have seen the light" know that the one true God is not the sun but the creator of it. We associate God with light, as did the saints before us. Bright cloud, burning bush, a pillar of fire, and bright light brighter than the sun were signs of God's presence for them. The psalmist described God as light: "The LORD is my light and my salvation" (Psalm 27:1); and Isaiah promised, "The LORD shall be your light forever" (Isaiah 60:19). Light stood for God's presence. Prophecies described the Messiah as light: "Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you" (Isaiah 60:1). And the prophet Simeon hailed the child Jesus as "a light for revelation to the Gentiles."

Jesus is the Light that will shine for eternity. Satan, evil, and the forces of darkness can't extinguish His light or hide His radiant glory. This Light, full of grace and glory, keeps shining and He offers His light to us. Once you have received His light, darkness cannot overcome our Light. So, let's walk in this Light and remember we carry His light wherever we go!

APPLICATION:

- What area of my life do I need God's direction and illumination?

JOHN 2

Mike Hicks

It was almost time for the Jewish Passover and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts, He found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. He made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; He scattered the coins of the merchants and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves, He said, “Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!” His disciples remembered that it is written: “Zeal for your house will consume me.” John 2:13-17

The image of Jesus that many of have grown up with is of a gentleman with a serene, inscrutable countenance and a wistful, faraway look in his eyes. He is usually very well-groomed, with neat wavy hair and impressively white, clean clothes. In this passage, however, we see a Jesus that doesn’t fit in with that image. Here Jesus is clearly fired up. He is angry with the people who are desecrating the temple.

The picture of Jesus often portrayed in traditional, religious art, or often taught about in church is a caricature which exaggerates two of Jesus qualities (meekness & mildness) while ignoring many others. Jesus was on a divine, world-changing mission of global redemption. He was zealous and focused on finishing the work He had come to do. He was tough and resilient. He endured much pain, humiliation, insults, rejection, misunderstandings, and suffering for the sake of His mission.

Jesus was tremendously kind and gracious to most people, especially the oppressed, poor, the sick, and the needy. Jesus was not always nice or polite to some people. He denounced the hypocritical religious leaders who stubbornly refused to believe Jesus’ true identity as Messiah, and who were burdening the people with unnecessary religious rules.

While we are called to be loving, kind, and gentle, we are also called to be strong and courageous. Allowing unbelief, ignorance, injustice, and evil to go unchecked, where we can make a difference, is not love.

Not only did Jesus’ act of clearing the temple reveal His passion for the things of God, but it also revealed His authority. Jesus’ act in cleansing the temple gave precedence to His authority as the representative of God.

APPLICATION:

- Pray for the passion of God’s heart to be your passion.

JOHN 3

Michael Piett

Why at night? And how did Jesus know the answer to Nicodemus' question without it being asked? Those are just two of the questions we may have from Jesus' meeting with Nicodemus.

It was under the cover of darkness, away from the public eye, that this leader of the Jewish ruling council, Nicodemus, sought out Jesus. He must not have wanted the others to see him approaching this man from Nazareth. Do we sometimes, because of our pride, not want others to see us approach Jesus? What will people think if they find out you are religious? Does it show weakness in the eyes of some? Are we embarrassed to admit that we don't have all the answers? For Nicodemus, that may have been a real problem. Jesus was causing a great concern for the rulers of the Jewish community. They were afraid of losing their power and authority as Jesus publicly challenged them and, in some cases, rebuked them. One of the main problems for them was Jesus' ability to perform miracles! This had the potential to cause public allegiance to waiver from their traditions.

It was amazing that Jesus replied to Nicodemus' observation with how to see the kingdom of God. He knew the real reason for Nicodemus' visit. The Jewish people at that time would have assumed that Nicodemus would know that answer already. After all, he was part of the ruling council. Jesus, using the illustration of the wind, explained how you can know something is there without seeing it.

