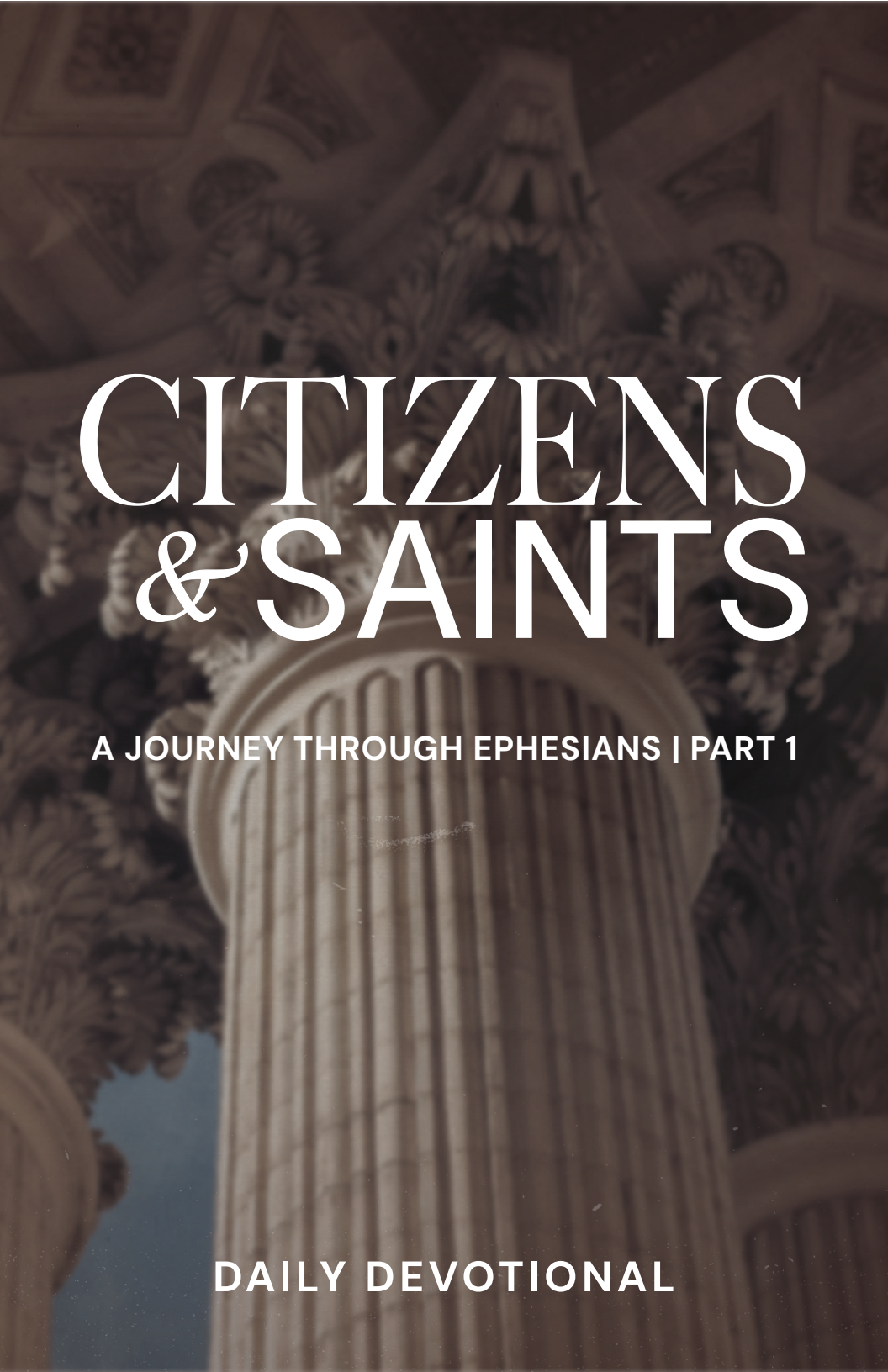




# CITIZENS & SAINTS

A JOURNEY THROUGH EPHESIANS | PART 1

DAILY DEVOTIONAL



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Over the next eight weeks, we'll journey through one of the richest books in the New Testament—a letter that reminds us who we are, what God has done for us through Christ, and how we're called to live together as His people. More than a study of biblical truth, this devotional is an invitation to know Jesus more deeply and allow Him to transform every area of your life.

