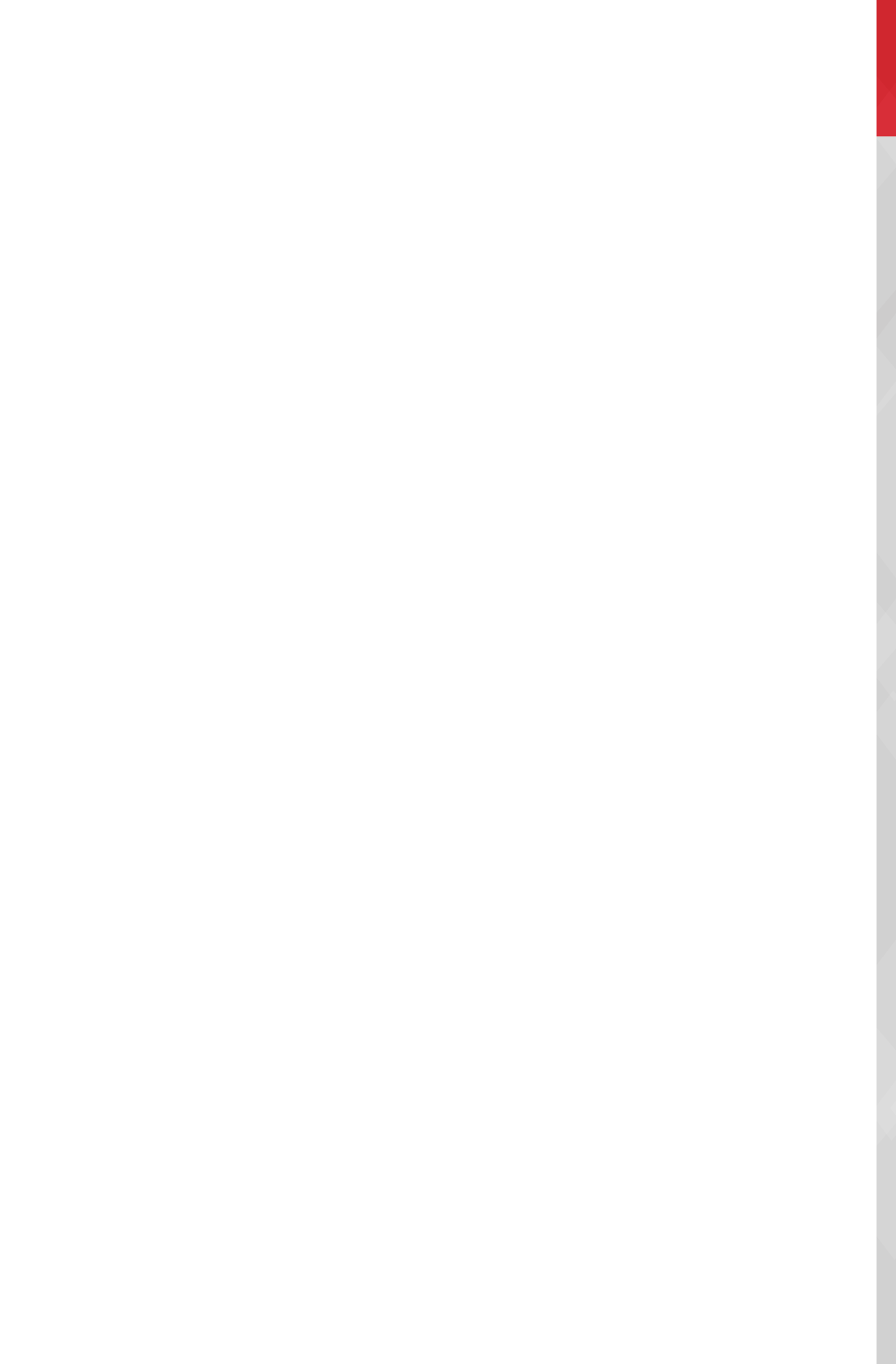


BUILD

Loving God. Loving People



Campaign Devotional Guide



A Message from Our Pastor



Most people, if they are honest, would have to admit that they struggle with dedicated time in prayer and devotion, either individually or as a family. Our culture is one that is busy and demanding; our attention span has been trained to be short and quick. Everything goes against setting aside a dedicated time of devotion.

