



JESUS  
AT THE  
CENTER  
OF THE CHURCH

STRUGGLES • TRANSFORMATION • HISTORY • PRAYER • MY STORY

DAILY DEVOTIONAL



I believe we can do the works of Jesus when we have the heart of Jesus. We grow our hearts for Jesus by being with Him daily. The more we spend time with friends or family, the more they shape us. The more we spend time in the presence of Jesus, the more we get His heart!

This year as a church, let's grow deeper in our love for Jesus, which will drive our love for others. I still find it amazing that the God of the universe longs to meet with us and know us. One of my greatest desires is for Brookwood to be a church that prays and desperately seeks the Lord.

The most important call on your life is to know God. May this year be marked with an increased hunger and desperation for God. I'm praying these daily readings will be a valuable tool to help you listen and hear from the Spirit in deeper ways so you can know Him better!

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'B' followed by a horizontal line and a cursive 'J'.

Bryan Jones, Senior Pastor

# WHAT RULES YOU?

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*Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God. Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace.*

**Romans 6:12-14 (NLT)**

For most of my life, I thought something was wrong with me. I loved Jesus, but I kept falling into the same sins. I remember years ago talking to my youth pastor about this. He shared, *Bryan, imagine that two dogs are living inside of you. A good dog and a bad dog. He then asked me, Do you know which one wins? The one you feed the most.*

The truth is that the flesh and the Spirit cannot coexist. Paul tells us in Romans 6 not to let any parts of our body serve sin. The word **serve** means to be *controlled by*. In other words, feed the Spirit of God in our lives, not sin. We will end up serving one.

Listen to what Oswald Chambers says:

*Sin is blatant mutiny against God, and either sin or God must die in my life. The New Testament brings us right down to this one issue— if sin rules in me, God's life in me will be killed; if God rules in me, sin in me will be killed. There is nothing more fundamental than that.*

Today, feed the Spirit of God. Listen to His prompting and convictions. If you sense He wants you to do something, stop something, say something, or sit and focus on Him, do it. The more you feed the Spirit, the stronger you sense His presence. If you're in a place where you feel controlled by a particular sin, ask Him for help. The Spirit is always willing.

**APPLICATION:** Every thought and action will draw you closer to the Spirit or pull you further away. Feed the life of the Spirit today in your thoughts and actions.

**PRAYER:** In prayer, ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen your heart for God. Ask Him to reveal anything that's competing with God in your life. Meditate on God and let the Spirit fan into flame a new passion for Him.

# A VISION FOR REPENTANCE

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*Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that His kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?*

**Romans 2:4 (NLT)**

For years, I treated the word *repentance* as an evil word. Repentance felt like after-school detention, where you had to sit quietly and pay your dues. I tried to keep a distance from God because I feared He'd point out my constant shortcomings. As I've gotten closer to Christ, I've changed my perspective on repentance, not seeing it negatively but as a positive.

What led to this shift? First, Romans gives a vision of God as patient and kind. The picture you have of God determines your future. You'll never give Him your whole life if God is too small. In the same way, if God is angry and disappointed, you'll always want to keep your distance. A vision for repentance is about understanding the heart and motives of God. God is never trying to punish us. Jesus' death on the cross has completely removed all punishment and shame.

Not only is God kind, but even His discipline is kind. Sometimes, God will discipline those He loves, but it's in kindness. It's a surgeon's knife, not a thief's. God is removing, shaping and redirecting us to bring us into a deeper life with Him. Think about it. Repentance isn't about us disappointing God. It's about us removing things so we can delight in Him more. This has caused me to be unafraid in the presence of God. I can freely approach Him, and if He points something out, I know it's in love and kindness. It's a father who cares, a coach who sees more potential, a boss who wants our best. Simply put, no one wants better for us than God, so confidently listen and let Him speak. He is good. He is kind. He is for us.

**APPLICATION:** It's the goodness of God that leads us to repent. Whatever God calls us to, let go, trust or do. Remember, His plans are better than ours!

**PRAYER:** Spend time listening and letting God speak to you. Talk to Him about where you're struggling. Ask Him to speak and guide you. Whatever He says, be faithful to respond, as this is what allows His voice to become louder in our lives.

# REVIVAL STARTS WITH REPENTANCE

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*"If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."*

2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV)

Almost every Christian I've talked to wants revival. We want to see God pour out His spirit, power and love in radical ways, but from studying revivals, I've often been struck by their subtle origins. Revivals are always predicated upon repentance. God seems to show up when we stop making excuses, comparing or judging but come face to face with our need for Him. Revival happens when we get our eyes off everyone else, off ourselves, and onto God.

Presidents publicly used this verse to proclaim to Americans a time of humiliation, fasting, prayer and turning from our ways. Abraham Lincoln did this three times during his presidency—three times! Do we know when the last time a government did this? Woodrow Wilson, May 11, 1918. It's been over 100 years, and we can feel the moral decay in our country.

2 Chronicles tells us that if we humble ourselves, pray and turn from our wicked ways, God will heal our land. What struck me was that this verse isn't for the world. Instead, it's for God's people. It was for Israel, and today this promise is for the Church. I've often thought revival happens, but 2 Chronicles says, *"If My people, ... will humble themselves ... and turn from their wicked ways."* Think about it. This is God's plan for revival.

God's Plan for Revival

Individual → Church → World

Leonard Ravenhill, a revivalist, said *America doesn't need God, the church needs God, and if the church gets God, America will feel it.* His point is that the world will see and feel its effects when the Church is set on fire for God. Repentance is about asking God to ignite the fire inside that has become cold or apathetic by sin's touch.

**APPLICATION:** Revival starts with personal repentance.

**PRAYER:** Sometimes, we feel lost about making a difference in this dark and decaying world. Here's how we're called:

- 1) Humility.
- 2) Prayer.
- 3) Longing for God.
- 4) Repentance.

Spend time praying for each of these areas in your life and Brookwood Church.

# TWO GREAT ENEMIES OF OUR SOUL

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*Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your Christian brothers and sisters all over the world is going through the same kind of suffering you are.*

1 Peter 5:8-9 (NLT)

We must be aware of two great enemies of our souls. These enemies are *sin* and *Satan*. Sin is the worst enemy because Satan can only devour us by getting us to sin and keeping us from repenting. We need a healthy understanding of Satan and his schemes, or we'll constantly fall prey to his tactics. Satan wanted to be like God. He wanted to be worshiped and praised. He led several angels away from God, and their sin caused them to be cast out from heaven.

Satan and demons couldn't physically overthrow God, so they went after what's most like God: His children. If you wanted to hurt me, you'd have to hurt my kids because they're mine. I want them to flourish in life, I want the best for them. Satan's tactic is to go after you if you're a child of God. He entangles you in sin, so you desire sin more than God. It makes you think God is holding you back or constraining you. This was his first lie with Adam and Eve. Remember, he said, Did God really say that? God knows you will be like Him! This was Satan's tactic to say sin has something better than what God can offer.

One of the ways Satan devours us is by causing us to minimize our sins. God cares so much about holiness because He knows that what starts as something small over time becomes more significant. Some of us aren't where we need to be spiritually because we think like this... *It's just one lie. It's just one judgment. It's just one lustful thought. It's just jealousy.* This tactic of the enemy keeps us justifying our actions.

Did you know that if you shot a rocket to the Moon from Earth and it was one degree off, it would be something like 4,000 miles off course by the time it reached the Moon? If you feel like you're off course right now, if somewhere you find yourself further from God than you want, let me encourage you with what Bernard of Clairvaux said, *When we are concerned for our coldness, it is because of the yearning God has put there.* God has a tactic for us to grow the very thing Satan is trying to attack, our faith.

**APPLICATION:** Stand firm against every sin, no matter how small it may seem.

**PRAYER:** Ask God to make you aware of any area Satan is trying to entangle you—with your job, comfort, money, health, culture, family or success.



# MAKING ROOM FOR SOMETHING BETTER

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*When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God. But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!*

**Galatians 5:19-23 (NLT)**

A little while ago, we were getting new beds for our daughters, Selah and Grey. We took out the old beds, and the girls were upset. They were still too young to comprehend that we had new beds coming—bigger beds, better beds. All they could see was that we were taking something away from them. They got upset because this was all they had known. Fast forward, they're happier in their new beds, evidenced by how often I catch them jumping on them! I've reflected on this, thinking that sometimes when it comes to repentance, we focus on what we are losing—the familiar.

Sin often is fun, and at first glance, holiness seems boring, but that's only because we fail to see what's better. Repentance, at its core, is about making room for the better things in our lives. It's about making room so the Fruit of the Spirit to be manifested in our lives. It's about letting go of a particular thing so we can be filled with more joy, more peace, more patience, more faithfulness, more goodness, more gentleness, and more self-control. The Holy Spirit is the One who produces the fruit, but we have to trust Him when He calls us to follow Him. We must shift our mindset from loss and thank the Holy Spirit that He is always working for our good. This is freeing because it allows us to let go and trust God in every situation that we surrender to Him.

Do you believe God's plans are better than yours? Are you living and trusting Him in every area of your life? I heard someone say *some people even have Jesus to make them miserable*. They're saying that when you know that Jesus alone satisfies you, but you try to follow your sinful desires, it makes you miserable. I've often said that when I'm right with God and allowing His spirit to have control, my food tastes better, the sunshine feels warmer, my kids seem better behaved, and everything seems better. Stop thinking about what you're losing and start thinking about the better life available through the Spirit. Today make room for the Spirit of God to fill you up to overflowing. He is better!

**APPLICATION:** Repentance is about letting go of the lesser to say yes to the better!

**PRAYER:** Spend time praying through the Fruit of the Spirit and ask God to fill you up with this life through His Spirit. Ask Him to help you see what's better than anything else the world can offer.



# WHAT CAN WASH AWAY MY SIN?

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*For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through Him you believe in God, Who raised Him from the dead and glorified Him, and so your faith and hope are in God.*

**1 Peter 1:18-21 (NIV)**

I've often heard that *something's value is what someone is willing to pay*. One of the most expensive items ever purchased was a yacht named History Supreme, which sold for a shocking sum—4.5 billion dollars. As surprising as this amount was, 1 Peter tells us there's a far more shocking price paid for us to be made right with God. It was every last drop of Jesus' blood. Jesus was without sin, fault or blemish. He was perfect and laid down His life for us so we could be redeemed. We're called to let go of our lives, repent and follow Him. Grace is so easy for us because it cost Jesus so much. Remember, however good or bad, your behavior doesn't make you right with God. Jesus' blood does.

There's a saying that *time heals all wounds*, but time, feelings and intentions can never make us right with God. Read what C.S. Lewis says, *We have a strange illusion that mere time cancels sin. I have heard others, and I have heard myself, recounting cruelties and falsehoods committed in boyhood as if they were no concern of the present speaker's, and even with laughter. But mere time does nothing either to the fact or to the guilt of a sin. The guilt is washed out not by time but by repentance and the blood of Christ: if we have repented these early sins we should remember the price of our forgiveness and be humble.*

Remember today that you're in perfect standing with God because of Jesus' blood, not your performance or a distance from your past. When you understand the great price paid for you and your value to God, His love through the Spirit will cause you to desire to please God in every area of your life. Remember the price paid. Remember your value. Repent of anything that keeps you from deeper life in the Spirit.

**APPLICATION:** Nothing but the blood of Jesus makes you right with God today and forever. Take confidence in this.

**PRAYER:** Spend time thanking God for the gift of His Son Jesus. Ask Him how He sees you, and let His truth remind you of your value as a child of God. If you reduce sin's effect because of time, intentions or feelings, give that to God and let His blood set you free.

# REPENTANCE REGULARLY

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*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar and His Word is not in us.*  
1 John 1:9-10 (NIV)

John is telling us that we all sin. When John writes 1 John, he's about 90 years old and one of the last living eyewitnesses of Jesus. If anybody knew Jesus well, it was the apostle John. John tells us we all have sin and will always be prone to sin. The key is to confess daily and allow God to purify and change us. I used to think of repentance as an annual physical. You show up each year and get a progress report. However, John tells us to confess. We should do this regularly, often, daily. When we come to God and confess, it's our way of saying, *God, I need You*. I've found that the only thing God won't heal is what we try to hide from Him. Regular repentance is a sign of maturity because it's our way of saying, *God, I need You. I can't do this alone. I need Your help. I need Your Spirit to guide me.*

Isaiah was a prophet, and he thought he was doing well, especially compared to others, yet when he encountered God, he saw how much he needed to grow and how hopeless he was without the grace of God. He shared that he was a man of unclean lips, and an angel came and touched his mouth with a coal from the altar (Isaiah 6:5). Think about it, Isaiah was a prophet, so he used his mouth to proclaim the promises of God. He used his words to preach and share the word of God. If there were anything he would have confidence in, it was his words, yet God revealed that even his best was a filthy rag without the grace of God. He repented of pride, and God was faithful to bring more profound purity and healing. I would imagine that from that moment on, repentance was a regular thing for Isaiah. His eyes had been opened to his sin and God's healing touch. I love what Charles Spurgeon says. *You will never glory in God till first of all God has killed your glorying in yourself.*

Repentance is about letting God have His way in us so that we can have God's healing touch transform us. John reminds us that God will always be faithful. God will never get tired of seeing you or forgiving you. He is faithful and just. God delights when His children come to Him regularly and allow Him to purify us.