In a world filled with competing voices, shifting values and endless distractions, it's surprisingly easy—even in church—to let something other than Jesus become our focus. We can become consumed with busyness, opinions, accomplishments or even ministry itself. Yet the Church has never been sustained by programs, personalities or preferences. It has always flourished when Jesus is at the center.

The book of Ephesians continually points us back to Him. In Christ we find our identity, our salvation, our purpose, our hope and our unity. Through Him we're adopted into God's family, made alive by grace, strengthened by His Spirit and joined together as one body. We must be rooted in the Spirit, growing stronger together, reaching the hurting, lost.

May this journey help each of us keep Jesus where He belongs—at the center of our lives, our families and our church. Because when Christ is truly at the center, everything else finds its proper place.



**Bryan Jones, Senior Pastor**

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# DAILY PRAYER AND REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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*"... Our Father in heaven..."*

Matthew 6:9b (NLT)

- What do You want to say to me today as my Father?

*"... may your name be kept holy."*

Matthew 6:9c (NLT)

- What do You want to reveal to me about Your power today?

*"May your Kingdom come soon."*

Matthew 6:10a (NLT)

- Help me make Your priorities my priorities today.

*"Give us today the food we need,"*

Matthew 6:11 (NLT)

- Is there anything specific You want me to do with my time or the people I'm around today?

*"and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us"*

Matthew 6:12 (NLT)

- Reveal to me anyone I need to forgive or ask for forgiveness.

*"And don't let us yield to temptation..."*

Matthew 6:13a (NLT)

- Is there anywhere I'm vulnerable to temptation?

# GOD CHOSE US—IN CHRIST

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*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. ...*

**Ephesians 1:3-4 (NIV)**

Earlier this year, my wife and I flew from GSP to Fort Lauderdale for a vacation. Before anyone boarded, the plane's destination had already been determined. Everyone who got on that plane was headed to the same place.

Ephesians 1 has sparked discussion among godly Christians for centuries. Words like *chosen*, *elected* and *predestined* have often become the focus of debate. But Paul's main purpose is not to settle every theological question. Paul's purpose is to assure believers that God's plan of salvation began long before we were ever born and that everyone who is *in Christ* has every spiritual blessing God has prepared.

Before the foundation of the world, God determined that all who are *in Christ* would be His holy and blameless people. I don't believe Paul is saying God arbitrarily chooses some for heaven and others for hell. Rather, he was encouraging the Christians in Ephesus that because they were *in Christ*, their future was secure.

Think of Christ as the airplane. Everyone who boards the plane arrives at its predetermined destination. In the same way, everyone who is *in Christ* will receive every spiritual blessing God has promised. God desires *all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth* (1 Timothy 2:4). He graciously invites everyone to trust Christ. The question is whether we'll accept His invitation and place our faith in Him.

What an incredible assurance. If you belong to Christ, you already possess every spiritual blessing you need, and one day you'll enjoy them fully for all eternity.

**APPLICATION:** Take a moment to thank God that He took the initiative to provide salvation long before you knew you needed it. List some of the spiritual blessings you've received and thank God for each one.

**PRAYER:** Lord, I'm amazed that You loved me so much that You sent Your Son to die for me. Help me live each day with gratitude, humility and faithfulness as I abide in You. Amen.

# OVERWHELMED BY HIS LOVE AND GRACE

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*In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.* **Ephesians 1:5-6 (NIV)**

Many parents in our Brookwood Church body tell me that one of the happiest days of their lives was adoption day. Parents who have waited, prayed, completed mountains of paperwork, and endured months or even years of uncertainty finally hear the words: *This child is now legally yours*. A child isn't simply welcomed into the home; he or she becomes a permanent member of the family with all the rights and privileges of a son or daughter.

Paul says that's exactly what God has done for us through Jesus Christ.

God's motivation wasn't guilt, obligation or anything we deserved. It was love. Before the world was created, God planned that everyone who places their faith in Christ would be adopted into His family. This wasn't an afterthought. It was His gracious plan from the very beginning.

That was revolutionary in Paul's day. Many people assumed God loved Jews more than Gentiles, men more than women, firstborns more than those born later, the wealthy more than the poor, the healthy more than the sick, and the free more than slaves. But Jesus turned that thinking upside down. He welcomed the outcasts, touched the lepers, cared for women and children, and offered salvation to anyone who would trust Him.