If you already have a dedicated time set aside each day for devotional studies, I ask that you incorporate this devotional guide. By going through this devotional guide together as a church, we will begin to align ourselves with God and each other.

If you don't already have a dedicated devotional time as an individual or family, I encourage you to use this opportunity to add greater depth to your Christian walk. Our only desire is to provide you with a spiritual challenge that will allow you to listen to God's voice and experience a deeper sense of His presence.

You are joining many others at TPC on this spiritual journey, and your commitment to this daily devotional and time of prayer will enrich your life and open a new world of fellowship with God. Our desire is that each of us grow in obedience and God's grace as we move forward together on this journey of faith.

Wayne Neyland

Week One: Gratitude for the Past

♦Day One: Attitude of Gratitude

“Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” 1 Thess. 5:18 (NIV)

An attitude of gratitude puts everything and every circumstance in the proper perspective. It enables us to see the big picture and helps us to focus on God and His glory rather than on ourselves and our personal trials or triumphs. Such an attitude, openly expressed and lived-out, sends a powerful message to our families and friends: God is in control and I’m glad He is! We already know the ultimate outcome of life’s circumstances: “...in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). If we forget this promise we begin to take God for granted, and an attitude of gratitude is impossible. We can become self-focused and lose sight of what God is accomplishing in the greater scheme of things.

Baking a cake requires using a number of ingredients which, if eaten by themselves, are mostly distasteful: flour, raw eggs, baking powder, etc. But, if these same ingredients are carefully blended together and baked for the right period of time, you end up with a delicious dessert. God is at the “mixing bowl” of our lives. Our “flour and raw eggs” experiences, however distasteful, are the ingredients of a wonderful creation. We can give thanks in all circumstances because of our faith in God, knowing that the end result of all our experiences will be a perfect blend for our good and His glory.

In your family or devotional group, encourage each member to identify at least one good experience and one bad experience they have had recently. Take the time to give God thanks for both, remembering that from God’s perspective they are equally beneficial. It may be possible to identify the value of the finished product even as the discussion is going on. Conclude your devotion by reading Prov. 3:5-6 (NIV): “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”

Week One: Gratitude for the Past

♦ Day Two: Gratitude in the Face of Disappointment

“Yet the Lord, the God of Israel, chose me from my whole family to be the King over Israel.” 1 Chron. 28:4 (NIV)

This expression of gratitude immediately followed the greatest disappointment of King David’s life. He had just learned from God that he would not have the honor of providing leadership for the building of God’s Temple. David had said in 1 Chron. 28:2 that his heart had been set on building a magnificent dwelling-place for the God of Israel. Later, he describes the energy, enthusiasm, and unbridled generosity he had already invested in this God-honoring project: “With all my resources I have provided for the temple of my God — gold for the gold work, silver for the silver work, bronze for the bronze...besides in my devotion for the temple of my God I now give my personal treasures of gold and silver...” (1 Chron. 29:2-3 NIV)

After all of this sacrifice and preparation David learns that he would not be the man to build God’s Temple. What was his response? What would we do in the face of such disappointment? 1 Chronicles 28:4 gives us a true glimpse of the spirit of David, “a man after God’s own heart.” His response teaches us one of life’s greatest priorities: focusing on the goodness of God. Instead of throwing a “pity party,” reflect on how wonderfully gracious God has been to you. That’s exactly what David did. Upon learning that he would not be personally involved in building the Temple, he reminded himself and others around him of the incredible honor he already enjoyed: “Yet the Lord, the God of Israel, chose me from my whole family to be the King over Israel.” (1 Chron. 28:4 NIV)

David did not allow this disappointing circumstance to rob him of his joy, nor did he regret having sacrificed so much to build the Temple. He did not pout over his loss; he rejoiced in the honor which had been given to him as king and gave generously to the Temple project. David’s lost opportunity could have made him resentful or bitter. Instead, he maintained an attitude of gratitude and remained focused on the big picture of God’s purpose and glory.

Regardless of the disappointments you are faced with today, take the time to reflect on all the special expressions of God’s goodness in your life.

Week One: Gratitude for the Past

◆ Day Three: A Memorial for Gratitude

*“These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.”
Joshua 4:7b (NIV)*

Joshua had instructed the people to carry large stones from the bed of the Jordan River and place them on the Caanan side of the river. Arranged together, these stones provided a memorial of God’s power, provision, and purpose for the children of Israel. The Israelites would periodically return to this place, Gilgal, to express their gratitude for victories won in this new land. Significantly, they were commanded to bring their children with them on these occasions.