**APPLICATION:** Confession is calling out to God where I need His help to change.

**PRAYER:** Ask God if there's anywhere you're glorying in yourself. Ask God if any area of pride or independence keeps you from running to your Father and allowing Him to transform you.

# SUFFERING REVEALS FAITH

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*Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.*

James 1: 2-4 (NLT)

I remember hitting a wall of crippling anxiety and depression. At first, I was embarrassed that my faith felt weak, especially as a pastor. I was supposed to be faith-filled and hopeful, but I was in a dark place. God gave me a gift in that season, and it was James chapter 1—to consider it joy when we face trials because suffering reveals that our faith is real. I remember feeling anxious one night and then stumbled upon this verse. I realized this simple but profound thought: my faith is real. In difficulty and suffering, I'm not running from God. Instead, I'm running toward Him. Let me encourage you that if you're struggling, the fact that you haven't given up shows that your faith is real.

In many ways, suffering is the game that reveals the strength of our faith. People always joke at the beginning of a sports season that every team is undefeated, but as games are played, the power of a team is revealed. In the same way, it's easy to have faith when things are great, but suffering is the game where faith is revealed. You will struggle. You will be sad. You will be angry or hurt, but showing up demonstrates that your faith is real. That's a great gift. Cherish that and ask God to strengthen your faith. This is how James says we can have great joy, not because of the bad things we face, but because we have confidence that suffering can't separate us from the love of God.

One of Satan's greatest weapons is the fiery darts of discouragement (Ephesians 6:16). He wants you to doubt God, your faith and the future, but James 1 is a gift to give us hope and endurance in the suffering. It's a way to remind the enemy that even in suffering, we can win because God strengthens us and gives us deeper maturity and endurance if we stay faithful. So even in the trials, rejoice that your faith is real, and God is using this season to grow you into something mighty for Him. Hope. Even rejoice in the tears. God's got you, and your faith is real.

**APPLICATION:** Look for opportunities today to encourage people who have lost hope and joy because of suffering. Pray for them and speak words of life to them.

**PRAYER:** Ask God to give you a greater perspective if you're walking through a difficult season. I invite you to ask God to grow and mature your faith, but fair warning, those growing times usually come through difficult times. Ask Him to grow your faith.

# THE POWER TO NOT RETALIATE

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*He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone. He did not retaliate when He was insulted, nor threaten revenge when He suffered. He left His case in the hands of God, Who always judges fairly.*

1 Peter 2:22-23 (NLT)

We live in a culture that loves retaliation. We don't like movies where people take the hits, absorb the evil and forgive. We like to see people settle the score and fight back. We want them to retaliate. This makes for good movies, but it makes for bad faith. One of the most amazing things about Jesus is that He never retaliated, not once. A lot of the time, I deserve the things that happen to me. However, Peter tells us that Jesus never sinned or deceived anyone. He suffered and modeled a way forward. When we suffer, we can think that our circumstances are different than anyone else's.

*John Piper says No one was more grievously sinned against than Jesus. Every ounce of animosity against him was completely undeserved. No one has ever lived who was more worthy of honor than Jesus; and no one has been dishonored more.*

I'm amazed that Jesus healed so many people, I'm amazed at His creation power, and I'm amazed that He rose and conquered the grave. But these are all things I expect from a Great King. What's shocking is that this Great King Jesus never retaliated. He always forgave. Now don't confuse His patience with weakness. There will be a day when Jesus will come back to judge the world, and all evil will be dealt with (Matthew 25:31-46). However, 1 Peter 2:23 reminds us that even on that day, He'll judge fairly. It won't be out of retaliation. So, this verse gives us two reasons to suffer and not retaliate:

1. Jesus did it.
2. Jesus will return again to judge, so you don't have to.

The Spirit of God has given you the power not to retaliate. If your life is truly surrendered to Jesus, you're called to follow Him in every area, and the choice to not retaliate is the way of Jesus.

**APPLICATION:** Jesus, who was perfect, never retaliated. Today I choose to lay down my right to retaliate.

**PRAYER:** Ask God if you're holding on to something. Not retaliating or forgiving doesn't mean you must trust a particular person. It might be wise to create space, but it means you let go of your right to punish. Ask God to reveal any person or situation you may be holding onto that is causing you pain or bitterness. Ask God to help you start the process of letting go.

# PAIN WITH A PURPOSE

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*But Joseph replied, "Don't be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you? You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people." Genesis 50:19-20 (NLT)*

Years ago, I dislocated my elbow. I remember going to physical therapy for a year to regain mobility. They had to break and stretch the scar tissue in my elbow. In short, the pain of physical therapy was way worse than the initial injury. However, I kept showing up weekly. Why? Because I like pain. No. Truthfully, I almost pass out every time I give blood but don't judge. I showed up because there's a purpose to the pain—it was leading me somewhere. It was giving me something I couldn't have without it. I was looking at the present pain but the future strength.

This is the key to pain. This pain can transform you instead of making you bitter and angry about the suffering you've faced. Joseph had been wronged by his family. His brothers had beaten him up and then sold him into slavery. They made up a story about Joseph being killed by wild animals and then shared it with their father. Joseph spent years doing the right thing, and it seemed like no matter what he did, there was always pain or suffering facing him.

Joseph was taken to Egypt and sold to the captain of the guard, Potiphar, as a household slave. Joseph was later falsely accused of attempting to rape Potiphar's wife then imprisoned. If you had never read the story, you'd expect Joseph to be angry and bitter, but he wasn't. Why? Because he knew there was a purpose to the pain. That it was leading him somewhere, the present pain was leading to a future strength even though he couldn't see it then. As his story continues, God gives him favor, and he's later elevated to second-in-command of Egypt. Then, he met his brothers and could have had them killed for what they did. However, he reminds them that what they intended for evil, God used for good. He saw the purpose in the pain. Listen to this quote from Tim Keller,

*Jesus lost all his glory so that we could be clothed in it. He was shut out so we could get access. He was bound, nailed, so that we could be free. He was cast out so we could approach. And Jesus took away the only kind of suffering that can really destroy you: that is being cast away from God. He took that so that now all suffering that comes into your life will only make you great. A lump of coal under pressure becomes a diamond. And the suffering of a person in Christ only turns you into somebody gorgeous.*

**APPLICATION:** Every setback you face is a setup to greater faith in God.

**PRAYER:** Ask God to help you focus on the future strength, not the present pain. Pray for others who might be walking through a difficult time. Ask God to help them see a greater purpose in pain.

# SUFFERING CREATES OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE OUR FAITH

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*And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear.*

Philippians 1:12-14 (NLT)

It's humbling that Paul wrote the book of Philippians from jail and one of its central themes is joy. In fact, in Philippians 1, Paul was imprisoned for his faith but wasn't beaten down. Quite the opposite because he knew that his suffering allowed others to hear about the Good News of Jesus. He said that while imprisoned, his talks about Jesus led many to hear and believe. People couldn't understand how he could have so much joy in such difficult times. In some ways, Paul's most remarkable ministry happened while he was suffering. It gave him an opportunity he wouldn't usually have, and people witnessed his faith.

The early Church exploded in revelation as it experienced widespread persecution. Roman Emperors like Nero were known to persecute Christians in horrific ways. However, the more they persecuted the early church, the more it grew. Christians were thrown into arenas with gladiators and wild beasts. It was said they'd forgive the people taking their lives, they'd die with confidence and poise, and because of this, people wanted to know why. This kind of suffering is what allowed the early Church to grow radically. It gave them a platform to speak about their faith. It gave them a platform to live counterculturally from the rest of the world. Tertullian, one of the early Church fathers of the second century, coined the term, *the blood of the martyrs is seed for the church*. No doubt, anytime the Church has faced persecution, it's increased.

We can speak about our hope in Jesus when we face troubles and suffering. Our pain can become our platform. It provides opportunities that we wouldn't normally have. We're part of an unshakeable kingdom (Hebrews 12:28) which gives us unwavering hope. Whenever we're going through a difficult season, we must look for the people God brings into our lives. The doctors, the neighbors, the lawyers, and the community around us could be different if we use our season of suffering for the glory of God. Paul himself said his imprisonment allowed the Gospel to spread to new places. May God give us spiritual eyes to see the spiritual needs of those He's placed around us.

**APPLICATION:** The pain you face often becomes your platform to speak about Jesus to others

**PRAYER:** Pray for those who you know need to know Jesus. Whom has He placed in your path that needs to hear the Good News of Jesus? Pray for them by name and look for any opportunities God allows you to share with them.

# SUFFERING FORGES DEEPER CHARACTER

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*We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because He has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love.*

Romans 5:3-4 (NLT)

Suffering can make us bitter, but it can also make us better. One of the reasons I believe so deeply in the Bible is that its wisdom is so contradictory to the world's wisdom. In earlier years, if you'd told me that pain and suffering can produce deeper character, I wouldn't have believed it. However, I've witnessed this truth first-hand. Pain can transform us, but many transform their pain and suffering into something else. Sometimes it's business, success, work or hobbies, or it can move to alcohol, pornography and fits of anger. God is far more interested in the people we become than the things we get done.

Read what Oswald Chambers says, *Suffering either gives me to myself or it destroys me. You cannot find or receive yourself through success, because you lose your head over pride. And you cannot receive yourself through the monotony of your daily life, because you give in to complaining. You can always recognize who has been through the fires of sorrow and received himself, and you know that you can go to him in your moment of trouble and find that he has plenty of time for you. If you will receive yourself in the fires of sorrow, God will make you nourishment for other people.*

Paul says something unique—pain is a pathway to deeper character. When we are transformed in suffering, we learn patient endurance. We understand how to withstand the heart of suffering without being destroyed in our pain. Not only that, we gain deeper character—the way that a goldsmith knew gold was purified was when he could see his reflection in it. Likewise, Paul shares that suffering allows us to let go of the impurities in our life so we reflect Christ all around us. Finally, he shares that we gain hope in suffering. We begin to understand that God is with us, and the very thing we thought would crush us creates deeper faith through the Spirit. You'll only suffer for a season but have character for eternity. Sometimes God uses the temporary to prepare us for eternity. God specializes in taking broken, shallow, hopeless and immoral people and making us into mighty men and women of God. Suffering is one of the ways God does this. Don't resist God. Let Him have His way with your life.

**APPLICATION:** God is far more interested in who you become than what you get done.

**PRAYER:** Look back at how previous times have created endurance, character and hope. Thank God for the ways He has strengthened your faith in those seasons.



# THE GREAT PROMISE IN PAIN

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*"When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you."*

Isaiah 43:2 (NLT)

There's an expression some people use when the pressure is high. They say *The heat is on*. We all know what it's like to feel pressure in an unhealthy way. Maybe you're there now. Those seasons can be overwhelming. The Israelites were in a season where *the heat was on* them. In the verse above, God is telling the Jewish people in Babylonian captivity that He would be with them in their most troubling times, even when they couldn't see or feel that He was with them. He wanted them to know He understood what they were facing.

Do you know the most central promise in the Bible? The most central promise in the Bible is these five words we see above, *"I will be with you."* This is what God is communicating over and over again in the Bible. It's His great promise. He reminds the people in captivity by using imagery from their past. The water represents the Red Sea. God opened the Red Sea for miles to allow the Israelites to walk on dry land (Exodus 14:21-22). The fire represents Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego in the furnace, who came out completely untouched (Daniel 3).

I disagree when people say *God will never give you more than you can handle*. If you're in a difficult time now, you know. It feels like more than you can take. This promise isn't in the Bible. Sometimes people believe that if they give their life to Jesus, they'll never have problems, but this isn't true. Jesus Himself told us to expect trouble (John 16:33). The great promise of the Bible is that God will be with us no matter what. This is our hope. This is our comfort. This is our way forward. The Bible doesn't say *if* we pass through the waters. It says *when* we pass through the waters. We will have troubles. But Jesus will always walk through them with us. God reminded the Israelites thousands of years ago and wants to remind us today that He will be with us. Rest in that promise today.

**APPLICATION:** The most central promise in the Bible is that God will be with us.

**PRAYER:** Spend time praying and remembering the promise that God is with us. Picture Him walking through every part of your day with you, the good and the bad. Ask Him to make you more aware of His presence each day.

# SHAKE IT OFF

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*As Paul gathered an armful of sticks and was laying them on the fire, a poisonous snake, driven out by the heat, bit him on the hand. The people of the island saw it hanging from his hand and said to each other, "A murderer, no doubt! Though he escaped the sea, justice will not permit him to live." But Paul shook off the snake into the fire and was unharmed.* Acts 28:3-5 (NLT)

Sometimes, after a kid gets hurt, I hear a parent tell them to shake it off. Depending on the situation, this can be helpful or harmful because some things don't shake off that easily. Healing can require time, and it's a journey. A parent or coach is making a point to release that thing. Keep moving forward. In the passage above, Paul literally, not metaphorically, shakes a poisonous snake off his hand.

This might be one of the most underrated passages in the Bible. Talk about a man's man here. A snake bites Paul and then Paul shakes it off like a mosquito buzzing around him. What struck me about this is when Paul shook off the venomous snake, he didn't shake it off toward others. He destroyed it in the fire. It would spread the venom around if he shook it off onto others. Bitterness, sin and self-pity are venoms that must be destroyed in our lives. If we don't destroy them, they'll always spread to others. Our sin never happens in isolation and always makes its way into a community. That's why when we face suffering, the venom, the pains of this world, we must not let it latch onto us. We must be faithful to see it destroyed through the power of the Spirit in our lives. In the same way, no one would willingly keep a poisonous snake loose around themselves and others. We must make an unwavering commitment to disallow the poison of bitterness and self-pity to roam around. It'll always keep us from the peace the Holy Spirit is giving us, and worse, it'll poison our community. Proverbs 27:17 (NLT) says *As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend.* We'll either strengthen the community we're part of or poison it. Whatever we suffer from, we must shake off whatever bitterness or self-pity creeps into our lives. Let God destroy it in the fires of holiness.