Are there times when you need to believe in God even when you cannot see Him or touch Him? Just think of the power of the wind. It has the ability to physically move items yet, it is completely invisible. When you are discouraged or doubting in the invisible God remember the wind.

Think of a time when you felt the wind blowing on you. Think of times you have seen the power or the fury of the wind on the water. May it be a reminder that God is alive and well.

APPLICATION:

- Pray for the perspective to see God active in your life.

JOHN 4

04

Bill Markham

Do you ever feel like you are on the outside looking in? It is the feeling of not being wanted; not belonging. Sometimes it is because of something that we have done to damage a relationship. Other times, it is prejudice or jealousy that separates us. Whatever the case, it is a lonely feeling to believe that no one understands or cares about you.

This is the situation for the Samaritan woman in John 4. She had multiple failed marriages and was currently having an affair, and as a result, had developed a reputation in her community. She was considered cursed, someone to stay away from, and unworthy of belonging in her community.

In her story, Jesus steps in and invites her into a new way of thinking about belonging and acceptance. What He does is controversial and shocking. Men did not talk to women they were not associated with. Jews did not talk to Samaritans. Teachers did not talk to the morally corrupt.

However, Jesus models a new way to think about ourselves and others. He invites her into a relationship with Him. Here is a bit of the story:

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans). Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

- John 4:7-10

This “Living Water” was the truth that there is a God who will never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5), a God who is on your side (Psalm 118:6), a God who invites you into a relationship with Him (Matthew 11:28).

So, are you ready to accept God’s invitation for a relationship? Are you ready to break the lie that you are all alone and that no one understands or cares? Are you ready to drink living water? Further, are you willing to break down your prejudice and the resentment you hold toward another so that they can experience God’s love today?

APPLICATION:

- Pray that God will soften your heart to receive and give His love.

JOHN 5

Gianpaolo Galessiere

Today I would like to focus on the question that Jesus may be asking you. Before we get to that question, I want to invite you into a small part of my world. I absolutely love to dream big dreams. I have a book filled with ideas and thoughts and “maybe one day”. A few years ago I was telling one of my friends about some of the dreams I had and how passionate I was about them. He patiently listened to me, nodded at the right time, smiling at the exact moment and even seemed just as passionate about some of my ideas as me. But he did something at the end of our conversation that changed my perspective on my ideas and dreams. He asked me this question, “So, are you ready to start any of them?”

Well, this just opened a new window in my life called “excuses”. I went on about how I didn’t have enough money, or time, etc. Each idea was backed up by a truckload of excuses, which blocked any of my dreams from turning into a reality.

In John 5, Jesus asks a similar question to a man who had been sick for 38 years. “Would you like to get well?”

This question was followed up with excuse after excuse about why he wasn’t yet healed. But none of those reasons had anything to do with Jesus. The sick man was focused on his own limitations and the limitations of his physical surroundings. Jesus never asked him why he wasn’t healed, He asked if he wanted to get well. When Jesus gets involved, your limitations are eliminated. Jesus simply speaks life and healing into the man’s life and instantly he was healed.

So many times we limit what Jesus can do in our lives based on our own limitations. Be reminded today that all Jesus needs is a willing heart to see your dreams come true today.

APPLICATION:

- What area of your life are you allowing your own limitations to hold you back?

JOHN 6

Emily Grabatin

My husband and I received an opportunity to learn from a trainer who could help us reach some goals we'd been unable to attain on our own.

First, we were part of a crowd listening to stories and teachings about concepts we believed in theoretically but weren't sure how to apply. Then we were invited to intensive training for three days. There was a sacrifice, an investment, and lots of potential involved. But the concepts and tools were unfamiliar and difficult to grasp, so only a few of us from that crowd accepted the invitation.

At the next training, the expert taught about more concepts that were hard to understand. At one point, he captured attention by offering \$1,000 to illustrate a principle. Another time he wowed everyone by making a spontaneous stock trade that generated \$20,000 in minutes, showing he had authority in what he was teaching. Each person left with access to the same tools and info. But only those who asked for accountability to apply what they had learned received an invitation to mentorship. And even fewer chose to invest in and commit to the daunting mentorship process.