Carefully read Joshua 4:19-24. When the people of Israel were obedient to God’s instruction regarding these twelve stones, it provided a great opportunity to teach and instruct the next generation. “And he spoke unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, what mean these stones?” A child’s natural curiosity opens the door for a parent to testify of God’s remarkable power. Parents should lead their children back to the place where God has demonstrated His timely provision. It may be a story, a place, or even a picture, but whatever it is, let them see it over and over again until it becomes a defining moment in their lives and a monument to God’s grace.

Our capital stewardship campaign is an excellent opportunity for the entire church body, member by member, to build a “memorial of gratitude.” Communicate to your family members and friends that this memorial is not merely a building or a piece of property; it is, more importantly, the experience of trusting God and seeing Him come through. Gilgal was not just a pile of rocks. It was a powerful reminder of our indebtedness to God. The greatest heritage we can leave to the next generation is such a memorial of gratitude.

Week One: Gratitude for the Past

◆ Day Four: Communication of Gratitude

“Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you,” Mark 5:19 (NIV)

Jesus spoke these words after casting demons out of a man from Gadarene. His command was simple: go and tell others what I have done for you. What a powerful reminder this gives us of the need to express our thanks to God: Not just in private thanksgiving, but also in public acknowledgement of God’s goodness.

All believers face the danger of forgetting “how much the Lord has done for us.” When this occurs, we may grow timid in communicating gratitude both to God and to man. Our stewardship campaign is therefore a great opportunity for us to strengthen and renew a spirit of gratitude. Communicating gratitude is important for several reasons:

1. It makes us more reliant on God. Romans 1:21 tells of those who “when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were they thankful.” Thankfulness occurs inwardly, in what our heart expresses. Glorifying God happens publicly, in what our mouth confesses. Public expressions of gratitude strengthen one’s commitment to God while counteracting our human tendency to self-sufficiency and self-reliance.

2. It has a profound impact on those around us. Family and friends need to hear that our successes are not of our own making, but that we are beneficiaries of the goodness of God. Read David’s words in 1 Chronicles 29:11-13 to see how his gratitude set in motion a great celebration of sacrifice and praise among God’s people.

Following David’s example, take the time to identify some examples of God’s goodness to you and then express your gratitude to God in the presence of a friend or family members.

Week One: Gratitude for the Past

◆ Day Five: Gratitude as a Form of Worship

First Chronicles 29:10-20 is one of the greatest expressions of worship found in God's Word. Read this prayer in its entirety and reflect on the essence of true stewardship: the realization that God owns everything.

After you have read and reflected on this passage, take some time to consider the significance of being in partnership with God. Recognize Him not only as the senior partner but also as the sole financial backer of your life's venture. David was completely captivated by the reality of this, and as a result he became unreservedly focused on building the temple for God's glory. His leadership influenced others to contribute in the same spirit of sacrifice and praise. "The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord" (1 Chron. 29:9 NIV).

Relative to your situation, plan a worship time with your family or a small group of friends which includes the following three features of true worship.

1. Gratitude: The recognition that all we have has come from His hand. We are but channels through which the work of God is carried out. When one's life is lived primarily in consideration of Him, it is less likely that what He provides for Kingdom work will be squandered on self-gratification.

2. Sacrifice: David said, "I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing" (2 Sam. 24:24 NIV). Sacrifice always involves cost. It has little to do with how much one gives. What is more important is the measure of one's sacrifice. Did it truly cost us something? When it does, then we have set aside something and made it sacred.

3. Praise: The distinction between gratitude and praise is this: gratitude is appreciation for what God has done; praise is appreciation for who God is. David was not only giving thanks in his prayer, he was expressing praise. "Now our God, we give you thanks and praise thy glorious name" (1 Chron. 29:13 NIV). As you conclude your worship time, recognize God for the Provider He is and commit yourself to becoming a good steward of His provision.

Week Two: Faith for the Present

◆ Day One: The Testing of Faith

Abraham had to wait 25 years before the promised son was born. By then he was 100 years old; his wife, Sarah, was 90. Yet God superceded the laws of nature to allow the birth of a child to an elderly, barren couple. They named their son Isaac, meaning “laughter,” for he brought unspeakable joy to them.