**APPLICATION:** Whatever sin tries to latch onto you today, shake it off and keep it free from your life.

**PRAYER:** Ask the Holy Spirit if any bitterness or self-pity is affecting you. If you struggle to let it go, ask Him to help you see how it will poison the community around you.

# FOUR REASONS WE COMPROMISE

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*"But if you refuse to serve the LORD, then choose today whom you will serve. Would you prefer the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates? Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live? But as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD."*  
Joshua 24:15 (NLT)

Inherent in Joshua's declaration is that he would serve the Lord alone. He would not serve God and someone or something else. There was one God in his life, and that God was the LORD. Some of the Israelites were starting to serve other gods or create idols, causing them to compromise their commitment to God.

God wants us to follow Him exclusively. He's a loving God but doesn't share the stage well with others. He wants our complete devotion. A follower of Jesus is someone who's chosen to build their whole life around Jesus, not just slot Him in. In the same way, a marriage will be as good as what you put into it. It's simple. If you aren't committed, you won't have a great marriage.

It's important to know that God won't entrust His greatest blessings and revelations to us if we're flippant in our commitment to Him. Nothing we do today will cause God to love us anymore. However, our decisions today will cause God to use us more. God is calling His followers to draw a line in the sand. We often compromise with God's words and exclusively serve Him for four reasons.

1. Fear of rejection
2. Tolerance
3. Pleasure
4. Laziness

Each person must make their commitment. Some of your friends and family might not choose to follow Jesus with the same commitment as you. Don't let anything compromise your faith. Your commitment to Jesus is the most essential thing in your life. Don't let the fear of rejection or being singled out cause compromise.

Tolerance creates sympathy or indulgence that causes us to compromise. Pleasure generates a willingness to settle or give in to be happy. Laziness is a comfort that keeps us from proactively running toward God. Draw a line in the sand and avoid letting these keep you from fully surrendering to Jesus.

The Hebrew for *we will serve the LORD* in the verse above has a rich meaning. David Guzik says, *The English uses a future tense here, but the Hebrew tense has a fuller meaning. It expresses continuous action. It involves the future, but it can also point to the past. Joshua was undoubtedly affirming, 'I have chosen, and I will choose.'* Let's be faithful to choose to follow Christ each day no matter the cost.

**APPLICATION:** Chose today to serve Christ in every area of your life

**PRAYER:** Look through the four reasons that cause compromise. Ask the Spirit to strengthen you in each area. Then ask if you need to commit or surrender anything to God in each area.

# COMFORT THAT LEADS TO COMPROMISE

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*"When you have eaten your fill, be sure to praise the LORD your God for the good land He has given you. But that is the time to be careful! Beware that in your plenty you do not forget the LORD your God and disobey His commands, regulations, and decrees that I am giving you today. For when you have become full and prosperous and have built fine homes to live in, and when your flocks and herds have become very large and your silver and gold have multiplied along with everything else, be careful! Do not become proud at that time and forget the LORD your God, who rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt."*  
Deuteronomy 8:10-15 (NLT)

For years, I always thought difficult times were the greatest threat to my faith. While the problematic times can shipwreck faith, I've found that, more often, the good seasons cause us to drift from God. The seasons of comfort lead us to compromise our faith by slowly drifting away. I've found that the difficult times are when my faith grows, and the times of comfort are when my faith can most decrease.

Charles Spurgeon says, *Some birds sing best in cages. Likewise, some of God's people shine brightest in the dark. Many an heir of heaven never prays so well as when he is driven by necessity to pray. Some will sing aloud upon their beds of sickness who hardly ever sang when they were well. Some will sing God's high praises in the fire who did not praise Him as they should have before the trial came. In the furnace of affliction, the saints are often seen at their best.*

I remember visiting a village in Africa years ago where I met a woman with joy and passion that far exceeded her circumstances. I asked her how she had so much joy. She said, *Here all I have is God, and without Him, I couldn't get through a day, but in America, you don't need God.* Her point still sticks with me because most people don't depend on God to provide for their basic needs. We have so many comforts that if we aren't careful, we'll compromise our faith by forgetting Him.

This is what happened to the Israelites: In the wilderness, they knew they needed God every moment. However, as they entered the Promised Land, God reminded them that their newly found comfort could cause them to compromise their faith. Notice God says it could create pride, that says, *I've earned this.* Pride causes us to forget that every good and perfect gift comes from above. Enjoy it if you're in a good season, but keep your eyes fixed on Him. Thank Him for all the blessings you have. Keep pride from creeping into your life.

**APPLICATION:** In seasons of comfort, enjoy but don't let your dependence and devotion to God decrease.

**PRAYER:** Spend time thanking God for the good seasons. Thank Him for every blessing you've been given. Remember, every good and perfect gift is from above.

# MORAL COMPROMISE

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*Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.*

Isaiah 5:20 (NIV)

In Isaiah's day, the people of God were starting to conform to the culture around them. They were beginning to compromise on their holiness. What they called evil, they started to call good, and what was good they now called evil. We face this in our culture and society today. We cannot let the moral compromise of the culture creep into the church.

I'm shocked that what's universally been accepted for 2,000 years regarding sexual ethics (homosexuality, transgender, cohabitating) is now being revised. Jon Tyson, a mentor of mine growing up, said, *We live in a time in history where what we believe today around the sexual ethics of Jesus no other Christian has believed in another age.* Some claim that the church or God has evolved, but God hasn't evolved. God can't mature or grow. His standards of holiness don't change. What's changed is that people have begun to call what is evil good, and if you don't support those views, you are now called evil.

This isn't the time to compromise on the standards of God. The church loses its influence when it bends to become acceptable to the culture. You cannot change the world if you aren't a part of it, but you can't change the world if you are no different. God has called you to be different, not superior or judgmental, but different. He's called you to act differently. He's called you to be faithful to His Word. In every area of your life, from the music you listen to, the TV shows you watch, to the amount of alcohol you drink, to the way you raise your kids, God has called you to honor Him. You are called to be faithful to what He calls you to do. Remember, what God allows others to do, He might not allow you to do. When you live out the holiness of God, you'll face resistance. If you never face opposition, it might be a sign that you've compromised in a particular area to be accepted. You cannot please both God and man. You must choose to live your life for an audience of One. Hold firm to the commands of God. It's the pure in heart who will see God. (Matthew 5:8) Don't compromise in any area of your life, no matter how much cultural pressure comes your way.

**APPLICATION:** You cannot change the world if you aren't a part of it, but you cannot change the world if you aren't different from it.

**PRAYER:** Is there any area that you've compromised because of cultural pressure? God loves all people, but He has commands on sexual ethics, lifestyle and choices that He wants us to obey. Spend time praying and talking to God about these areas and ask Him to strengthen your resolve to live for Him.

# THEOLOGICAL COMPROMISE

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*What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.*      **2 Timothy 1:13-14 (NIV)**

Occasionally, our kids want to help in the kitchen. When Steph's making food, they start grabbing different ingredients to add, usually some sort of chocolate or candy. They get excited, but I don't usually share the same feelings because I know Skittles and green beans should never be mixed. They have the right intentions, but the outcome isn't always great. I've seen so many people try to explain and blend their ingredients into theological truths, and while their intentions are good, the outcomes aren't always great.

I believe I have the best job on planet Earth, and to have the opportunity to Pastor an amazing church like Brookwood is one of the greatest privileges of my life. One of the hardest things in my job is watching people who once seemed to be on fire for God completely fall away from the faith. Usually, when I investigate what happened, it was some theological truth about the Bible or God they disliked, and they began to add their truths.

I love what R.C. Sproul says, *as well might a gnat seek to drink in the ocean, as a finite creature to comprehend the Eternal God. A God whom we could understand would be no God. If we could grasp Him, He could not be infinite. If we could understand Him, He could not be divine.* God's ways and His Words are higher than ours. He doesn't need our help to make Himself more accessible or pleasing to people. He knows what He's doing. We know the Bible is God's Word. People today can question or find fault with it, but as followers of Jesus, we must never compromise His commands in our beliefs. Jesus is and will always be the only way to the Father. Heaven and hell are real places where people will go, but Jesus shed every drop of blood so that no one has to go to hell. The point is that the Bible, in its entirety, is the Word of God. We must cherish it. We must keep it. We must follow it. It's not about legalism. It's about the Spirit of God creating a desire to honor God above anything else.

**APPLICATION:** Our love for God reveals itself through our obedience to His Word today.

**PRAYER:** Ask God to help you cherish His Word and commands. Ask Him to cause your passion and commitment to His Word to increase so you might hide His Word in your heart.

## COWARDLY COMPROMISE

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Meanwhile, Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant girl came over and said to him, "You were one of those with Jesus the Galilean." But Peter denied it in front of everyone. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. Later, out by the gate, another servant girl noticed him and said to those standing around, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." Again Peter denied it, this time with an oath. "I don't even know the Man," he said. A little later some of the other bystanders came over to Peter and said, "You must be one of them; we can tell by your Galilean accent." Peter swore, "A curse on me if I'm lying—I don't know the Man!" And immediately the rooster crowed.

Matthew 26:69-74 (NLT)

On Sundays it's easy to be a Christian while surrounded by people praising and treasuring the name of Jesus. The rest of the week can be more challenging. When the followers of Jesus have left, you find yourself surrounded by people disinterested in and even hostile to Jesus. The more I take a step of faith and speak about Jesus, the easier it becomes to talk about Him. The opposite is also true. The more I remain silent and fail to talk about Jesus, the harder it becomes.

This is what happened with Peter in the passage above. *I do not know the Man!* Peter's sin of denying his association with Jesus grew worse with each denial. First, he merely lied. Then he took an **oath** to the lie. Then **he began to curse and swear**. Small steps in either direction can create a huge difference in our life. We all bow to fear in certain moments. Peter was preaching to large crowds one second, then cowering in fear before a servant girl the next. The key is that Peter didn't want this kind of cowardly compromise. Jesus had told Peter that he would be a rock, and through Peter, He would build His church (Matthew 16:18).

Be encouraged that God doesn't recruit all-stars and the elite to build His church. God takes normal ordinary people, who, like Peter, give in to fear and cowardly compromise, but He, by His Spirit, grows them into something mighty. Like Peter, you might bow to fear more than you like, but you don't have to stay that way. No one hungry for God has ever been left unfilled. Peter wanted to change, and through the Spirit, God changed him. Don't see yourself through your human eyes. See yourself as God sees you. Peter saw a coward, but God saw a rock. God looks at you and knows you through His Spirit. You are a child of the King. You are called to be bold for Him. You are called to be light in the darkness. Let your light shine for Him today!

**APPLICATION:** Look for small opportunities to speak about Jesus. The more you say, the bolder you'll become. Small steps make a huge difference!

**PRAYER:** Ask God to make you bold. Ask Him to give you an eternal perspective about the brevity of life. Ask Him to help you see the Gospel as Good News, not a burden.



# COMPROMISING IN OUR WORDS

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*Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.*  
Ephesians 4:29 (NLT)

Growing up, I heard the phrase, *Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.* It's a catchy phrase, but it's terrible wisdom. The truth is that words do hurt. The book of James says that words can kill (James 3:8).

Words have ended marriages. Words have started wars. Words have caused addictions. Words have created unbearable pains. Words have ended countless friendships. **Proverbs 18:21 (NLT)** says, *The tongue can bring death or life; those who love to talk will reap the consequences.* There's no such thing as neutral words. Each day your words will create death or life. You'll draw others closer to Christ or drive them further away.

The tongue, on average, is about 3-4 inches long. It's incredible that something that small can be that difficult to tame. As a spark can lead to a forest fire, our words can tremendously impact people for good or evil. We're called to use our words to build others up and encourage them. In the verse above, Paul tells us that as followers of Jesus, our words should be different. It's easy to think God only cares about the big things in life. However, Paul wants us to know that our words matter to God.

Our words matter to our witness. Paul says we should be different, which means we don't use foul language or laugh at coarse jokes, and we monitor the lyrics and TV shows we consume. We don't judge the world, but we don't participate in everything either. Words are such a big deal because words reflect our hearts. Jesus said in **Luke 6:45b (NLT)**, "... *What you say flows from what is in your heart.*"

We can't say words are insignificant because they reflect a more significant thing—our heart. Words reveal if our hearts are close to Christ or far away. The Spirit of God will prompt and convict us to use our words to bring healing and life. Everyone around you today is carrying wounds or blessings from the words they've heard. Your words can bring healing or deeper life if you give God complete control of your tongue. Someone's future can be different if you follow the Spirit's guidance and use your words to encourage. What a gift in a culture of constant criticism to be a voice of encouragement and hope!

**APPLICATION:** Your words will bring death or life today, so be intentional in speaking life into others.

**PRAYER:** Ask God if you're holding onto anyone's negative words. Ask God for His help to release those. Ask Him how He sees you. In the same way, ask God to reveal where someone has spoken a blessing over you. Thank Him for that gift.