I thought of this experience when I read through John 6. When Jesus asks, "Where can we buy bread to feed this crowd?", like Philip, I'd think about how this could be possible instead of first acknowledging Jesus' identity and God's abundance.

I see Jesus perform miracles like feeding over 5,000 people and causing a boat to instantly land at its destination, and I marvel at the moment. Yet, I can easily miss the bigger message.

Like Jesus' followers wanting all-you-can-eat bread for life like manna in the wilderness, I ask, "What do I need to do to get my needs met? What must I do to receive God's approval? What do I need to do to see God do what He did before?"

When I watch for the answers I relate to or expect, I miss fresh abundance God is waiting to release to me. When there's an investment or a sacrifice, I gripe because it's no longer easily being handed to me. Thankfully, I'm learning to ask different questions, such as, "Jesus, what are you really up to in this situation? How can I be part of it?"

APPLICATION:

- Pray for a new perspective to your situation.



JOIN US FOR
P R A Y E R
IN OUR MAIN
AUDITORIUM
SUNDAY MORNINGS
8 : 1 5 - 8 : 4 5 A M

JOHN 7

Jonathan Gallo

07

In this story, the Nation of Israel is in the middle of a seven-day Fall harvest called the Feast of Tabernacles. Not only did people travel from all over to Jerusalem to enjoy the joyous celebration but, they would bring with them a tithe (10%) of all their harvest to be given for Temple Worship (Leviticus 23).

The story switches between the perspectives of Jesus' disciples, the people, and the leaders as they discuss who they think Jesus is. Some believe he is the one promised in Hebrew scriptures and others think He is a fraud. Jesus first secretly attends the festival, then begins to teach in the temple challenging their ideas about what they believed about him.

On the last day of this Feast, prayers would be made for rain, the priest would pour water out of the stone altar in the inner court of the temple, the Levites would sing Psalm 113-118, and the people would wave palm branches. At that moment, Jesus stands up and declares himself as the real water they were praying for. He says:

“Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, ‘Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.’”

- John 7:37-38

Jesus' presence in our lives stands in stark contrast to the popular notions of our culture and our own values and beliefs about who He is and the heart and desire of God for us. He is not looking for our mental assent that He is real. He wants us to go to Him, for the Holy Spirit that He offers, to experience the reality for ourselves.

The Holy Spirit that, like fresh water, can turn our desire into fulfillment and our potential into fruitfulness. The Holy Spirit is not weird, mystical, ethereal, and hard to grasp. The Holy Spirit is real, can speak to us, can lead us, can empower us, can change us from the inside out, and can help us fulfill our potential. We experience this as we pray this simple prayer, “Come Holy Spirit, change me, flow out of me.”

APPLICATION:

- What is Jesus working on in you?

JOHN 8

Mike Hicks

Again, Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.' John 8:12

This is a life-changing verse if you see it for what it is and see Him for who He is. It states that following Jesus is more than hanging out or tagging along behind Him. It means following Him for who He is. Not just a fan but a player, not passive but active. It means being so taken with Him that you join yourself to Him.

And notice that when you follow Him, you have Him as the light of your life. "I am the light... whoever follows me... will have the light...". You will have Me, He says, as your light. If you follow Me, you have Me. Be a follower, not a fan.

"Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness." Therefore, does that surmise if we don't follow Jesus, we walk in the darkness? Where is the darkness? I believe it's in our hearts and in the world. What does "the light of the world" mean? I can think of three things.

First, the world has no other light than Jesus. If there is light for the world, it is Jesus. It is Jesus or darkness. There is no third option.

Second, all the world, everyone in it, needs Jesus as their light.