After Isaac had grown into young manhood, the word of God came once again to Abraham. He commanded: “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah.” The message continued: “Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about” (Genesis 22:2).

Still believing, Abraham obeyed the voice of God and took his boy on that long, agonizing trip to the bleak slopes of Moriah. Though he did not comprehend God’s purpose, Abraham’s faith was not shaken. He complied with the instructions, placing his dear son on the altar and raising a knife to plunge into the young man’s chest. In the very act of lifting the knife to slay his son, God stopped him. Instead, he commanded Abraham to kill a ram caught in a nearby bush.

Would he have gone through with it? Would the old man have actually killed his own beloved son? We need not wonder. Hebrews 11:19 provides the answer: “Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.” Yes, he would have done it, for he was already expecting God to raise his son from death!

What an extraordinary story which causes us to wonder, what could we possibly have in common with Abraham? Many things! As God spoke to Abraham, He speaks to you. As God called Abraham to a life of obedience, He calls you. As God tested Abraham, He tests you. As God called Abraham to a life of faith, so God calls you.

Think on and discuss the parallels between yourself and Abraham. If possible, identify some specific ways these are revealed in your life.

Week Two: Faith for the Present

◆ Day Two: What Is Faith?

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)

In order to tap the endless resources of God, the believer must exercise faith by acting in obedience to God’s Word. As the Apostle Paul explained to the Romans, “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Romans 10:17). When one is prompted by the Word of God or by the leadership of the Spirit, obedience to that prompting is an expression of faith. Such a response enables one to enter into partnership with God, and gives the assurance of success even though the end may not be in sight.

When Noah was directed by God to build an ark, he obeyed by starting a project which lasted for 100 years. Noah had never experienced a flood nor had he even seen rain, yet he obeyed with regard only for the Lord. Since the command of God came without a specific schedule, Noah had to believe and act accordingly because faith has no time limit.

Hebrews 11:7 says that Noah, “when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family.” The fear was not fright, but a deep and abiding respect for the Lord and a confidence in His Word. Faith was the only reasonable response for Noah, as it is for us today. As we look to the church’s future, we can’t see it perfectly; but we can know that God will honor our obedience to Him in the commitments we make.

Encourage each member of your family or devotional group to ask, Lord, what do you want me to do in our capital stewardship campaign? Whatever His leading, respond in faith.

Week Two: Faith for the Present

◆ Day Three: Why Do We Need Faith?

A personal relationship with God is established by faith and a continuous fellowship with God is maintained by faith. Paul told the Colossians, “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him” (Col. 2:6). We receive Him by faith, and we walk in Him by faith. Without faith we cannot please God, and we cannot live effectively for Him. “Without faith,” the Bible says, “it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6).

Second Kings, chapter 5, records the story of Naaman, a powerful Syrian military leader who was suffering from the most dreaded disease of that era, leprosy. Someone told him that Elisha, the man of God, could possibly heal him, so he sought the prophet’s help. Elisha instructed Naaman to wash himself seven times in the Jordan River to be healed. The great soldier became angry at such a ridiculous suggestion. “I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy,” said Naaman to his servants (2 Kings 5:11). At first he refused, but without any other remedy, Naaman at last went into the river and was healed. The act made no human sense, but in the divine plan it was an act of faith.

Why do we need faith? There is no other way to relate to God, for in His infinite plan He has determined that “the just shall live by faith.”

On your own, with your family, or in a small group, identify one thing you consider an act of faith. Determine to do that thing, and keep a record of the evidence of God’s blessing on obedience in that behavior. Share the results.

Week Two: Faith for the Present

◆ Day Four: Acting on the Promises

William Tyndale was perhaps the most important person in the illustrious history of the English Bible. He was, in fact, not only the father of the modern English Bible, but the father of the modern English language. His translation, first published in 1525, and used subsequently in virtually every other major translation for hundreds of years to follow, was the new standard for English expression. By quoting the Bible, Shakespeare quotes Tyndale more than 5,000 times!

William Tyndale did not live an easy life. He was hunted, persecuted, and eventually killed by those who considered his work evil. Putting the Scriptures in a language common people could read? Preposterous! Yet he pursued this goal because he was motivated to communicate what he considered the “lost message of the church” — the message of faith. Tyndale defined faith as “acting on the promises of God.” It’s doubtful we could come up with a better definition.