# FRIENDS WHO CAUSE YOU TO COMPROMISE

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*Don't be fooled by those who say such things, for "bad company corrupts good character." Think carefully about what is right, and stop sinning. ...*

1 Corinthians 15:33-34a (NLT)

A pastor once told me, *Show me your friends, and I'll show you your future.* The friends we choose have an incredible impact on our life. It's good to have non-Christians as friends. If Christians only have believing friends, we won't have opportunities to share the Good News. I've often found that we swing to one side or the other. Some people I know don't have Christian friends, while others only have friends who are believers. We should have non-Christian friends, but we need some of our closest friends to be Christians.

The people closest to us speak the most into our lives. They help encourage and guide us. They influence us in ways we aren't even aware of. The truth is, it's easier to pull someone down than to bring them up. Paul says don't be fooled—bad company will rub off on you. The people closest to us will help set a course for our lives. It's hard enough to follow Christ in the world, but it's almost impossible if our closest friends are constantly criticizing our faith. We should love all people, but we must be wise with whom we let speak into our lives.

We also cannot isolate. We need community. We cannot spiritually mature alone. That's one of the reasons the Church is so important. It helps us link arms with people moving in the same direction as us. We're better together. Most people on fire for their faith attend church and are engaged in a Community Group because we need that constant encouragement.

An old proverb says, *When you run alone, you run fast. But when you run together, you run far.* The Christian life is not a 100-yard dash. It's a marathon. The passions of others will rub off on us. Think about it: some of our hobbies or interests are because of those closest to us. If we want greater faith, we must surround ourselves with people running after Jesus. Their passions will often affect ours. We must be wise with the friends we bring closest to our lives.

**APPLICATION:** The friends you choose will direct your future. Spend time with friends who will build you up.

**PRAYER:** Pray for your friends to keep running after Jesus. If you don't have any close Christian friends, ask God to bring some people into your life who will help you pursue Him.

# WHY INDULGENCE IS WRONG

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*"Write to the angel of the church in Thyatira: Thus says the Son of God, the One whose eyes are like a fiery flame and Whose feet are like fine bronze..."*

**Revelation 2:18 (CSB)**

The letter to the church in Thyatira begins by describing Jesus' eyes and feet. This picture is meant to evoke a strong response in the readers as Christ is seen as all-seeing. I think often in churches today, this strong imagery of Christ is often replaced with a Jesus Who excuses sin and is often laissez-faire in His approach to those living in rebellion with the ways of God.

So, it shouldn't surprise us that professing Christians struggle with indulging their flesh. We must begin to see our actions as if they were displayed in front of Christ. Knowing that Christ, who died for our sins, sees them all should evoke an emotional response of shame or even disappointment. I've heard that shame has no place in a Christian's life, but it does when it leads us to Christ, Who gives us peace!

So how does seeing Jesus in the way He describes Himself in this passage motivate you to live in a more Christ-honoring way? How would recognizing Him as an all-seeing Savior change the way you live?

**APPLICATION:** The eyes of Christ see all, and we must be willing to identify what's leading us astray from our faith and respond with vigilance.

**PRAYER:**

God,

Help me be concerned with what concerns You. Please help me see what's leading me astray in my faith and give me the courage to overcome so I can fully devote myself to You and Your Kingdom.

Amen.

# RECOGNIZING INDULGENCES

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*I say, then, walk by the Spirit, and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you don't do what you want.*  
Galatians 5:16-17 (CSB)

The church of Thyatira experienced people indulging in fleshly desires. Specifically, practicing sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols. Indulgence involves yielding to our flesh instead of to the Holy Spirit. The first step in initiating change is to recognize what's in control. Let's look at the seven deadly sins:

Lust	Sexual Gratification
Gluttony	Overconsumption of Things
Greed	Uncontrolled Gain of Money/Possessions
Sloth	Lack of Activity/Laziness
Wrath	Uncontrolled Feelings of Anger
Envy	Sad/Resentful towards Others
Pride	Putting Your Needs/Desires before Others

These are seven ways we indulge our flesh, as opposed to the desires of the Holy Spirit. But to truly overcome them, we must yield to the Spirit rather than our flesh.

**APPLICATION:** When struggling in sinful indulgence, reflect on what you are yielding to— the flesh or the Spirit. Make a conscious effort to yield to the Spirit.

**PRAYER:**

Jesus,  
Help me yield more to Your Spirit than my flesh. Please help me say no to whatever takes my focus off You and Your purpose in my life. Please help me see my growth in these areas and help others to do the same.  
Amen.

# A COUNTER TO INDULGENCE

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*"I know your works—your love, faithfulness, service, and endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first."*

**Revelation 2:19 (CSB)**

Jesus shares four positive qualities of the church in Thyatira: Love, faithfulness, service and endurance. Love and faithfulness involve attitudes, and service and endurance include the results of these attitudes. Love and faithfulness are two of the three core Christian virtues (see 1 Corinthians 13:13 faith, hope, and love.) These qualities describe a growing relationship with Christ and faithful obedience to Him.

Love and faith lead to service and endurance. As we say at Brookwood, growing in your love for God and others leads to serving others. The church at Thyatira was praised for its growth in this area.

Serving others and a willingness to endure difficulty conflicts with indulging selfish desires. But this fight against self must begin with loving Christ more than loving ourselves and being faithful to His Word rather than our feelings. When these attitudes characterize our lives, different behaviors result.

Does this describe you?

**APPLICATION:** I should experience a growing relationship with God that leads towards service to others and a strength to remain faithful regardless of circumstances.

**PRAYER:**

Heavenly Father,

This world is dark, but You've placed Your Spirit in me and called me the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Please give me the strength to remain faithful to Your standards in this world that's lost them. Please guide me in doing this in a way that'll encourage others to stay faithful as well. Amen.

## RESULTS OF INDULGENCE

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*"But I have this against you: You tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and teaches and deceives My servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat meat sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she does not want to repent of her sexual immorality. Look, I will throw her into a sickbed and those who commit adultery with her into great affliction. Unless they repent of her works, I will strike her children dead."* **Revelation 2:20-23a (CSB)**

This passage is quite sobering. Jezebel, a name assigned to this woman leading others astray, is identified as a false prophetess and deceptive leader. Christ's criticism of the church of Thyatira is their tolerance of this false teacher. This woman is not simply teaching false information but leading others to commit sexual immorality and encouraging them to eat meat sacrificed to idols.

Christ directly calls out their tolerance of this woman's sinful acts.

Focusing only on Jezebel's wrongdoing can be easy, and we must be aware of that. However, the church's tolerance of this woman's ongoing actions draws the criticism of Christ. Passivity in theological conviction is seen as sinful by Christ.

Christ, in contrast, was patient with her but acted decisively. Don't confuse patience with passivity. Patience is an active response waiting for a desired conclusion. Passivity does not involve a reaction of any kind.

We often approach others, especially in the church, in the same way as some of the members of Thyatira did. When we see a consistent pattern of someone leading others astray, we must avoid being passive but act decisively. What action would you take towards someone encouraging others towards sexual immorality?

**APPLICATION:** As Christians, we're responsible for our actions and to lead others towards a right relationship with Christ—not tolerating willful deception.

### **PRAYER:**

God,

It's so hard to remain vigilant. This world doesn't help develop my faith. It feels intolerant towards what I believe. Please help me stand firm with You as my shield. Please help me be a light in the darkness regardless of others' reactions. And God, please help me point others toward You!  
Amen.

# SEXUAL INDULGENCE

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*Flee sexual immorality! Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the person who is sexually immoral sins against his own body.*

**1 Corinthians 6:18 (CSB)**

Jezebel led others away from Christ and into the indulgence of fleshly desires, specifically sexual immorality. Sexual sin is particularly destructive. All other sins are committed outside the body, but sexual sin is against God and the body!

The use of pornography, sex outside of marriage, objectification of women, and other acts result from the unrestrained indulgence of the flesh. To fight against sexual temptation, we must be willing to practice chastity and fulfill our sexual desires in a God-honoring way.

Even in this perilous, destructive situation, God exercised patience toward Jezebel. **1 Timothy 2:4 (NLT)** reminds us that *God wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth*. God's approach, with patience and love, should bring us great joy.

But one day, if we reject the offer of repentance, God's patience will result in judgment. Christ is clear here. He's offering an opportunity to repent and find rescue from sin. The offer to you who are reading this is the same. Repent of your sins and place your trust in Christ.

*For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*

**Romans 10:13 (CSB)**

**APPLICATION:** Sexual sin is uniquely destructive, and we must not indulge in it.

## PRAYER:

God,

Help me be pure in mind and heart. This world is corrupt and sexual sin has become routine. But it's degrading and wrecks our relationship with You and our bodies. Give us the strength to say no to our sexual lusts and build our bodies as Your dwelling place.

Amen.



# INDULGENCE OF THE STOMACH

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*Listen, my son, and be wise; keep your mind on the right course. Don't associate with those who drink too much wine or with those who gorge themselves on meat. For the drunkard and the glutton will become poor, and gogginess will clothe them in rags.*  
Proverbs 23:19-21 (CSB)

This is not a subject often addressed in churches, but the group in Thyatira had an issue with people eating food sacrificed to idols. These meals would then lead to other sins when the drinking got out of hand, like sexual immorality.

Christians should be marked by self-control (Galatians 5:21-22). Yet the ability to say *no* at the table or in a restaurant is rare! Unrestrained eating and drinking can also lead to a lack of restraint in other areas of life.

In fact, besides intermittent fasting, when was the last time you heard about someone fasting from food? How much more do you hear about someone fasting from technology or working too hard?

In **1 Timothy 6:17 (NLT)**, we're reminded that *God richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment*. Yet we often find ourselves desiring more than what we have, especially when it comes to food and drink. But beware of what this indulgence leads to, not only in terms of physical health but spiritual health!

**APPLICATION:** Our stomachs provide specific temptation that leads to sinful indulgence in other areas. Seek to honor God with what you eat. Discover what leads you to overeat and exercise restraint to the glory of God.

## PRAYER:

Lord,

This can be a challenging area and one that should be discussed more. Help me seek to maximize my body's stewardship and become a person of self-control. Show me specific areas where I can be more disciplined in my actions to devote my body to You.

Amen.

# CONTENTMENT VS. INDULGENCE

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*"I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who haven't known "the so-called secrets of Satan" –as they say–I am not putting any other burden on you. Only hold on to what you have until I come."*

Revelation 2:24-25 (CSB)

Jesus ends this section to Thyatira by withholding any new burdens on those intolerant of the false teachings. Some may have been frustrated hearing this encouragement. I can see the driven, Type-A personalities frustrated at no new boxes to check. But Christ is clear, keep on keeping on until Christ returns.

A church that's pleasing in His sight passionately loves the brothers and sisters in the church and keeps adhering to the teachings of Scripture. These two interrelated practices make a church healthy and the type of church that pleases God. There are no secrets or hidden methods in the way of Christians, only committed contentment to love and obey God.

A commitment to love others and abide by God's Word are two markers that inevitably result in spiritual success and leads to God's good pleasure as we honor Him with our lives.

One day this battle will be over. Christ will return as King of the World and receive His followers. We must remain content to follow Christ and reap the rewards one day given to us by Jesus Christ Himself.

Will you remain faithful to these markers of love towards others and devotion to the teachings and ways of Christ? Will you remain content in your call to faithful service for Him?

**APPLICATION:** We must commit our actions and lives toward the love of others and adherence to the Scriptures.

## PRAYER:

Lord,

A lifestyle of contentment feels foreign in this world. The culture tells me I can never have enough, be enough or do enough to be happy and filled with joy. But Lord, help me believe that's false. Help me seek a quiet, happy life, living out Your purposes with boldness and conviction. Help me resist the pressures of this world and love others, devoting myself to your teaching.

Amen.

# URGENCY IN KILLING SIN

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*"So if your eye—even your good eye—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your hand—even your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell."*

**Matthew 5:29-30 (NLT)**

I've known many people who've had cancer. I've seen some who deal with it well, and others devastated. I've seen many get healed, and I've seen several get healed through the grave. The one consistent thing I've noticed is that no one has a casual approach to cancer. Why? Left untreated, cancer will spread.

Jesus is using a figure of speech to show the severity of sin. We cannot have a casual approach to sin because it spreads and starts to affect everything. Jesus isn't advocating mutilation, but He is advocating seriousness regarding sin. Jesus stresses that we must be willing to sacrifice to be obedient. If part of our life is given over to sin, we must be convinced that it's more profitable for that part of our life to die rather than our relationship with God to die.

Sin makes us miserable in the long run, but it feels good momentarily. We can be double-minded when it comes to sin. We say we want God, and we do. However, we also want to hold onto certain sins. We must ask, do we want to let go of this particular sin? Sometimes, we'll stay in something familiar and comfortable, but we're miserable. Jesus stresses that the starting point is to commit to Him fully above everything else. It can't be Jesus plus anything else. It's Jesus alone, and anything competing for our affection for Him must be killed. If we don't have this mentality, then our sins take over and control us. God will be faithful to heal whatever sin we're struggling with, but we must be willing to let it go. Jesus is making it clear that we must never have a casual approach towards sin, even small sins that seem justifiable. Sin will always grow and kill the life of God in us.

**APPLICATION:** God is calling you to kill sin so that you can live for Him. He is better.

**PRAYER:** Ask the Spirit to give you the desire to let go of sin. Ask the Spirit to provide you with strength and commitment to kill whatever sin is in your life. Ask God to reveal any hidden areas of sin.