The same is true today. None of us becomes God's child because of our family background, our church attendance, our morality or our accomplishments. We are adopted by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

What amazes me most is what Paul says next: this was *in accordance with his pleasure and will*. God doesn't reluctantly save sinners. He delights in it. It brings Him joy to forgive us, adopt us and call us His sons and daughters. His grace isn't given sparingly; it's freely poured out on everyone who belongs to Christ.

No wonder Paul begins this letter with praise. When we truly understand God's love and grace, worship becomes the natural response.

**APPLICATION:** Take a few minutes today to thank God for adopting you into His family. Let that truth shape how you see yourself and how you treat others who are equally loved by God.

**PRAYER:** Father, thank You for loving me enough to make me Your child through Jesus Christ. I deserve nothing, yet You have given me everything by Your grace. Help me live each day being kind to everyone I meet and sharing Your Good News with them. Amen.

# SHOWERED WITH KINDNESS AND GRACE

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*He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. He has showered his kindness on us.*

**Ephesians 1:7-8a (NLT)**

The first lie Satan ever told was not about God's power. It was about God's heart.

In the Garden of Eden, Satan asked Eve, *Did God really say...?* His goal was to make Adam and Eve question God's goodness. He wanted them to believe God was holding out on them and that His way was not the best. Ever since then, Satan has used the same strategy. When life is hard, he whispers, *If God really loved you, would He let this happen?*

That's why we must settle on one truth in our hearts. *God is good.* His heart toward us is filled with kindness and grace.

Paul reminds us that God did not merely tell us He loves us. He proved it. Jesus purchased our freedom with His blood. We were slaves to sin, unable to free ourselves, but Christ paid the price we could never pay. Because of His sacrifice, our sins are completely forgiven, and we are welcomed into a restored relationship with God.

I love the way the New Living Translation says it: *He has showered his kindness on us.* God is not stingy with His grace. He doesn't measure out forgiveness with an eyedropper. He pours it over us like a summer rain.

Some have called this *the great exchange*. We bring Jesus our guilt, shame and sin. He gives us forgiveness, freedom, righteousness and new life. What an incredible trade! We could never earn it or deserve it. It is a gift of God's amazing grace.

That's why Christianity is such good news. Our hope is not found in what we have done for God, but in what Christ has already done for us. Every day, we can rest in the confidence that our Heavenly Father is rich in kindness, abundant in grace, and always working for our good.

**APPLICATION:** When doubts about God's goodness creep into your mind this week, remember the cross. It's the greatest proof of God's love, kindness and grace toward you. Thank Him for the freedom and forgiveness that are yours in Christ.

**PRAYER:** Father, thank You for showing me Your heart through Jesus. Thank You for purchasing my freedom and forgiving all my sins. Help me trust Your goodness, especially when life is difficult, and remind me each day that I have been showered with Your kindness and grace. Amen.

# THE MYSTERY THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING

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*With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment, to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.*  
**Ephesians 1:8b-10 (NIV)**

Have you ever wondered, *God, what are You doing?* I have. I've endured personal trials that included car accidents, health problems, surgeries and even cancer. Then I watch the news and see wars, suffering and evil around the world. It can seem as though everything is spinning out of control. But what if God is carrying out a plan much bigger than anything we can see?

Paul says God has made known to us the mystery of His will. In the Bible, a mystery is not a puzzle to solve. It is God's plan that was hidden for centuries but has now been revealed through Jesus Christ.

Part of that mystery is wonderfully simple. Through Christ, God welcomes both Jew and Gentile into His family. Anyone who places their faith in Jesus can be forgiven, adopted and made one of God's children. Salvation comes by grace through faith, not by race, religious background or good works.

Paul also says God has given us wisdom and understanding. This is more than knowledge. It is the ability to see life from God's perspective. Proverbs teaches, *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom*. As we learn to honor and trust Him, we begin to recognize that He is always at work, even when we cannot understand what He's doing.

That's a comforting truth today. Our world often looks chaotic. Wars rage. Families struggle. Evil appears to gain ground. Yet none of this has caught God by surprise. History is not drifting aimlessly. God is moving everything toward the day when His plan is complete, and Jesus Christ reigns over all creation. One day, every wrong will be made right. Everything in heaven and on earth will be brought under Christ's perfect rule. Truth and justice will win.

When life doesn't make sense, remember this: we may not see the whole picture, but God does.

**APPLICATION:** Ask God to help you see your circumstances from His perspective instead of your own. Thank Him that His plan is unfolding exactly as He intends and that your future is secure in Christ.