As you consider that phrase — acting on the promises of God — how are you exercising faith today? What promises are you claiming, and how are you living out that reality? For today, identify one specific promise of God that is especially important and significant. Share that promise with others, and consider how you can act on its certainty.

Week Two: Faith for the Present

◆ Day Five: How to Walk by Faith

George Mueller hadn't faced a situation quite like it. Before him were 120 orphans, expectantly seated at long dinner tables. But something at this mealtime tested the mettle of Mueller's heart. On the dinner plates at that table was...nothing but water. Eager faces looked toward him, as if to say, "What's for dinner?" But he didn't know; the cupboard was bare and the icebox was empty. There was no milk, and no money to buy food or drink.

What was George to do? It didn't take long for him to decide. He would do what he had done every other mealtime. He would instruct the children to bow their heads and join him in thanking God for the meal they were about to eat. He would praise God for the faithfulness of His provision. And so he did. Mueller prayed simply, directly, and with a heart filled with faith.

When the "amen" was pronounced, the plates were still empty. But as the eyes of those 120 youngsters turned again to the head table, a knock sounded at the door. One of the boys was sent to answer. A moment later, he called out, "Mr. Mueller, it's the vegetable man! He's got a lot of stuff for us!" "Coincidentally," there were many vegetables that would spoil if he didn't do something with them. While the vegetables were being unloaded, another person came to the door — the butcher! He had run out of ice at the end of a hot day and faced the prospect of awful, rotting meat. Could the orphanage use it? No sooner had he spoken the words than another amazing "coincidence" occurred. The milkman's wagon pulled up, overloaded with milk and dairy products and needing desperately to do something with them!

Needless to say, it was quite a banquet that night. And it was the finest lesson in faith those orphans ever received. Would the same thing have happened had Mueller not prayed, believing God for His provision ahead of time for it? We don't know, but we do know that Jesus said we have not because we ask not. And we know that His will for us is to walk by faith, not by sight.

God is calling each member of the church family to answer a vital question: Do you have the faith to trust God for His provision? As we move toward the future — personally and corporately — this must be our attitude.

Week Three: Vision for the Future

◆ Day One: Seeing the Impossible

Historical records are filled with the amazing (and often amusing) words of men whose vision was clouded on some important subjects...

On World Population...“The population of the earth decreases every day, and, if this continues, in another ten centuries the earth will be nothing but a desert.” (Montesquieu, 1743)

On Anesthesia...“The abolishment of pain in surgery is a chimera. It is absurd to go on seeking it today. Knife and pain are two words in surgery that must forever be associated in the consciousness of the patient. To this compulsory combination we shall have to adjust ourselves.” (Dr. Alfred Velpeau, 1839)

On Aviation...“The demonstration that no possible combination of known substances, known forms of machinery, and known forms of force can be united in a practical machine by which man shall fly long distances through the air, seems to the writer as complete as it is possible for the demonstration of any physical fact to be.” (Simon Newcomb, astronomer, 1903)

On the Atomic Bomb...“That is the biggest fool thing we have ever done. The bomb will never go off, and I speak as an expert in explosives.” (Admiral William Leahy to President Harry Truman, 1945)

Though well meaning, these men just didn't see things in the right way. They looked at the natural world and concluded that certain things simply were not possible. As we consider their words, let's be admonished to not look at the spiritual world and conclude that certain things are not possible; for, with God, all things are possible.

Today, pray with your family or a friend about the need to have 20/20 spiritual vision. And pray that in our capital stewardship campaign the entire church family will experience the unifying power of seeing and believing God for something that is beyond what we could ask or think.

Week Three: Vision for the Future

◆ Day Two: Looking Above and Beyond - Part One

Imagine the scene.

Jesus is gathered with a small group of followers on a hillside overlooking the area surrounding our church. With a sweeping gesture of His hand, He says, "Some think there are still four months until harvest, but I say, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest." The followers squint their eyes, straining to see what Jesus sees, but they recognize no gleaming fields of grain. Only brick and mortar, wood and shingles, roads of asphalt and streams of vehicles. With puzzled expressions they turn to Him, as if to ask, Where exactly is the grain ready to harvest? Knowing their hearts, He says, "I'm not talking about a physical harvest of grain, but a spiritual harvest of people." Patiently, He continues, "Dear ones, you must look above and beyond the distractions to see the people. It is to them that I came to give life and give it abundantly."