# URGENCY IN OUR PRAYERS

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*The end of the world is coming soon. Therefore, be earnest and disciplined in your prayers.*

1 Peter 4:7 (NLT)

This verse is very challenging because it flips what most people believe about prayer. Peter reminds us that prayer isn't the means to the end. Instead, it's the end to our means. Prayer isn't preparing us for the greater work. Prayer is the greater work. A significant way God moves His Kingdom to Earth is through prayer.

Read what E.M. Bounds has to say on prayer and urgency.

*There is neither encouragement nor room in Bible religion for feeble desires, listless efforts, lazy attitudes. Heaven is too busy to listen to half-hearted prayers or to respond to pop-calls. Our whole being must be in our praying.*

In the verse above, Peter realized the greatest threat wasn't health. It wasn't an economic threat. It wasn't a governmental threat. The greatest threat was an eternal one. The greatest threat is that all of us will have a last day on this Earth or that Jesus will return, and we're unprepared. Then we'll stand before a Holy God to give an account of our life. Our lives should be different in light of this crisis! As Jonathan Edwards once said, *Lord, stamp eternity on my eyeballs.*

In Matthew 26, before Jesus was arrested, He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter, James and John were the only other disciples with Him. Jesus invites the three of them to pray, but they fall asleep. Jesus drew strength from prayer—strength that none of the other three disciples had. Years later, Peter recalls this experience. He draws power from prayer as he faces persecution from the Roman government for following Jesus. Peter has been awakened to the urgency and power of prayer.

Are you asleep in your prayers? Are you praying with passion? God is inviting each of us to wake up our prayers, to dive deeper into the power and intimacy of prayer that Jesus modeled. If Jesus prayed with urgency, how much more should we, as His followers, pray with a spirit of urgency?

**APPLICATION:** Be disciplined today in making time for prayer and remembering its power.

**PRAYER:** Ask God to make you aware of the power of prayer. Ask the Spirit how the enemy wants to distract you from prayer. Ask the Spirit to help you become more disciplined in your prayer life!

# URGENCY IN SHARING YOUR FAITH - PART 1

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*My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be willing to be forever cursed—cut off from Christ!—if that would save them.*

**Romans 9:2-3 (NLT)**

Years ago, I was speaking at a camp, and a woman with a prophetic gift came and shared something with me. After I was done speaking, she paused and said, *Tonight, Bryan, I'm going to ask that God break your heart for these kids.* At first, I was slightly offended, but deep down, I knew she spoke the truth. My heart wasn't broken for the kids, and I was more burdened by preaching a good talk than anything else. The next night I was preaching and felt this burden when talking. I almost couldn't finish. It was like I got a glimpse of God's heart for those far from Him, and it nearly crushed me. I preached differently that night because there was a sense of urgency. It suddenly made every other burden I was carrying feel small and insignificant.

In the verse above, Paul had a sense of urgency, a burden that his Jewish brothers and sisters might come to faith in God. It's sobering to me that the Jews were Paul's worst enemy. They harassed and persecuted him throughout his life. All the burdens and threats he faced melted away under the greater burden for people to know Jesus.

Charles Spurgeon says this about the passage above, *This great passion for souls gave Paul perspective. Lesser things did not trouble him because he was troubled by a great thing – the souls of men. Get love for the souls of men, and you will be delivered from petty worries... Get your soul full of a great grief, and your little griefs will be driven out.*

Paul longs to see his brothers and sisters come to faith in Jesus. He'd give up his faith if it meant they found theirs. A deep sense of urgency drove Paul's life. He felt this because he saw people separated from God's love—unbelieving Israel who had rejected God's love. The urgency of the Gospel has propelled missionaries to all corners of the Earth, often at a sacrificial cost to their lives, employment and family. Oh, how I want to have more of Paul's spirit here! Do we grieve? Do we have an urgency? Do we long for our friends, families and neighbors who are far from God? I know that many of you do. That's good. Nurture that grief with biblical truth and urgency that causes us to share and tell others the Good News of Jesus.

**APPLICATION:** You don't need perfect words to be a light to others. Just let them know how deeply you know long for them to know Jesus.

**PRAYER:** Ask the Spirit to break your heart for those around you. Ask for a holy burden. Sharing your faith doesn't come from your mind. It originates from your heart.

# AN URGENCY TO RESOLVE CONFLICT

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*"So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God."*  
**Matthew 5:23-24 (NLT)**

In the Sermon on the Mount, where the passage above comes from, Jesus tells us what His Kingdom will be like and what His followers will be doing. One of the things He gives is an urgency to forgive and reconcile. Here, Jesus says if you're doing something for Him and you remember there is a conflict, go and reconcile with that person. This is our first ministry because conflict and unforgiveness will poison our lives. People say they hold onto bitterness but can compartmentalize it, meaning they keep it separated from the rest of their lives. The problem is that our hearts can't compartmentalize the toxins of bitterness and anger. They spill over to everything else, and Jesus knows this. Unforgiveness is a prison. Jesus wants us to deal with this issue because He knows it will sideline us at some point. Notice, we're called to reconcile, but that doesn't mean we must trust the person. Sometimes it would be foolish to do that. We must relinquish our right to retaliate or get even with them. This is a hard teaching, but Jesus Himself modeled this.

People have asked me, *How can I find the strength to forgive? I don't have it in me.* Let me encourage you—I don't, either. There's only one place I've ever found the strength to forgive and reconcile: the Spirit. The Spirit shows me how much this affects my life and the damage caused by holding onto it. The Spirit will often remind me how much I have been forgiven. When I look at Jesus' kindness to me, it changes me. Forgiveness is a two-way street: I cannot receive God's forgiveness and then choose to be unforgiving. The cross is what makes resolving conflicts possible.

**APPLICATION:** As I receive God's forgiveness today, I reciprocate that to others.

**PRAYER:** Ask the Spirit to guide you to resolve any conflict. Ask Him if there's any bitterness you're still holding onto so He can help you destroy it.

# URGENCY IN PARENTING

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*"And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up."* Deuteronomy 6:6-7 (NLT)

With culture increasingly becoming more secular and toxic, the stakes of biblical parenting have never been higher. One of the things we do at church is have a Child Dedication Ceremony, which at its core, is a parent's commitment to raise their children in the ways of the Lord. The way we parent should cause our kids to bump into God and begin to follow Him.

If you don't become the dominant influence in your child's life, someone else will. The Bible includes 58 one another statements—things like *love one another, care for one another, pray for one another, encourage one another, help one another, counsel one another, and support one another*. So, when we look at family, there's a biological family, and then there's God's family. We help the kids grow up as the Church. So, even if you don't have biological kids, you're called to be a spiritual mother and father to children around you. You're to help train the next generation to follow Jesus. If there's one memory a child should have from their time with us and our church, it's this: they should remember God. God was first. God is central.

Tony Evans says *God created the first family. He told them to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth*. And the idea was not just to fill the earth with people but to fill the earth with His image in which man and woman were made. Since our world is broken, we urgently need to raise children with a biblical mindset. This is critical for children, their future families, and our nation to flourish. We need to disciple our kids, not the world. So, we need godly influences in our families, neighborhoods and the Church. We love kids by teaching them to love the commands of God, but here is the key, we must model it. We cannot ask our kids to delight in God and follow His commands unless we do the same. Values aren't *taught, they're caught*. This means that when the next generation sees us delight and obey God, they'll do the same.

**APPLICATION:** Look for ways to speak about the love of God to the next generation today.

**PRAYER:** Pray for your kids. Pray for your influence as spiritual mothers and fathers. Ask God to give you an urgency for the most critical thing today: To help children put God first.



# URGENCY IN RESPONDING TO GOD'S VOICE

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*That is why the Holy Spirit says, "Today when you hear His voice, don't harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled, when they tested Me in the wilderness."*  
**Hebrews 3:7-8 (NLT)**

One of my favorite things to do in the morning is hit the snooze button on my alarm clock. Probably much to my wife's annoyance, I hit the snooze button two or three times. If you keep hitting the snooze button, the alarm will stop going off after a while. There's a warning in Hebrews to ensure we don't hit the snooze button on God. If we keep hitting the snooze button when God speaks, we'll stop hearing His voice after a while.

In the book of Hebrews, the phrase, *"Today, when you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled,"* appears three times (Hebrews 3:7-8, 15; 4:7). This quote from Psalm 95 was meant to call the people to listen to the voice of God and not have a *sinful, hard heart that turns away from the living God.*

Many voices vie for our attention, especially with the increased use of technology and social media. The problem is that the voices around us seem to be louder than the voice of God. We must learn to quiet our hearts and listen. The more we listen and respond to God's voice, the more we discern His voice over time. The enemy doesn't want us to hear from God. He fears us walking closely with God in a vibrant relationship. He'll do anything to disrupt our relationship with God and harden our hearts.

Richard Foster says, *Our Adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry and crowds. If he can keep us engaged in "muchness" and "manyness" he will rest satisfied.* Sometimes it isn't the evil things that cause us to harden our hearts. Sometimes it's the overcrowded schedule that has no margin for God. Sometimes the constant noise of the TV, phone, computer and music keeps our minds constantly preoccupied. Sometimes constant meetings, hangouts and activities keep us from learning to be alone with God. Sometimes it's spiritual drowsiness that lulls us to sleep in our faith. This verse is a clear reminder that God speaks and wants to be heard by you today.

**APPLICATION:** Carve out time to be with God and respond to His words.

**PRAYER:** Ask the Spirit of God to show you what you can carve out of your life. Ask Him to help increase your ability to hear His voice.

## URGENCY IN SHARING YOUR FAITH - PART 2

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*"And they have defeated him by the blood of the Lamb and by their testimony."*  
Revelation 12:11 (NLT)

The early church reminded the enemy that he was defeated by two things—the blood of Jesus and the power of their testimony. Think about it. There's power in your testimony. There is power when you share your story. Some say, *My story is crazy enough* or *My story is too crazy*. Let me release you from this kind of thinking. You're not the center of the story. Jesus is. He is the central person and the central part. So talk about how He's transformed your life. You don't have to preach a sermon. You share what God's done in and through you.

People will argue theology. They'll argue Bible verses and sermons. However, no one will argue about the power of a transformed life. So be faithful to share what God's done in your life. This is what Revelation says caused the early Church to explode. They weren't theologians, pastors or the elites who turned the world upside down for Jesus. They were common, ordinary men and women whom the blood of Jesus had transformed. They were telling the world—that was it. They were transformed people telling their stories to the world no matter how hostile it was.

Following Jesus isn't complex, and it isn't always easy. God calls us to live with boldness. To speak and be faithful to tell others how Jesus rescued us. The point is that change has to be accurate in us, then we need to talk about it. We don't have to pump ourselves up. Point to the work of Jesus in our lives. This helps release us from the pressure.

Rick Warren says *People aren't going to trust Jesus until they trust you*. People usually don't ask me if the Bible is credible. They want to see that I am credible. Do I live with integrity? Am I gentle? Am I loving? Am I compassionate? In the same way, no snowflakes are the same, they're all unique. People are unique, and God has purposely placed us where we are. We may be the only person who can reach those around us. Our jobs aren't to convert everybody to Jesus—that's the Spirit's job. Our job is to scatter seeds. The Spirit will take what we share and use it how He sees fit. Our job is to show up, speak up and tell others what Jesus means to us.

**APPLICATION:** Think about your story. Ask God who He's placed around you who needs to hear it.

**PRAYER:** Ask the Spirit who needs to hear your story this week.

# GOD AS OUR MODEL OF FAITHFULNESS

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*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.* Hebrews 13:8 (NLT)

Years ago, I was at church, and the people in the church said, *We want to bring change and reach more people.* When we started making changes, I learned a fundamental lesson. Even though people say they want to change, most of us don't like change unless we're making it. In a world that's constantly evolving and hard to understand, I take great comfort in the truth that Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. We might not understand everything about God or even some of His commands. However, we rest knowing that He won't change His mind tomorrow. God is stable. God is steady. He doesn't evolve because He's already perfect. He's full of wisdom and love, and that will never change.

John Piper has this to say about Jesus being the same yesterday, today and forever:

*Yesterday:* *It is crucial that Jesus Christ be the same yesterday as He is today because yesterday is when Jesus Christ showed us in history what He is really like.*

*Today:* *It is crucial that Jesus Christ be the same today as He was yesterday because today is when we have fellowship with Him and relate to Him as the person we know.*

*Tomorrow:* *It is crucial that Jesus Christ be the same tomorrow as He was yesterday and today because all our hope for everlasting joy hangs ultimately on Him.*

Jesus is our model of faithfulness. It would be difficult to follow and trust Him if He were inconsistent or constantly prone to change. The fact that He never changes helps us fully surrender to Him and allows the Spirit to transform us. Everything Jesus is calling us to do, He has already done. His invitation is to live like Him. Faith isn't about our faithfulness to God. It's about His faithfulness to us. We've never been fully faithful to God. If we base our faith on our perfect performance, we'll become discouraged and give up. Instead, our faith is built on Jesus' faithfulness to us. This allows the Spirit of God to conform and grow us daily to more faithfulness. It's not willpower or spiritual adrenaline. It's the Spirit of God making us more like Jesus each and every day. Rest in the comfort that Jesus is our model for faithfulness. He will always be the same yesterday, today and forever. Thank you, Jesus, that your faithfulness is what changes us.

**APPLICATION:** Today, reflect on His faithfulness to you.

**PRAYER:** Thank God for His faithfulness to you. Reflect on how God has been faithful in your past and present. Pray that this will allow you to fully trust Him in whatever you face.