Third, the world was made for this light. This is not an alien light. This is the light designed for the world by the creator. The light exposes sin plainly as foreign and ugly, but it also illuminates all that is good and reveals its full and true beauty. This world was made for this light.

Don't forget, you as a believer, carry this light wherever you go!

APPLICATION:

- What are you doing to actively proclaim His light in your sphere of influence?

JOHN 9

Michael Piett

The concept of sin gets tossed back and forth constantly in this chapter of John: Who sinned? Who did not sin? Can sinners perform miracles? He is a sinner! He is not a sinner, God doesn't listen to sinners, you were steeped in sin at birth, if you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin. Questions about sin get asked by Jesus' disciples, Jesus Himself, the Pharisees, and the formerly blind man. Back and forth the idea of sin is thrown around and around overshadowing the miracle of sight restoration at the center of the miracle.

What is interesting is that the question of sin gets more attention than the miracle of sight. A man blind from birth was healed by Jesus. A miracle of a lifetime of blindness was cured. Sight that was never gifted to a newborn baby now was given to this man who never had the opportunity to see growing up into adulthood. Years of only darkness, sounds, smells, touch, but never a visual. Never seeing the beauty of life, only being able to imagine what it might look like.

How is it today that we can get so distracted at times that we miss the purpose of what God has done? The Pharisees had their own agenda. They had predetermined that God would never do a miracle on the Sabbath. Are there times when we have some predetermined thoughts that block our ability to see the bigger picture? Sometimes, we may need to take a step back and invite the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of our heart to see what God sees.

Why is it people cannot celebrate for others? Why are some people so selfish that they have to spoil the miracle and actually bring grief to others? Can you imagine how happy the parents must have been to have their son healed? All those years of having to care and support him in his struggles of being blind. On the very day that should have been a party, the parents were summoned before the Pharisees to be put on trial with the threat of being excommunicated from the temple! Have you had things taken from you?

APPLICATION:

- Is there something in your life today that may be distracting you from the bigger purpose?

JOHN 10

Johnny Henderson

When I was a 17 I worked at Subway as a sandwich artist. It was only a few months earlier that my life was radically transformed by God and I was on fire. Every chance I got I would share my faith with my teenage co-workers. I was so excited about what God had done in my life, that I felt I needed to share it with anyone and everyone who would listen. It honestly felt like I had found the cure for cancer and needed to let the world know. In my tenacity and passion, my conversations would often become intense and debate oriented. This wasn't my intention but I felt like it was my job to make others believe my truth. As a new Christian, I felt that I had to defend God and convince people to accept Jesus. I was never O.K. with being honest about my own doubts, struggles, and big questions. In my "newness" to faith, I started to believe that my own assurance in what I believed and my confidence in having all the answers, would be what convinced people to believe in God. This was not the case.

After I left my position as a sandwich artist, one of my friends (who was also a believer) came to me and asked me if she could share something that was brutally honest. She began to explain how a couple of my co-workers (now friends) were talking about faith on her shift at Subway. She told me about their conversation and how they both agreed they were close to "actually believing" because of their chats with me. What stopped them from following up with these feelings was that they felt that I viewed them as another "notch" on my proverbial belt of conversions.

As I have grown, I have realized that it is not my job to convince people of anything. It's not up to me to have the right, wise and persuasive words (1 Cor 2:4) but to authentically live out my faith and allow the Holy Spirit to work through me with power. In John chapter 10 Jesus talks about how He is the gate and anyone who climbs in another way is a thief and a robber. Understanding that Jesus is the way—not me or my answers or my persuasive words—is the key to leading people to Christ. Often we are more concerned with leading people to our way of thinking rather than to the person of Christ. I have had to learn to trust the truth that Jesus is the only way.

APPLICATION:

- What does it look like to direct people to Christ, not our own opinions?

JOHN 11

11

Andrew Rutledge

The story of Lazarus' death and resurrection is one of the most remarkable stories of the Bible. Jesus demonstrated His authority over death by bringing Lazarus back to life! It is a key moment in the New Testament and sets the stage for Christ's own resurrection.