**PRAYER:** Father, thank You for revealing Your great plan through Jesus Christ. Give me wisdom to trust You when life is confusing and faith to rest in the certainty that You are working all things toward Your perfect purpose. Amen.

# INCLUDED IN CHRIST

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*In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will... And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation.*  
**Ephesians 1:11,13a (NIV)**

I transferred to a new, private, wealthy high school in tenth grade. Many of the students had gone to school together since first grade, and I was the outsider. Ever felt like that? Maybe it was at a new school, a new job or even a new church. We all want to know that we belong.

That's exactly what Paul is emphasizing in these verses.

Notice that he speaks to two groups. First, he says *we who were the first to put our hope in Christ*. Paul is likely referring to the first Jewish believers who embraced Jesus as the Messiah. Then he turns to the Ephesian believers and says, *And you also...* Those little words are packed with meaning.

For centuries, God's chosen, covenant people had been identified primarily with Israel. Many Gentiles felt far from God and outside His promises. But through Jesus Christ, God's plan was revealed. Gentiles were no longer outsiders. They, too, could become full members of God's family.

How? Paul gives a simple answer. They heard *the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation*, and they believed. Through faith in Christ, they were included in all that God had promised.

This has always been God's plan. Paul says God works everything according to His purpose. The mystery revealed in Christ is that salvation is available to everyone who believes. As Paul wrote elsewhere, the Gospel is *the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile* (Romans 1:16).

The same is true today. God does not accept us because of our family background, nationality, accomplishments or religious heritage. We're included because of Jesus Christ. When we place our faith in Him, we become part of God's family and share in all the blessings that belong to those who are in Christ.

If you have trusted Christ, you are not an outsider. You belong.

**APPLICATION:** Thank God for making a place for you in His family through Jesus Christ. Ask Him to help you welcome others with the same grace He's shown you.

**PRAYER:** Father, thank You that Your plan of salvation includes all who place their faith in Jesus. Thank You for welcoming me into Your family. Help me live with gratitude and extend that same welcome to others. Amen.

## SEALED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

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*And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession, to the praise of his glory.*

**Ephesians 1:13-14 (NIV)**

Very recently, I had to drive to my bank to get a legal affidavit notarized for a friend in Virginia. The notary's seal certified that my document was authentic and official.

Paul says God has placed His own seal on every believer.

Notice when it happened—*When you believed*. The moment you placed your faith in Jesus Christ, God gave you the promised Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came to live within you, marking you as God's child and enabling you to abide in Christ each day.

In Paul's day, a seal carried several meanings. A king or owner would press his signet ring into hot wax to show ownership, authenticity and protection. The seal declared, *This belongs to me*. Breaking that seal without authority was a serious offense.

Paul uses that familiar picture to describe what God has done for us. His Holy Spirit is God's mark of ownership on our lives. We belong to Him. The Spirit also assures us that God's promises are true and trustworthy.

Paul adds that the Holy Spirit is *a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance*. A deposit is the first installment that guarantees the rest will come. God has already begun His work in us, and He will finish what He has promised. One day, we'll stand in His presence completely redeemed, holy, blameless and glorified. **This is God's predestined future for every believer.**

No matter who you are or what your past may hold, if you have trusted Christ, you belong to God. His Spirit lives within you, and your future is secure because God's promises never fail. No wonder Paul ends this section with the words, *to the praise of His glory*. Everything God has planned, accomplished through Christ, and guaranteed by His Spirit should lead us to worship.

**APPLICATION:** Thank God for the gift of His Holy Spirit. Live today with the confidence that you belong to Him and the joyful hope that the best is yet to come.

**PRAYER:** Father, thank You for giving me Your Holy Spirit as the seal of Your love and the guarantee of my inheritance. Help me abide in Christ, walk in the Spirit each day, and live in a way that brings praise to Your glory. Amen.

# THE FAITH THAT ENCOURAGES OTHERS

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*Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people everywhere, I have not stopped thanking God for you.*

**Ephesians 1:15-16a (NLT)**

Corrie ten Boom was a Dutch woman who helped Jews escape during the Holocaust of World War II. She was eventually caught and sent to a concentration camp, and later recounted the terrible living conditions. Hundreds were crowded into buildings far too small for their numbers, and the rags they were given to function as mattresses were filled with fleas. Corrie was understandably repulsed, but her sister told her to thank God for the fleas because He placed them there for a reason. Over time, Corrie and her sister were able to do Bible studies and share the Gospel with others in the camp, which was obviously forbidden, but only because the guards never entered their housing area due to the fleas.