Of course, this scenario did not literally occur anywhere near our church. But the pattern for it did happen nearly two thousand years ago; for when Jesus had this kind of conversation with some of His disciples, He was establishing an enduring principle. There is really no difference between those believers of the first century and we of this century. Just as He wanted them to see the spiritual harvest, He wants us to do the same today. And, just as they needed to look above and beyond, so do we.

Right now, at this crucial moment for the ministry of our church, God is checking our vision. As we embark upon our stewardship campaign, He's determining if we can see what He really wants us to see. And He's challenging us to be obedient to Him as we do what spiritual vision demands that we do. Today, ask yourself and those closest to you, What can we do to check our spiritual vision and ensure that we see what is right?

Week Three: Vision for the Future

◆ Day Three: Looking Above and Beyond - Part Two

As we look above and beyond, we see thousands upon thousands of people all around us who need the message of salvation. Some, like overly-ripened grain, are falling away, never to be redeemed. Many, many more are waiting to be harvested by loving laborers. In the next decade, the demographic experts say that our community will continue to explode with thousands of new residents. Who will reach out to these precious souls with the good news of Jesus?

We must take on this challenge. We must invite them in “from the highways and hedges.” We must open our hearts to receive them with love and acceptance. But we have a difficulty that must be overcome: more laborers are needed for this harvest. Our home is not big enough. We must have more space for more people. We must add on to our house in order to welcome more souls into God’s Kingdom. How can we do this? First, by seeing this as a challenge and not a problem. This too, demands the right spiritual vision. We must look above and beyond. In the months ahead, we are going to believe God together to give us the insight — and the foresight — to do great things for His sake.

Today, share with your family or a close friend, the name of one person you envision being reached with the Gospel — someone you are praying will one day worship the Lord with us in our new home.

Week Three: Vision for the Future

◆ Day Four: Famous Last Words

Moments before the resurrected Jesus returned triumphantly to heaven, He left His disciples with this promise: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” After He spoke these words, Jesus ascended before their very eyes.

With this scene fixed in your mind’s eye, consider this question: Was Jesus’ promise only for those disciples who were physically present that day and heard His actual words? The answer carries vital implications for us as believers in our church today.

Those who were assembled with Jesus that day were no doubt profoundly affected by everything He did and said following the Resurrection. They took it all to heart. But the promise wasn’t exclusively for them, any more than the hundreds of other promises in God’s Word were meant only for the relative handful of people who originally heard or read them.

In the New Testament there is what we might call a “pass-it-on” principle: what we receive in spiritual truth and blessing we are to pass on to others. The imperative of Jesus’ Great Commission is to make disciples — to impart to others the essentials of faith in Christ and obedience to him. That is our church’s primary commitment.

In the “true” Lord’s Prayer, recorded in John 17, Jesus prayed for spiritual fruitfulness and unity among the disciples. And He said, “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.” The plan and the promises of God encompass all believers, not just those who were blessed to literally see and hear the Messiah.

Pray today that our entire church family will have the spiritual vision to see the reality of these truths and to act in obedience to them.

Week Three: Vision for the Future

◆ Day Five: Seeing the God Who Is Greater

Who knows the full extent of what God has in store for our church? Only God does! But He longs to reveal more and more of His plan to us as we act in faith and see that He is greater than all.

Acts, chapter 4, describes the bold ministry of Peter and John, and the price they paid for proclaiming the Message. Because they would not keep quiet about their Lord...because they were convinced that their silence would carry eternal consequences...because their faith was in the One whose Name is above all others...they didn't give up or give in. Although the authorities demanded that they cease to teach about Jesus or even to speak His name, they refused and were persecuted.

When Peter and John were released that day, they returned to their fellow Christians and joined them in praying to the God who is Greater. All the believers recognized the risks they were taking, but in the larger context, the threats didn't matter. Consequently, their prayer was not filled with expressions of anxiety; instead, it overflowed with the promises of Scripture. Their emotions and thoughts were anchored in the reality of who God is. No one pretended that the circumstances were pleasant, but everyone confessed two essential truths — that God is sovereign and that He is forever the Creator.