# FAITHFULNESS VS. SUCCESS

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*"The master was full of praise. 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'"* **Matthew 25:21 (NLT)**

The world is interested in success, but God is interested in faithfulness. One of the things I've asked myself is why so many pastors and Christian leaders seem to be falling. I've asked this not in a judgmental way but rather to gain wisdom to prevent myself from falling. I realized when reflecting that we assume that the moment someone experiences success, they're faithful, but this isn't the case. Many successful people aren't faithful to God, and many faithful people are unsuccessful, at least by the world's standards.

Over the years, I've focused my energy on being faithful, which matters most to God. Jesus is more worried about the *quality* of your life than the *quantity*. If this seems hard to believe, in Matthew 25, Jesus says the same thing to the man with five talents as He does to the one with two. Both were told, *"Well done, my good and faithful servant."* Jesus doesn't add to the five-talent person, *Oh, and by the way, you're the employee of the month.* He says the same thing. This is amazingly freeing when you see it. God wants you to be faithful to the opportunities He's placed before you.

God's operating system is different from the rest of the world. As John Ortberg said, *God cares far more about who you become than what you get done!* Success is when we try to earn something we don't have, while faithfulness is living out what we already have. As Christians, we need to stop comparing our success to others and start living faithfully as a son or daughter of God. This is incredibly freeing. We're called to remember who we are. We're heirs to the kingdom of God, sons or daughters of God, joining God in the renewal of things. We help bring His kingdom to this earth. We're ambassadors for the most important person in the entire universe. We've been entrusted with gifts and talents to help wake the world up to Jesus. That's our identity. Our call is to live faithfully to God, and God rewards faithfulness. For those who are faithful, He rewards them with more of Himself. God will give us more of His love, more of His patience, more purpose, more passion, more joy, more boldness and more power. What we need to turn this world upside down isn't more successful people. What we need is more faithful people.

**APPLICATION:** Today, remember that God is more interested in who you become than what you get done.

**PRAYER:** Spend time asking God if you're living faithfully from your identity as a son or daughter of God. Ask Him to show you if you compare yourself to others' success. Thank Him for your position as a child of God.

# FAITHFULNESS IN OUR FINANCES

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*Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully."*

2 Corinthians 9:6-7 (NLT)

Imagine you saw a farmer who never planted a seed sitting around waiting for vegetables to grow. You would scratch your head because there is a principle that you sow first, then you reap. This is the same principle God applies to your finances. It's easy to say, *once I get in a better situation or once I get this next promotion, then I'll start to tithe*. You're waiting for God to be faithful to you without sowing anything. The more you give, the more you give God the chance to show His faithfulness.

When it comes to tithing, God isn't putting you to the test to see what you're made of. He's putting you to the test to show you what He's made of! It's important, though, that you don't give reluctantly or out of compulsion. Rather you give to show your faithfulness to God. You cannot say God is first in your life and not have Him first in your finances. When you have a hobby you love, you give your resources—time and money—to that particular thing. If you love God, you will give your resources—time and money—to God.

The Bible tells us that we're stewards of our finances. This means that everything we have is God's, and we've been entrusted with it. If we view everything as God's, it would be easier for us to tithe. We can think, *Well, God didn't go to work for me. God didn't build this company or put the long hours in*. True, but where do our opportunities come from? Where do our natural skills and abilities come from? When we slow down and look around, we understand that every good and perfect gift is from above.

Finances reveal where our trust is because nothing gives us more security or insecurity in this world than finances. If we view everything as God's, He has more than enough to care for us. Our jobs are to be faithful to give what He places on our hearts. If you've never given before, start giving regularly. If you're giving regularly, pray about giving your tithe or 10%. If you're giving your tithe, pray about Spirit-led giving, where you ask God what specific percentage He's calling you to give. Just remember this truth, you can never outgive God. He's the most generous person in the whole universe.

**APPLICATION:** Every good and perfect gift is from above. Your job is to steward it.

**PRAYER:** God, Help me to be generous because You are generous. Help me to see that everything I have is from You.

Spend time asking God what He's calling you to give from your finances or how He's encouraging you with what you already give. Ask Him to make your next step in being faithful with your finances clear.

# FAITHFULNESS WHEN WE DON'T FEEL IT

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*Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God.* Psalm 42:5 (NIV)

One of the major pitfalls for followers of Jesus is putting too much stock into our feelings. Feelings can serve us, but they can also mislead us. Why do we wake up one morning feeling great, and the next morning, we're ready to burn the world down? The culprit—our feelings.

One of the keys to spiritual growth, when it comes to feelings is to stop listening to ourselves and start preaching to ourselves. The Psalmist above has some feelings that begin speaking to him. He doesn't suppress them. He acknowledges them. Suppression will cause us to deal with things sideways, numbing or trying to escape pain, which doesn't work. We must face our feelings head-on. However, the Psalmist shows us that once our feelings speak, we speak back. Again, we must stop listening to our feelings and start preaching to ourselves.

Notice the Psalmist tells his feelings what to do. He says, *I know I'm feeling this, soul, but I'll put my hope in God. I'll praise Him even if it doesn't make sense.* I've learned that we must preach our best messages to ourselves. We should be honest about how we feel. We should even share our feelings with others, but we need to preach the promises of God to ourselves. This transformative practice helps us in our formational journey of becoming more like Jesus. We need to choose which thoughts we choose to focus on each day.

Listen to what Martin Llyod Jones says, *Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them, but they start talking to you, bringing back yesterday's problems, etc. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you. The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself.*

A leader told me, *Bryan, in life, the hardest person to lead will be yourself.* He was right. We quickly see what others should do. However, our feelings, or attempts to suppress them, cause us to feel overwhelmed in our faith. The good news is, there's a way to greater peace in the Spirit. It's to speak the promises over our feelings each day. This allows us to deal with what's in front of us in a way that builds faith instead of stress.

**APPLICATION:** Today, don't listen to yourself. Instead, preach to yourself the promises of God.

**PRAYER:** Bring all the issues you're facing to God. Write them out or say them aloud. One by one, bring those to God and let Him speak truth and peace over each area. Wait until you feel like He's speaking. It may take a while to slow down and hear Him.

# A LONG OBEDIENCE IN THE SAME DIRECTION

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*"If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities. And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven? And if you are not faithful with other people's things, why should you be trusted with things of your own?"* Luke 16:10 (NLT)

There are two ways in which God brings transformation:

1. Breakthrough
2. A Process

Sometimes, God instantly heals an addiction or immediately gives great faith. However, there are other times when it is a process. The disciples are wonderful examples of this. Peter drops his net to follow Jesus, but it's a process for him to experience the true transformation he expected much sooner. This is why he was so confident he wouldn't deny Jesus.

I love breakthroughs and pray for more in my life and yours. However, sometimes following God is a journey. I can tell you that for years I prayed for a passion that would cause the things of this world to *grow strangely dim*, as the old hymn goes, but I never experienced it. Some friends did, and I wondered what was wrong with me. It seemed that one prayer time, and they were forever changed. For me, the passion and fire for God developed over time.

The same is true with forgiveness. Some people have a breakthrough where they're freed the first time they pray, while others spend much of their lives learning to let go of unforgiveness. I don't know why it happens like this, but it does. It also should offer relief, knowing there's nothing wrong with you. Don't give up if your passion for God isn't where you want it to be. Stay the course. Like a fire is slowly kindled, if you stay faithful to meet with God, He will begin to fan into flame a greater faith. Just remember, it's a process.

One of my favorite definitions of faith is *a long obedience in the same direction*. I love this because we usually hear something, get fired up and try to get where we desire overnight. The motives are good, but the practice isn't. Spiritually we must choose consistency over intensity. Malcolm Gladwell, author of *Outliers: The Story of Success*, wrote that it takes 10,000 hours to become an expert in anything. He said, *10,000 hours of deliberate practice are needed to become world-class in any field*. I'm unsure if it takes precisely 10,000 hours, but I know it takes a long time. Remember that faithfulness is a long obedience in the same direction. We must choose consistency that leads us to intensity over time!

**APPLICATION:** Today, choose consistency over intensity. Create a plan to spend time with God daily.

**PRAYER:** Ask God to speak to you about how to spend time with Him daily. Remember, God is the God of creativity and how you connect with God might be a little different than I do but listen for God to speak about how you can be consistent with Him.

## DELIGHT GROWS FAITHFULNESS

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*The one thing I ask of the LORD—the thing I seek most—is to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, delighting in the LORD’s perfections and meditating in His Temple. For He will conceal me there when troubles come; He will hide me in His sanctuary. He will place me out of reach on a high rock.*

Psalm 27:4-5 (NLT)

The Psalmist says the one thing he asks for is to delight in the Lord. We don’t start with duty. Instead, we begin with delight. We look upon God. We see the power and majesty of Jesus, and we delight in Him. This is the starting place. To delight in God above everything else, we must remember He is the most joyful being in the universe. He isn’t heavy or weighed down by the weight of the world. He is full of joy and delight. Before we do our duties for Him, we must learn to first delight in Him. Otherwise, we’ll burn out or become distracted.

In a culture of intellect, wisdom and enlightenment, it seems delight feels elementary or out of touch. Yet, it’s central to the Kingdom of God. I need to grow in this area. It’s easy to be aware of what we lack or have lost instead of thanking God for what we have. Perhaps, that children’s song had it right: *This is the day the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad in it.*

When we constantly need entertainment, it indicates that we aren’t living in the joy of the Lord. The more we learn to delight in God, the less we desire the things of the world. Complacency creates a chill that kills the fire of God. If our fire is burning out, we must ask, *What am I seeking first?* Any joy we experience today can’t compete with the joy of the Lord. In His presence is the fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11). Reflect on that. Sit. Thank God for the life available. Receive it. Smile.

**APPLICATION:** Today, your main job is to delight in God. Delight draws you deeper into the presence of God.

**PRAYER:** Try sitting for a few moments and think about how wonderful, powerful and perfect God is. That this amazing God who we delight in delights in spending time with us. Thank God for this amazing truth.



# FAITHFULNESS TO NOT GIVE UP

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*Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a sleeping mat. They tried to take him inside to Jesus, but they couldn't reach Him because of the crowd. So, they went up to the roof and took off some tiles. Then they lowered the sick man on his mat down into the crowd, right in front of Jesus. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the man, "Young man, your sins are forgiven."*

Luke 5:18-20 (NLT)

In the Bible, there are 40 stories of Jesus healing someone. What I find interesting is that 34 of these stories happen when friends bring their friends to Jesus. Only in 6 does Jesus find them, or they go themselves. In the passage above, some people are desperate for their friend to encounter the healing touch of Jesus. However, they have a problem—they can't get to Him, there are too many people crowding Jesus. But in their faithfulness, they do something radical. They cut a hole in the roof and lowered their friend to Jesus to be healed. Jesus heals this man because of the faith of his friends.

There is nothing more important than someone experiencing the healing touch of Jesus. Spiritually, we are surrounded by people who probably won't reach Jesus unless we bring them. Rest assured, the moment we try to get them to Jesus, we'll likely have a few obstacles. We might run into resistance from them, some awkward conversations, and some might not like our methods. All I know is that there will likely be resistance. Don't be surprised by this. We should expect this. Most importantly, we shouldn't give up.

This man wouldn't have been healed if his friends had given up. Some of our friends will be spiritually healed, meaning they will come to faith in Jesus if we remain faithful. This story reminds us that we're called to be faithful to get our friends and family to the feet of Jesus. Sometimes it can be overwhelming to think about trying to impact the world. Our job isn't necessarily to impact the entire world. Instead, it's to impact our world. God has placed us in communities, in our jobs, in our schools, and our neighborhoods. We're God's plan to reach those around us. Think about that. God has placed us in a very specific place at this time in history. We must be faithful to look for God's opportunities daily.

**APPLICATION:** No matter what resistance you face, be faithful to bring others to Jesus today.

**PRAYER:** Spend time praying for specific people today. Ask God to allow you to tell them about Jesus. Ask Him for the courage to remain steadfast in the face of resistance.

# LUKEWARM

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*"I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were either one or the other! But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth!"* **Revelation 3:15-16 (NLT)**

Christ doesn't begin His address to the church of Laodicea positively but with condemnation of the lukewarm nature of their faith. Christ would rather the members of this church be hot or cold, in or out, rather than neutral. It should shock us that Christ would rather us be antagonistic to our faith than lukewarm.

The imagery of Christ spitting the Laodicean members out of His mouth is meant to be disgusting. Does this image describe you?

Jon Bloom says, *If a fever is a symptom of disease in the body, lukewarmness is a symptom of the disease of unfaithfulness in the soul.*

Jesus' stark example should shake us up. Are we on fire for the Lord or complacent in our approach to prayer and worship, mindlessly going through the motions? The idea of being spit out should deter us from a lackluster faith and move us towards a faith ignited in Christ, the mission of God, and love for people.

**APPLICATION:** Ask Christ to show you ways you've grown complacent towards Him. Write them down. Ask Him to rouse your spirit in those areas.

**PRAYER:**

Christ,  
Ignite my faith in You. Point out ways I've grown complacent. God, guide me to people who'll encourage my growth in devotion and steps to warm my heart in faith. Please help me share that fire with others.  
Amen.

# POVERTY

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*"You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' and you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked."*

**Revelation 3:17 (NLT)**

The Laodiceans would describe themselves as self-sufficient because of their wealth, but Christ condemns this attitude. He calls them *poor and blind and naked* (v. 17).