Yet, we can sometimes miss the opening of this chapter. The disciples had a very hard time understanding what was going on. First, when they hear of Lazarus' death and Jesus suggesting that they return to Judea, they are filled with fear. It seems like a natural response considering that the last time Jesus went there, the Judeans tried to kill him. This despite the fact that Jesus had just told them Lazarus' sickness would not end in death but in God's glory.

Then, when Jesus mentions that Lazarus is asleep, they remark that it's a good thing. Sometimes, when you are sick, you need sleep to get better. Jesus, by this time completely frustrated, has to bluntly tell them that Lazarus is dead.

I wonder how many times we are like the disciples. When God is trying to do something through us, we completely misunderstand him. It is rather amusing that Thomas decides to follow Jesus with the comment "Let us also go, that we may die with him." Despite Thomas' doubts about the outcome, perhaps that is the attitude we should all have. Perhaps it is better to follow Jesus, even if it leads to our death, than to not move at all.

If you are in a place where you don't understand what Jesus is doing in your life, you are always better to be where He is and figure it out as He moves. Eventually, the disciples saw Lazarus raise from the dead. I am sure there was a moment when they went, "oh, that's what He meant!"

APPLICATION:

- Pray for clarity about the things that are happening in your life that are confusing.

JOHN 12

12

Gianpaolo Galessiere

I love gardening in the summer time. It's one of my passions in life. I love every part of the process. From the mixing of the soil to planting the seed, to seeing it grow; I love it all. However, there is still something about seeing a plant that you planted grow, that is simply unbelievable.

Jesus speaks a lot about planting and growing seed, and we see another example of it again in the book of John. However, this time it's coming from a different angle. In John 12:24-26 Jesus speaks about a kernel of wheat being planted and dying in order to produce new kernels. Not only does He say it, but He demonstrates it in the weeks to come with His own death and resurrection. Jesus then includes all of us in the mix as well and gives us a deep explanation of what He's trying to say.

When a seed is on its own, it's alive, but only for itself. It doesn't produce anything else until it is planted and allows the process of producing a harvest to begin. This example is just like us. If we care too much about our own lives and aren't willing to lose (or plant) it, then we will live a life that is only for us. However, if we are willing to lose our life and surrender it to God, He will turn our lives into something truly amazing. A plentiful harvest of new lives.

It's all about serving Jesus and being willing to follow Him, no matter what the cost.

APPLICATION:

- What's holding you back from fully surrendering to God?

JOHN 13

13

Jonathan Gallo

Have you felt the inhale of fresh purifying air? Not that type of air that has been artificially purified by air additives or mechanical means. Authentic, natural, pure, fresh air that you find after a long hike on the top of a mountain. The type of fresh air that you find walking by the sea.

Can you see the disciples here breathing that type of air? A breath of pure, fresh, rejuvenating, and energizing love.

The one who knew who He was - the eternal creator, sustainer, and giver of life, who had shown His love by humbly becoming human - humbled Himself once more. He takes the position of lowest human imagination. He takes the position of the one oppressed and enslaved. He exposes Himself in a vulnerable way and begins to clean the dirt and grime off of the dirtiest parts of those who are there. He even cleans the one He knows will betray Him and the one who would deny Him later.

It's as if He is saying, "I come to clean the dirtiest, hurting, exposed, broken, rejected part of you. It doesn't matter if you reject me, use me, forget me or deny me. I will do what it takes to become what you need for you to breathe in fresh love. As you receive my love, you will have some to give away to others."

So here we are. We have a chance to breathe. To receive love and acceptance. To allow Jesus to come into our weakness and difficult moments, and become the hurt and pain for us. As we inhale His love and exhale the hurt, He inhales our hurt and exhales His love. As we do, we have the capacity to become to others who He has been to us. To "Love each other. Just as I have loved you..."(v.34).