The same God to whom those first century disciples devoted their lives, that same Sovereign Lord and Creator, is our God. And when we pray to Him we are confessing confidence in the One who is Greater. In response to our prayer, He can create new dispositions in the hearts of our opponents. He can create a thirst for Jesus in the hearts of those who once rejected the Gospel. He can create circumstances to override the prevailing circumstances. And He can do all this because He is greater than all.

We face mountainous challenges. How must we respond? With the spiritual vision to see that He, as the God who is greater, can cast those mountains into the sea or reduce them to a plain path. Pray with someone today about a “mountain” you are facing, and pray also about the “mountain” we face in our important capital campaign. Let's believe God together!

Week Four: Commitment to the Challenge

◆ Day One: Commitment...Because We're Forgiven

At first they didn't believe the reports of the women. Jesus was alive, they said. The disciples were troubled, filled with doubt. Then, one by one, they recognized Him, fell at His feet, and worshiped Him. He was alive! Hope was reborn!

But what about the past? Would He remember how they had deserted Him...how they had cut and run at the moment of danger? How could they have been so faithless and unbelieving?

Never one to upbraid or accuse, Jesus quietly reaffirmed His love for them. He spent time among them on several occasions. He allowed them to touch His hands and His side, to settle their doubts and be convinced of His reality. He helped them in their daily needs: directing them to the location of fish when they had caught nothing and fixing them breakfast on the shore. He opened their eyes to the Scriptures. He gave them the promise of His Spirit, to be with them forever. And then, He gave them a mission.

When the disciples were renewed in faith and secure again in His love, He gave them a charge. Those who had so glaringly failed Him in His moment of trial were entrusted with the greatest work the world would ever know: the spreading of the Gospel. The past didn't sabotage the present or the future. Their failures would always be a reminder of the weakness of the flesh and the power of sin, but they would not be a barrier to further usefulness. These men, renewed by love and mercy, went on to turn the world upside down.

As we look back at all God has done for us in the life of our church, our hearts are filled with gratitude for the Lord's goodness. He has always been faithful and forgiving! And, like our counterparts in the first century, we have a mission to carry His truth to our community and to regions beyond. In building our new home, we are not building a retreat; we're constructing a new center of operations for that life-giving mission!

What is the most significant lesson God has ever taught you about the importance of staying committed and not giving up?

Week Four: Commitment to the Challenge

◆ Day Two: Commitment...Because We're Free

Several years ago in the unlikely town of Fulton, Missouri, the town fathers directed huge chunks of concrete to be hauled onto the local college campus. They knew there would be no better backdrop for a historic speech to be given in their little city.

As chunks of concrete go, they weren't particularly attractive. In fact, they were pitted, scarred by blows, and smeared with garish graffiti. But to those who saw them, carefully situated behind a podium on the broad green campus lawn, they were beautiful.

The speech was by Mikail Gorbachev, former leader of the former Soviet Union, in commemoration of another speech given decades before in that same place by Sir Winston Churchill. In that earlier speech — on the same campus, behind the same podium — Churchill coined the phrase “Iron Curtain” to describe the conditions in Eastern Europe.

Half a century later, an ex-Soviet strongman stood at the microphone to talk about freedom...against a backdrop of large chunks from a fallen Berlin Wall, the actual remnants of that once-daunted “Iron Curtain.”

Freedom! What a wonderful word it is, and what a wonderful state to live in. Here in the U.S., we are blessed with a measure of freedom that is remarkable in the annals of modern history. Yet this social freedom pales in comparison with the spiritual freedom we know and experience in Jesus Christ. In Him, we have been liberated eternally. And because of that freedom He has given us, we are motivated to commit wholeheartedly and unreservedly to Him.

When we participate in the campaign to build a new home for our church, we are ensuring that the message of freedom in Jesus Christ continues to go forth from this place. It is because we are free that we must do everything possible to spread the message of freedom to our community and beyond.

What are some practical ways you can share the joy and reality of your freedom with others?

Week Four: Commitment to the Challenge

◆ Day Three: Commitment...Because We're Blessed

There are two seas in the Holy Land. The northern sea, called the Sea of Galilee, is one of the land's most beautiful features. Fed by the Jordan River, it waters fertile valleys and helps produce a bounty of fruits and vegetables. Fishermen still ply its depths, finding sustenance and profit.