The word poor is interesting because the Laodiceans were known for their great wealth. In this context, Christ is speaking specifically to their spiritual poverty. This should immediately remind us of another picture that Jesus gave us of treasure:

*"Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

**Matthew 6:19 (CSB)**

**APPLICATION:** The poverty of earthly riches is a better plight than the poverty of the soul. Focus on where you invest your time, energy, money and gifts. Are you investing in your heavenly portfolio or earthly treasures?

## **PRAYER:**

God,

Please guide me as I invest my time, energy, money and gifts today. Help re-orient my mind towards my heavenly investment portfolio. Please open my eyes to the opportunities to help others. Give me someone today who I can invest in spiritually. Give me the courage and wisdom to do so with Your heart.

Amen.

# BLINDNESS

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*"You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' and you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked."*

**Revelation 3:17 (NLT)**

The Laodiceans would describe themselves as self-sufficient because of their wealth, but Christ condemns this attitude. He calls them *poor and blind and naked* (v. 17).

Secondly, Jesus describes the Laodiceans as blind. Many scholars believe there was a famous remedy for deficient eyesight in nearby Phrygia, and Laodiceans would have sold it. Once again, Jesus is taking a unique strength and commanding them to rely on Christ instead of their resources.

*Then Jesus told him, "I entered this world to render judgment—to give sight to the blind and to show those who think they see that they are blind."*

**John 9:39 (NLT)**

Only Christ can give spiritual sight. But often, we rely only on what we see around us. How much more could we know if we had Christ's eyes? How would our actions change if we could see the world as Jesus does?

**APPLICATION:** Consider an area of your life that needs more of Jesus' spiritual vision. Take a moment to seek clarity from Him.

**PRAYER:**

God,

Give me the eyes of Your Son Jesus. As Jesus told the Laodiceans and as He taught in John, give me the sight that only He can provide. I pray we see people, circumstances and our culture through Your spiritual lens.

Amen.

# NAKEDNESS

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"You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' and you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked."

Revelation 3:17 (NLT)

The Laodiceans would describe themselves as self-sufficient because of their wealth, but Christ condemns this attitude. He calls them *poor and blind and naked* (v. 17).

The last term Jesus uses to describe the Laodiceans in v. 17 is *naked*. In ancient culture, nakedness was the picture of ultimate humiliation (2 Samuel 10:4, Isaiah 20:4), and expensive clothes were a way to honor people (Esther 6:6-11, Daniel 5:29).

Calling the Laodiceans *naked* would rouse feelings of shame and humiliation. Likewise, Jesus emphasizes this condemnation by challenging them to "*buy white garments*" from Him in v.18. Laodicea was known for their clothes made exclusively with black wool.

Jesus is trying to make clear that their riches have made them complacent and self-reliant. In the kingdom of God, we must learn to rely upon the Holy Spirit that indwells us, Christ's provision in His finished work on the cross, and God's divine sovereignty. But we're often drawn to our methods, strengths and resources.

**APPLICATION:** Accept a challenge today to spend two or three minutes quietly and present yourself to God as you are. You can share a short prayer such as, *Father, I am here*, or *Jesus be with me*. Then allow your mind and heart to slow down and be present with God.

## PRAYER:

God,

It can be so easy for me to fall into patterns of self-reliance instead of coming to You first. Today I ask that You be my guide. Please remind me of Your presence throughout the day and help me as I try to interact with people around me.

I thank You in advance for what You'll do.  
Amen.

# DISCIPLINE

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*"I correct and discipline everyone I love. So be diligent and turn from your indifference."*

**Revelation 3:19 (NLT)**

Do you believe that God's correction is a sign of His love?

Our images of discipline and love are often separate from one another. Yet the Bible shows us that the Lord disciplines those, and only those, whom He loves. This is something we need to spend some time reorienting our hearts around. As we see in the letter to these churches, Jesus spends much time correcting them. It's how He shows His love.

His goal is to turn us around. To move us from indifference to devotion and mission. This is the picture of repentance. Christ corrects our wrongs, and we respond by turning away from our wrongdoing and towards Christ's instructions, figuratively in our hearts and literally in our actions.

Christ makes it clear that it's Him, and Him alone, doing the correcting. It's personal and loving. Yet many of us, based on our life experiences, may have different pictures of discipline.

**APPLICATION:** Here are two responses to today's passage:

1. If you struggle with discipline and love working together seamlessly, pray that the Lord will correct your vision.
2. If you don't, ask God in prayer to point out any wayward way in you.

**PRAYER:**

God,

The picture of discipline today is often skewed. Please help me understand discipline as You intend. As I pray, I ask You to reveal areas in my life that need Your correction. Move my heart away from where I'm lingering and towards You. Give me practical ways to step towards You today.

Amen.

# INVITATION

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*"Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear My voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends."*

**Revelation 3:20 (NLT)**

Jesus is outside the door knocking, inviting those inside to answer His knock. The Greek tense of the verb *knocking* illustrates someone trying to get in, not just a rhythmic tap at the door. This is Christ's appeal, moving from a congregational letter to a personal invitation.

There's a possibility that the tender knock of the Lord may reach some individuals but not the entire church. Even though this church has gone awry, it's being invited back into fellowship with the Father. Christ would not only eat with them but invite them into a continual relationship which is encouraging.

Have you felt you've missed the invitation of Christ? Are you or have you felt like you're in a dry and weary land?

**APPLICATION:** Take a moment and accept the invitation of Jesus to enjoy a meal with Him. Spend time in His presence, thankful for his availability and graciousness towards you.

**PRAYER:**

Jesus,

You are so good to me. God, please share some time with me today. Speak to my weary heart. I'm ready to enter whatever conversation You want with me today. I am thankful for You.

Amen.

# VICTORY

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*"Those who are victorious will sit with Me on My throne, just as I was victorious and sat with My Father on His throne."*

**Revelation 3:21 (NLT)**

Jesus ends His letter to the church of Laodicea with a call to persevere by encouraging those who obey all He has written to join Him on His throne. How did Jesus come to sit on this throne given to Him by His Father? Jesus earned that seat through His death.

Jesus' call to those who will obey is that they remain faithful to Him despite future persecution. He promises to share His throne with those who do so. This throne is a seat of honor. What a fantastic image: sitting next to Christ after our life on earth is over, sharing the bounty of His love and rightful throne. What a day that will be!

The journey will have its challenges, but we must maintain sight of the sweet reward Jesus offers us.

**APPLICATION:** Take a moment and thank God for what He's accomplished through Jesus and applied through His Spirit. We are a blessed people indeed.

**PRAYER:**

God,

Help me remain zealous in my love and devotion to You. Help me see glimpses of Your glory when my days are hard and long. Translate the challenges of this world in a way that makes spiritual sense to me, and provide the resources needed to remain faithful to You.

Amen.



# OVERFLOWING WITH GRACE AND PEACE

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*Paul, Silas, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the LORD Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.*

1 Thessalonians 1:1 (NIV)

Sometimes I overlook the words of introduction to the New Testament letters like those in 1 Thessalonians 1:1. At first glance, they seem like a good way to start a letter, but I rarely think there's much real meaning in the opening sentences. This time, something was different. The words *grace* and *peace* stood out to me in a new way. Sure, I know Jesus came to bring grace and peace, but how often do I feel this way? How often do I reflect on God's grace?

As I read further, it seems Paul's opening statement sets the tone for the entire letter. Before directing and teaching the Thessalonians, he reminded them of God's grace and peace. This is also an excellent reminder for us. The reality is that we cannot—and were not designed to—do life on our own and that wandering away from God's intimate love and tender care only leads to worry, fear and discontentment. Our satisfaction and worth are only found in the grace and peace of God.

**APPLICATION:** Today, find a quiet moment to sit with God. Ask Him to take you back to times when you felt a deep sense of His grace. Reflect on times you experienced peace from the Holy Spirit, even amid challenging circumstances. Ask God to help you experience His faithful love as you face today's challenges and responsibilities.

**PRAYER:**

God,

Thank you for the grace that removes my guilt and relieves me of shame. Thank You for the comfort and peace You've made freely and endlessly available because of what Jesus did. Please help me walk closer with You today.

In Jesus' name,  
Amen.

# FAITH, LOVE AND HOPE

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*We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 (NIV)

Superstitions are simply an improper relationship between cause and effect. Walking under a ladder won't give you seven years of bad luck. Knocking on wood doesn't mean trouble won't come your way. Stepping on a crack won't break your mamma's back. One thing doesn't always lead to another.

I'm not superstitious, but unfortunately, I lived a long time with an improper view of cause and effect. I believed that my actions caused God to do things. I wrongly believed that I earned God's love by doing good things. I thought that when I did something wrong, God loved me less. It even crossed my mind that if God didn't answer a prayer, it was because I didn't have enough faith.

This passage reveals something different. God is the one who causes the effect, not the other way around. My work doesn't earn God's love. It's His love that compels me to work. The faith and hope He's given me is the reason (the cause) for what I do (the effect). What a great reminder that my strength and power come from God!

**APPLICATION:** Today, stop striving. Give up the idea of trying to make God happy with you. Pay attention when doing things from a place of duty and obligation and ask God to refill your heart with His love. Surrender and ask God to increase your faith. Then, YES! By all means, do good things. Work hard. Love your neighbor. But do acts of goodness from a heart that overflows from God working in you.

## **PRAYER:**

God,

Thank You that I don't have to earn Your love. Thank You that I'm fully known and fully loved. Forgive me for doing things backward, forgetting that it's You working in me that produces good work. I ask You to deepen my faith, help me experience Your love, and fill me with hope so I can live my life more fully for You.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

# WORD AND POWER

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*For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that He has chosen you, because our Gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.*  
1 Thessalonians 1:4-5 (NIV)

I study the Bible frequently. I know a lot of excellent information. But this passage compels me to do something greater. I also want to live with the power of the Holy Spirit. Notice that the Gospel (Good News) goes forth not simply with words but also with power. Paul repeats this truth in **1 Corinthians 4:20 (NIV)**, *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.* I want more of this in my life. The power of God living in me and through me.

The reality is that we need both of these things: word and power. Over the years, I can see times I focused on one rather than the other. I would study and learn but forget about the power of the Holy Spirit to work miracles, and other times I'd ask God to work in mighty ways but leave my Bible unopened.

**APPLICATION:** Write the words WORD and POWER on a notecard and put it somewhere you'll see it this week. Devote time to studying God's Word. Learn. Read. Seek to understand. Also, spend much time in prayer, asking God to work miracles around you: He'd restore marriages, heal sick friends and family members, and reach out and save people who are lost. Ask God to show you other ways He wants you to apply today's passage to your life.

**PRAYER:**

Dear heavenly Father,  
Thank You for preserving the Bible over all these years. Thank You for the truth. Thank You also for the power of the Holy Spirit. Thank You that the same Spirit who created the heavens and the earth also lives inside me. Help me live according to Your Word and in the power of Your Spirit today. In Jesus' name,  
Amen.

# LET YOUR LIFE SPEAK

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*You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore, we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.*

1 Thessalonians 1:6-9 (NIV)

Our words matter. What we believe matters. But often, what draws people to Jesus is simply the life we live, day in and day out. I've had a handful of mentors and teachers. They taught me a lot, but their most significant influence was how they lived and the way they cared for their families. Their values were revealed by the choices they made.

You've likely heard the phrase, *Preach the Gospel at all times and if necessary, use words.*

Implicit in this saying is the understanding that the most powerful sermons are often unspoken. When we have integrity and live consistently by our standards, people notice. When we radiate joy and happiness, they see even more. In your desire to help the people around you come to know Jesus, remember that living out your faith in everyday life may be your greatest influence.

**APPLICATION:** Today, let your light shine. Allow God to work in you so your life radiates who He is to the people around you. When faced with a decision, do what is right. Spend your time on things that matter. Seek to do good. Make choices that not only benefit you but will also be a testimony of the character and nature of God.

## **PRAYER:**

Father,  
Thank You for the work You've done in my life. Thank You for the privilege of telling others about You. I pray You'd keep changing me on the inside so I not only use words to tell people about You but others may see You by how I live.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

# WHAT'S IN THE WAY?

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*We are human, but we don't wage war as humans do. We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.*

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 (NLT)

What was in my way? I wanted a career change and applied for different positions that interested me. I prayed and sought God and moved ahead. I was frustrated because I couldn't even get an interview! This was not the direction God wanted me to go, but my pride told me I should get one of these jobs. Once I submitted to God's authority and direction, He clearly showed me the path He wanted me to take, which wasn't one I had thought of at all.

Things in our lives can keep us from knowing God and having a deeper relationship with Him. What's an obstacle for you? Maybe it's a phone or social media. Perhaps it's an unhealthy relationship. These obstacles are unique to each of us and require us to honestly reflect on our lives and ask God to help us identify what they are.

Whatever's standing between you and a more intimate relationship with God must be removed so you can grow closer to Him. It will be difficult and possibly even painful, but it will be worth it!

**APPLICATION:** Spend time reflecting on and writing down how much time you spend on different things. Do any of these jump out as potential obstacles? Pray about these and ask God to show you what you need to remove from your daily life.

## **PRAYER:**

Dear God,

I know that there are things that come between me and You. Reveal these to me and help me overcome them. I want to draw closer to You, knowing these obstacles must be removed first. Give me the strength to put these aside and look to You. I love and thank You and pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

# DON'T GIVE UP!

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*I remember your genuine faith, for you share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother, Eunice. And I know that same faith continues strong in you. This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you. For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.*

**2 Timothy 1:5-7 (NLT)**

I don't know about you, but I can easily lose hope and faith in my everyday life. As outside forces push in, I can become fearful and want to disengage. I listen to voices that clearly aren't from God, telling me I'm not good enough and will never be good enough.