APPLICATION:

- What do you need love to heal in you?



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JOHN 14

Jonathan Gallo

From the moment that Jesus had first invited his disciples to follow Him, they had become entirely reliant on him. As was tradition, a disciple was dependent on their teacher for food, housing, provision, protection, direction, and leadership.

Here in this chapter, Jesus lets them know that very soon they were going to graduate. Jesus was preparing them to empty the nest because they were almost ready to become that which they were being prepared for. When He invited them to follow Him, He said, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Now they were to enter into that stage, and things were about to get real.

Jesus told them that He was about to go to the Father. Then He promised that while He wouldn't be around, He would send His Spirit to His followers, who were active in His mission, to help them with that task. He promised that He would come to live in them by His Spirit and through that connection all of heaven's resources would be theirs.

“When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them.” John 14:20-21

When we are living with God's mission in mind, we can have the confidence that His Spirit will give us the power we need for the task at hand. We do not need to think we are alone and on our own. That change in perspective makes all the difference to switch our mindset from limited to limitless and from impossible to possible.

APPLICATION:

- How can you live with the priority of God's mission to reach the world?

JOHN 15

Madi Falk

Growing up in Niagara, I've always loved to drive by the vineyards and look out at the long rows of grapes. There are always too many rows of vines to even begin counting. I've always been fascinated by the large machines designed to fit between the rows so that they can trim away the unnecessary branches. Hundreds of branches are cut off and cleared away.

Can you imagine the amount of work it takes to care for those vines so that the very best fruit can grow? Pruning is hard but necessary work. When the branches of the vines are left unattended, they grow out of control, choking the plants and reducing or even destroying the quality of the grapes. The branches that remain on the vine after pruning are the only ones that are able to produce fruit.

In John 15, Jesus used this very example to teach us how to live in His will. Jesus said "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you abide in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing". Jesus explained that He is, in fact, the True Vine in our own lives. Without Him, we are like the pruned branches on the ground that cannot produce anything good on their own. We are hopeless unless we remain connected to Jesus

So, what does it look like to bear fruit in our own lives? Jesus explained that fruit is the consequence of prayer, obedience and witnessing in His name, and is ultimately to the Father's glory! Be reminded today that when we remain in Jesus, He will also remain in us and empower us to glorify God in all that we do!

APPLICATION:

- What is something that you need God to prune out of your life so that you can bear better fruit?

JOHN 16

Michael Piett

John 16 gives us another view behind the scenes of how much Jesus loves us. Jesus was facing His own crucifixion knowing what was going to happen to Him in the very near future. Yet, He was more concerned about not leaving His disciples alone. John 16:7 reads, “It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you.” What a selfless statement! Jesus knew that, after His death, His close friends, His disciples, would be persecuted by people who think they are offering a service to God by having them killed!

Jesus knew that they needed the power of the Holy Spirit to be able to stand firm in their faith in God. Jesus called the Holy Spirit “the Counselor” and “the Spirit of truth” who would “convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8). The same power of the Holy Spirit is available to believers today (Romans 8:14, Galatians 5:18).

In our lifetime, we may not ever experience the persecution that His disciples faced. However, the world is becoming increasingly hostile. There are going to be times in our life where we may be tempted to fall away. We may feel like giving up on the pursuit of God or denying His Lordship over our lives. Sometimes it can be subtle, in front of a small crowd at work or school. You become afraid to make a stand out of fear of how they will respond. It is in those times we need to remember the final words of Jesus in this chapter:

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

- John 16:33

APPLICATION:

- Would people know your convictions of faith in Christ?

JOHN 17

17

Bill Markham

I love being a part of a team. There is something very special about a group of individuals with different talents and skills coming together for one big purpose. I have seen this many times as a volleyball coach. The teams that have won have shared a few common characteristics.

First, they have had a unified vision. They know that you can't always control the outcomes, but you can control what you are trying to accomplish. They measure success by how well they execute this vision regardless of the results.