This is the sea that Jesus loved. He knew its waters in stillness and in storm. Upon its banks He taught many parables, spent many nights, and worked His miracles of love and compassion.

The southern sea, further down the Jordan River, differs greatly from Galilee. Its air is filled with the stench of debris and filth. No man or beast will drink from its bitter waters. No children play along its polluted shores, for this is a lifeless sea. Its very name reveals its nature: The Dead Sea.

Both seas are fed by the same river. But why the stark difference? It's because the Dead Sea has an inlet to receive the fresh waters, but no outlet to send them on. The fresh waters pour in...only to stagnate and decay.

Can you think of people like this? People who are greedy and selfish, thinking only of getting more and more for themselves? They are like the man in the parable who sought to build bigger barns to protect his increase, never realizing the true nature of his riches.

Our challenge, and our commitment, must be to be "Galilee Christians" — giving out as freely and readily as we take in. For only by living in this way will we be as healthy and joyous as God desires us to be. As Proverbs 11:25 says, "A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed."

As we give freely and generously to expand the ministry of our church, we are living out the lesson of Scripture. We are discovering the joy of the Galilee principle.

What is God calling you to do today? How will you express your commitment? Share with family and friends the burden God has placed in your heart.

Week Four: Commitment to the Challenge

◆Day Four: Commitment...Because We're Joyful

Prisons today are five-star resorts compared to those in which Paul languished. He enjoyed no heated cell with private toilet and sink. There was no mattress for sleeping, no TV room for relaxing, no well-stocked library for reading and study. There was only the dark encasement of roughly hewn stones, filled with putrid odors and the pungent reminders of human depravity. Perhaps worst of all were the chains, their rusty coarseness scraping his skin raw, constantly tugging at him.

As if imprisonment were not painful enough, Paul had to endure something worse: the stinging criticism of those who called themselves his Christian brothers. They dared to attack God's apostle even while he was held captive.

Stop and imagine yourself in Paul's situation. Feel the weight of the chains on raw skin. Taste the nauseating swill that was his daily food. Listen to those dreadful sounds of suffering that filled his ears day and night. Look into the menacing eyes of the Roman prison guards.

You are there. You are suffering. You are chained. You are Paul the apostle. Now, what's your attitude? What fills your heart through the weary hours? Here's what Paul wrote to his friends in Philippi:

"Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly."

What an attitude! Rather than being inflamed with furious self-pity, Paul is encouraged by the positive impact of his negative condition. In spite of the severity, he is joyful.

What a lesson Paul teaches us! We have troubles and trials, sure; but what is our attitude, and what is our commitment? Paul was joyful and he kept on giving. What is God teaching you today about joyfulness and the priority of giving?

Week Four: Commitment to the Challenge

◆ Day Five: Commitment...Because We're Loved

George Matheson was a bright, promising young musician when he received the most devastating news of his life. He was going blind.

For several months, as his vision worsened, he had suspected the worst. But more painful than the crushing reality of his blindness was the reaction of his fiancée. When he told her of his condition, she tearfully returned the engagement ring. She said she could not live the rest of her life with a blind man.

Stunned by her reaction and overwhelmed with self-pity, Matheson was reeling like a boxer falling to the mat. Then, it was as if he were literally swept into God's arms, encouraged and uplifted. Still disappointed, yet buoyed in spirit, Matheson sat down and composed a song.

In one poignant moment, George Matheson knew more deeply than ever what is the true mark of the Christian — the unmistakable mark of love.

That's what his song was all about. It's a song sung by believers all over the world, even to this day — the great hymn, O Love That Will Not Let Me Go! Through a hurtful trial, he was reminded of the love that would remain forever unaffected. In so doing, he was able even to love the one who had rejected him, as his Lord had loved those who took His very life.

There are so many reasons for us to express our commitment as members of this church family. We have been forgiven, blessed, protected, encouraged. But most of all, we've been loved. Our heavenly Father has demonstrated His love for us in that, while we were yet sinners, His own Son died for us! The commitments we make, the monies we give, the energies we devote, are simply expressions of thanksgiving for all He has done.

In these crucial days, let's look with gratitude to the past, let's exercise faith in the present, let's have a true vision for the future; but, above all, let's show a commitment to the challenge before us because of the love He's shown for us.