The enemy wants to separate us from God and others, knowing that we become weaker in isolation. But God has given us a new spirit of strength. The Holy Spirit dwells in us. We need to look to Him and ask for His intercession! Don't let fear bring you down. Instead, call on God to give you the strength to overcome.

*Lead me on, Lord; Holy Spirit, open up my eyes. Holy Spirit, open up my heart; Open up my ears. Onwards You show me; where You lead me I will follow.*

**Hymn of the Holy Spirit** by Pat Barrett

**APPLICATION:** As you go through your day, intentionally call on the Holy Spirit in struggles and successes. Let this become a rhythm of your daily life.

**PRAYER:**

Gracious Father,

I thank You for being with me as I meet the challenges of each day. Help me not lose hope, but instead seek You and call on the Holy Spirit to help me have courage and strength.

In Jesus' mighty name, we pray,

Amen.

# GRATITUDE TO OUR GRACIOUS GOD

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*Now all glory to God, Who is able, through His mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to Him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.*

**Ephesians 3:20-21 (NLT)**

God provides so much to us, which should lead us to a place of gratefulness. He gave us the Word and the Spirit. How amazing! As we look at these great gifts, we should all show gratitude to God for them because He certainly didn't have to give them to us. Through His grace and love, we can receive and use these in our lives.

Billy Graham said *A spirit of thankfulness is one of the most distinctive marks of a Christian whose heart is attuned to the Lord.*

Thankfulness should flow from us if we're genuinely tapped into His power and Word.

**APPLICATION:** As you read these verses, stop and think of ways God has blessed you. Write them down and then thank God for each one.

## **PRAYER:**

Abba Father,

I want to say thank You. Thank You for sending Your Son to earth to die for us. Thank You for sending the Holy Spirit to us. Thank You for loving us so much and giving us grace. Please help me remember to praise You always. Amen.

# CELEBRATE WHO HE IS

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*Sing a new song to the LORD! Let the whole earth sing to the LORD! Sing to the LORD; praise His name. Each day proclaim the Good News that He saves. Publish His glorious deeds among the nations. Tell everyone about the amazing things He does. Great is the LORD! He is most worthy of praise! He is to be feared above all gods. The gods of other nations are mere idols, but the LORD made the heavens! Honor and majesty surround Him; strength and beauty fill His sanctuary. O nations of the world, recognize the LORD; recognize that the LORD is glorious and strong. Give to the LORD the glory He deserves! Bring your offering and come into His courts. Worship the LORD in all His holy splendor. Let all the earth tremble before Him. Tell all the nations, "The LORD reigns!" The world stands firm and cannot be shaken. He will judge all peoples fairly. Let the heavens be glad, and the earth rejoice! Let the sea and everything in it shout His praise! Let the fields and their crops burst out with joy! Let the trees of the forest rustle with praise before the LORD, for He is coming! He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with justice, and the nations with His truth.*

**Psalm 96 (NLT)**

Everyone loves a good celebration. Whether for an anniversary, birthday or another significant milestone. It's always a wonderful occasion when we gather friends and family to celebrate. And usually, there's cake! As we celebrate 30 years of Brookwood Church, let's stay focused on who we celebrate week in and week out. It's never about any one of us. We celebrate our Creator. Savior. Righteous Judge. Returning King. He alone is worthy of worship and praise.

Timothy Keller said this about worship:

*The word 'worship' is from Old English 'worth-ship'-the ascribing of highest worth. Whatever you value or love most-whatever is your greatest source of significance and security—you are worshipping in your heart. Worship in church is just an expression of that.*

The worship and celebration of who God is shouldn't be limited to an hour on Sunday morning. Worship is a lifestyle that should permeate every part of who we are!

**APPLICATION:** Take a few moments today to reflect on God's strength, majesty and power. Thank Him for His goodness, grace and mercy. Consider the names of Christ and what they reveal about Him. Take a few moments to listen to the Phil Wickham worship song **1,000 Names**.

## **PRAYER:**

Father,

You alone are worthy of worship and praise. Thank You for who You are—the all-powerful God of the universe Who loves me. Help me celebrate You every day of my life.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.



# CELEBRATE WHAT HE'S DONE

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*Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the LORD: "I will sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously; He has hurled both horse and rider into the sea. The LORD is my strength and my song; He has given me victory. This is my God, and I will praise Him—my father's God, and I will exalt Him! The LORD is a warrior; Yahweh is His name! Pharaoh's chariots and army He has hurled into the sea. The finest of Pharaoh's officers are drowned in the Red Sea. The deep waters gushed over them; they sank to the bottom like a stone. "Your right hand, O LORD, is glorious in power. Your right hand, O LORD, smashes the enemy.*

**Exodus 15:1-6 (NLT)**

When you think of miracles in the Bible, one of the first that may come to mind is the parting of the Red Sea. Immediately following this supernatural, physics-defying demonstration of God's power, the Israelites sing the passage above in celebration. They acknowledge that God has triumphed, granting them freedom and victory over their pursuers.

Do we stop to give credit where credit is due? James, the brother of Jesus, says this: *Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, Who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow.*

**James 1:17 (NLT)**

The danger lies in our forgetfulness. Three days after this song of praise, the Israelites are full of complaints because they're thirsty. Within a month, they wish they were back in slavery in Egypt because their bellies aren't full. May we not forget how God has moved in the past when our present is less than perfect.

**APPLICATION:** Count your blessings. Write down as many instances as you can remember where you've seen God move in your life. Commit to reviewing that list every day for a week. When we remember how God has moved on our behalf, it helps us remain faithful to the One Who's been so faithful to us. Consider listening to the worship song **What He's Done** by Passion.

## **PRAYER:**

Almighty God,  
You are the One Who blesses me in every way. Thank You for how You've moved on my behalf in the past. Help me trust You to continue to do so all the days of my life.  
In Jesus' name,  
Amen.

## CELEBRATE HIS CREATION

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*You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank You for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in Your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed. How precious are Your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered! I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! And when I wake up, You are still with me!*

**Psalm 139:13-18 (NLT)**

If you were to meet your favorite celebrity or professional athlete, you'd call that an event worth celebrating. If they spent intentional time with you, asking questions to get to know you, what you've been through, etc., you'd likely be overwhelmed that someone so significant would care to get to know an ordinary person like you. As amazing as you are (and you are), this make-believe scenario will likely never come to fruition.

And yet!

The God of the Universe, King of kings and Lord of lords knows everything about you. He has seen you from the beginning, as He uniquely hand-crafted you in your mother's womb. Every day of your life was fully known to Him before one day passed. And knowing all your flaws and failures, He still thinks more about you in a single day than you can comprehend. This is an overwhelming kind of love.

Yesterday we looked at James 1:17, but today let's look at the next verse: *He chose to give birth to us by giving us His true Word. And we, out of all creation, became His prized possession.*

**James 1:18 (NLT)**

Out of everything that our Creator has formed, you are His favorite. Our wounds of insecurity may make this difficult to believe, but He not only tells us this in His Word, He shows us with His actions.

**APPLICATION:** Take a few moments to observe your own body. Consider the complexities of this magnificent creation—how your inner parts connect and function. Tell God how thankful you are for His handiwork and implore Him to grant you further awareness of His love for you. Reflect on these things by listening to **So Will I** by Hillsong Worship.

### PRAYER:

Creator God,  
Thank You for making me so wonderfully complex. Your love and focus on me is overwhelming. Help me walk in the confident assurance of Your love. I celebrate Your artistry in all Your creation.  
In Jesus' name, Amen.

# CELEBRATE THE LOST BEING FOUND

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So Jesus told them this story: "If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.' In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!

*"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Won't she light a lamp and sweep the entire house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbors and say, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents."*

Luke 15:3-10 (NLT)

We've all lost something at some point. We might accept that it's gone forever if it's insignificant. But for the stuff that we need or deem valuable—we'll tear apart the couch, car, junk drawer and everywhere we can think of in the search. When the lost item remains elusive, it's incredibly frustrating. It can often become an unhealthy fixation until the situation is resolved, and we bask in the sweet joy of finally reclaiming that which was lost!

That's how God feels when those who are lost are ultimately found. Verse 10 says there is joy in the presence of God's angels for that one sinner repenting. Who does that imply is doing the rejoicing? Indeed, the angels are joining in, but it seems that this is God Himself in a moment of exultation.

A few chapters later, Jesus says: *For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.*

Luke 19:10 (NLT)

**APPLICATION:** Do we celebrate those who are lost being found? A non-believer passing from death to life in Christ is miraculous! Take a few moments to pray for lost family, friends or coworkers. Thank God for your loved ones who are believers. Consider listening to **Homecoming** by Bethel to reflect further on this concept.

## PRAYER:

Gracious God,  
Thank You for the gift of Your Son, Jesus. His perfect life, His willing death, and His undeniable resurrection are the foundation of our hope. Help me as I seek to be Your ambassador so that many in my life will come to know You. In Jesus' name,  
Amen.

# CELEBRATE THE LOVE OF GOD

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*What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since He did not spare even His own Son but gave Him up for us all, won't He also give us everything else? Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for His own? No one—for God Himself has given us right standing with Himself. Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and He is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us.*

*Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean He no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? (As the Scriptures say, "For Your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.") No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, Who loved us.*

*And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**Romans 8:31-39 (NLT)**

Unconditional love is what we aspire to, but if we're honest, our love for others is often conditional. We love those who love us back—who provide for or benefit us somehow. And because of this, we can struggle to believe that the love we receive from others is unconditional. This line of thinking can reinforce our insecurities and relational barriers.

In one of the most beautiful passages in the Bible, the Apostle Paul assures us that nothing can ever stop God from loving us. Even when our circumstances are suboptimal, God still loves us. He is for us, not against us.

Corrie ten Boom, who spent time in Nazi concentration camps for harboring Jews to safety, once said: *There is no pit so deep, that God's love is not deeper still.*

**APPLICATION:** Focus on these three simple words today: God loves me. Not just people who seem to have it all together. Not just those who work in vocational ministry. Me. He loves me. He is for me, not against me. Don't lose sight of the truth that God loves every single person He has created. What tremendous love He has demonstrated at the cross. As you reflect, consider listening to the Hillsong Worship song **Who You Say I Am**.

## **PRAYER:**

Lord,

You see me, know me and love me. I don't deserve Your love, but You give it anyway. Thank You for being faithful in Your love even when I'm not. Help me remember today that You are for me, not against me. That Your love is unfailing and never-ending. In Jesus' name, Amen.

# CELEBRATE HIS PEACE

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*Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.*

*Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*

*And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.      **Philippians 4:4-9 (NLT)***

We live in tumultuous times. Everyone would likely agree with that statement. It seems there's unrest everywhere. Violence fills our schools and streets. Truthfully, the economy is a rollercoaster ride that none of us want to ride. The rise of social media shines a brilliant spotlight on all these things and more. No wonder depression and anxiety are at all-time highs.

And yet!

God the Father is still sovereign. Jesus is alive and will return to establish His eternal Kingdom. The Holy Spirit is among us. We may agree with these statements, but do they bring us joy and peace? Do we trust God? Celebrate Him? Does our thought life reflect that we've placed our trust in Him in every circumstance?

Hear the words of Jesus to His closest friends on the eve of His crucifixion: *"I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid."*

**John 14:27 (NLT)**

**APPLICATION:** Write out a list of various things that concern you—your stressors and anxiety inducers. Pray over this list. Ask God to help you live more fully in His peace. Then tear up the list and throw it away. You might also listen to the Mosaic MSC worship song **Tremble**.

## **PRAYER:**

God,

Help me trust You even during tumultuous times. Jesus, You are the Prince of Peace. May Your peace rule and reign in my heart and mind. Your joy is my strength.

In Jesus' name,  
Amen.

# CELEBRATE THE MISSION

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*Jesus came and told His disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* **Matthew 28:18-20 (NLT)**

*What's my purpose in life?* A question that all of us have wrestled with. The good news is that there's a clear answer. And it doesn't depend on where you go to school, what you do for a living, whom you're married to, or any other significant life decisions.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism asks and answers this question like this:  
*Q: What is the chief end of man?*  
*A: Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.*

One of the most important ways we glorify God is by sharing our faith, making disciples who make disciples—Kingdom multiplication. If salvation was only about going to heaven, the Lord could beam us up as soon as we're born again. But in His divine wisdom, He's chosen us to be His ambassadors.

The scope of this job is broader than professional Christians who speak from a stage or do mission work in a foreign country. We celebrate and honor Him by living every day of our ordinary lives on a mission. All believers are called. None are exempt.

**APPLICATION:** Who can you share your faith with? What's stopping you from doing so? Pray that God would embolden you to have faith-based conversations with those He's put on your heart. Then listen to a classic hymn, **Go Tell It on the Mountain**, available by several artists.

## **PRAYER:**

Father,  
Thank You for the mission of sharing Your light and love with the world. Please grant me the courage and conviction to communicate with clarity. I pray that the lost will be found and that my life will honor You as I seek to fulfill the Great Commission.  
In Jesus' name,  
Amen.







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580 Brookwood Point Place • Simpsonville SC 29681  
864.688.8200 • [brookwoodchurch.org](http://brookwoodchurch.org)