Second, they have a "team first" mindset. On some of my teams I have had athletes, who would be starters on most other school teams, choose to embrace a supportive role so that the team can be better. I have had athletes agree to play in positions and embrace a philosophy that was new and/or challenging for them. Instead of relying on what they were comfortable with, they chose to be a team player.

Third, they worked together in a positive environment of encouragement and support. There really is only so much a coach can do. At some point, the team must decide if they are going to work hard to make each other better. Whether this means committing to working hard at every practice, showing up to the games prepared, or using their voice to elevate the game of those around them, it is imperative that they build each other up.

I think this is what Jesus envisioned when He prayed for His church.

I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. John 17:21-23

The challenge for you and I today is whether or not we are willing to be surrendered to Jesus' vision for us as His church. Are you willing to set aside your preference in order to serve another? Are you willing to use your gifting, whether acknowledged or not, in order to make those around you better? Are you willing to use your voice to encourage and inspire others to the greatest vision ever given to humanity - the call to let the world know that they are loved by God, evidenced in our love for each other?

APPLICATION:

- How has God gifted me to make His church better?

JOHN 18

Madi Falk

Life is full of questions. We are bombarded with them everywhere we go. The most common questions we hear are “who are you?”, “where do you go to school?”, “do you have kids?”, and “what do you do for a living?” We’re asked about our hopes, our dreams, and our future! All of these questions help us to learn, grow, and figure out what we want in life. Yet, God’s constantly reminding me that there are greater questions that can change everything in our lives.

In John 18, Jesus asked an important question. Armed soldiers, led by Judas, came to arrest Jesus. He went out to meet them and asked, “Who is it you want?” “Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied.

The person standing before them is Jesus of Nazareth, of course. But He has another name too. “I am He,” He said, identifying himself with the God who spoke to Moses from the burning bush (“I AM WHO I AM”—Exodus 3:14). And in the disarming presence of God, the soldiers drew back and fell to the ground. Again, Jesus asked them, “Who is it you want?” Now they had a choice. Did they want Jesus of Nazareth, whom they can arrest, beat, and kill? Or did they want “I AM,” before whom they cannot stand but must recognize as Lord?

Who is it we want? Do we want someone we can study and admire for a while, then push aside and go on with our lives? Or do we want “I AM,” the one true God, who has power over all things and yet loves us so fiercely that He came to die for us to give us new life? Will we bow and worship Him? Will we serve as He calls us to? If yes, then let us be prepared to give an answer for the hope we have found in the great “I Am”.

APPLICATION:

- Are there things in your life that you need God’s power to overcome?

JOHN 19

Emily Grabatin

I moved to Banff at age twenty with two suitcases and a heart full of shame. While other young adults flocked to this town for skiing, drugs, and drinking, I only wanted to reconnect with God and the identity I had lost figuring out life on my own. The majestic Rocky Mountains towering above me made God feel close when I felt so far from Him.

Every day I cracked open my Bible to read to a passage. I didn't do it with the same eagerness as I had done for years. Most days, I felt numb and lost. But I trusted each choice to read was a step closer to reconnecting my identity and relationship with Jesus.

The day I came to John 19, I almost skipped it. Already down, it seemed like reading about Jesus being mocked and crucified wasn't going to be very inspiring. I wanted something new. But that day something broke in me. The passage came alive in vivid slow motion.

Jesus' body jolted under the whip laced with animal bone. Lash after lash, I cringed. Bright blood oozed from His wounds. Before He could gather Himself, a soldier shoved thorns on His head.

"No!" I cried aloud, tears streaming. I'd had enough. This was someone who knew everything I had done and not done - and loved me anyway. I couldn't just watch Him be tortured.

Pilate came out and flaunted Jesus in front of the crowd. "I do not find Him guilty of any crime," Pilate announced. My hope glimmered. Someone could stand up for Jesus. But seeing a potential riot, Pilate pulled Him in for a private conversation. My admiration grew for Jesus as He stood confidently in who He was and in His purpose without explanation or defense.

Watching the next scenes play out broke me even more. Rejection caused by fear. Pain. Humiliation. Torturous death. My helplessness.

I finally awoke to the Truth. All this time, I'd been trying to earn my way back into God's presence. I didn't deserve restoration as much as I longed for it. But what Jesus suffered, He did for me just as much as anyone else. That couldn't be earned. It was a mountain of grace I could only receive and honor with my whole life. That grace is for you, too. How much can your love for Jesus expand today with this realization?

APPLICATION:

- Pray that your awe of God's love would grow deeper today.

JOHN 20

Johnny Henderson

Imagine you were just fired from your Job! In the wake of this event, all these feelings of rejection, failure and hopelessness begin to surround you. You keep playing over scenarios in your head of how things could or should have been different. Amidst the stress and the heartache, you miss an email in your inbox from an old friend. Your friend just happened to reach out because he wanted you to work with him and it's your dream job. In the process of being blinded by the situation at hand, you are unable to see the opportunity that lay before you. You miss the email because you aren't looking for it.

There have been moments of deep hard ache in my life when I am not sure where to go. My default in these moments is to jump to the worst-case scenario and to seek an easy way out. The story of the resurrection in John chapter 20 shows us there is another way to see life's moments of tragedy, despair and even death. In these moments, we can seek resurrected life.

In John chapter 20 Mary Magdalene finds Jesus' tomb empty and, in her despair, she assumes His body has been stolen. Jesus stands before her and asks her why she is crying, and she still doesn't recognize it's Him. In the middle of tragedy and hardship we can become blind to the resurrection potential that is standing right before us.

It is interesting that it is when Jesus simply speaks her name that she realizes it him standing before her. Sometimes, God calls out our name to get our attention so that we can see the resurrection that awaits us.

Jesus gave His disciples many hints that He was going to be raised from the dead (Mt.16:21, John 10:17-18, Mt. 27:62-64) so why were they not expecting it? I think it's because when trials and tragedy come, we need the voice of God to remind us of His ability to bring dead things back to life (Rm. 6:8)

APPLICATION:

- What is something that is distracting you from seeing God's potential?



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JOHN 21

21

Bill Markham

Do you ever feel like you have made a mistake that you will never recover from? Do you feel like you have been labeled and that every time people think of you, they think of what you did in the past? Do you ever feel like you have been defined by a past situation and it is paralyzing you from experiencing something good in the present? Have you lost hope for your future?

This is where we find the disciple Peter. Let me give a quick refresher on the story. Just before Jesus was crucified, Peter rebuked Him for even suggesting that He was going to die. In response, Jesus said, “Get behind me Satan!” WOW! That is an epic fail. Later Jesus was explaining that His disciples would leave Him when it got tough to which Peter responded, “Even if I have to die, I will never disown You.” That very night, Jesus was arrested and when Peter is questioned about knowing Jesus, he denies that he knows Him three times. At that moment, just as Jesus had prophesied, a rooster crows and Peter is reminded of his broken promise. The Bible says he ran away, broke down and wept!

What do you do with your failure? I don’t know how you respond, but I do know how Jesus responds. After Jesus comes back to life from the dead, He finds Peter. This must have been a bit awkward at first for Peter, but his fear is soon assuaged by the words of Jesus,

Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” John 21:15

Jesus asks Peter this question three times, once for every time Peter disowned him. He is driving Peter back to what he truly believes despite his failure. And this is the point for you and I. God is willing to take us back to what originally motivated us; those things that we dreamt about and had a vision for. Regardless of our mistakes and failures, Jesus is willing to recommission us to purpose, and that is GREAT news!

APPLICATION:

- How will you allow your life to be defined? By the mistakes, you have made, or the vision God has put in you? What will you do when confronted with the question, “do you love me?”



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