Stories hold the power to create or destroy, the power to build up or tear down. Our world is so full of negativity that we have to fight to notice the positive. If you've read all of Paul's letters in the New Testament, you've probably noticed how often he corrects and rebukes rather than encourages. Verses like Ephesians 1:15-16 are a breath of fresh air, an opportunity to celebrate that God's Spirit is moving and working in the world around us.

Do you notice the strong faith in the people around you? Do you celebrate it? Do you allow that to build up your faith, rather than allow the negativity to tear it down? Each of us is an example of faith that can help those around us or hurt them. Let's be people who encourage those around us with our words and our faith today!

**APPLICATION:** Can you think of someone whose faith inspires you? Meet them for coffee, give them a call, or shoot them a text so you can encourage and thank them, like Paul encouraged the Ephesians. Celebrate how you've seen the Spirit work in others!

**PRAYER:** God, thank You for the people in my life who follow You and live admirably. Give me eyes to see more of these people so You can further encourage me. Grow my faith and help me to walk with You so my faith may encourage others. Amen.

# THE WISDOM THAT GROWS YOU

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*I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God.*  
**Ephesians 1:16b-17 (NLT)**

Solomon's appeal for wisdom in 1 Kings 3 is as inspiring as it is frustrating. If you haven't read it, Solomon succeeded his father David as king over Israel, and God appeared to him in a dream. God offered to give Solomon whatever he wanted, so Solomon asked for wisdom. This pleased God, so He made Solomon the wisest person who ever lived and also gave him wealth and victory over his enemies.

The following chapters in 1 Kings tell stories of how Solomon used that wisdom, often to the awe of his people and the surrounding nations. Unfortunately, as Solomon grew in power and influence, he also accumulated wives from surrounding nations with different religious practices. Solomon's wisdom was eventually squandered on self-indulgence, disobedience and pandering to his wives' desires rather than being used for the honor and pleasure of his God.

Solomon was the wisest person who ever lived, but his wisdom was infected, polluted and corrupted by his selfishness and the influence of those around him. Solomon's story in 1 Kings is a cautionary tale because it shows how easily even God-given wisdom can be weakened when we stop submitting our hearts to God. When Solomon leaned on his own understanding, ignored God's commands and allowed competing desires to shape his decisions, his wisdom no longer produced faithfulness. His life reminds us that true wisdom is not merely knowing what's right—it's trusting God enough to obey Him.

Thankfully, we know and serve a God who wants to give us wisdom. He shares it freely through Scripture and generously through His Spirit. We can grow in our knowledge of many things, but growing in our knowledge of God is the greatest application of wisdom we can pursue!

**APPLICATION:** When you read your Bible today, what wisdom is God bringing to your attention? Obey Him in that wisdom today! Even if it's small, a step of obedience is a step in the right direction.

**PRAYER:** God, thank You for being the source of wisdom. Give me and the people around me spiritual wisdom and insight so we may grow in our knowledge of You. Amen.

# THE INHERITANCE THAT IS GOD'S PRIDE

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*I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.*

**Ephesians 1:18 (NLT)**

My wife and I recently had a son. He's a joyous little boy who loves people. He's constantly observing the world and always wants to be moving and as active as possible. As he continues to grow, my wife and I keep learning new things about him, connecting certain qualities back to each of us, and excitedly sharing these findings with loved ones. When people see him next to my wife, they know he's her son, and the joy and pride on her face light up the room.

Our love isn't just about what he does but about who he is—our son. Even when he screams like a banshee or pees on a poor, unfortunate soul, he's still our son. The actions and consequences aren't ideal, but they don't change his connection to us.

The Bible bends over backward to help us see God as Father. Jesus came as God's Son so we could see that relationship and share in it. When we openly declare and believe in our hearts that Jesus is Lord, we become *His holy people who are His rich and glorious inheritance*. Our sin and its consequences need to be sanctified, but they don't change our connection to Him.

When we look at ourselves, we primarily see the past. We see mistakes, missed opportunities, failures and disappointments. For the believer, God sees your future! He sees who you are in Christ and who you'll grow into down the road as you continue to follow Him. He sees His masterpiece (more on this when you get to Ephesians 10). You're part of His *glorious inheritance*, His treasure, His pride and His joy. What would change if you walked in that confidence, that reality today?

**APPLICATION:** Ask God how He delights in you. Listen, write down what He tells you, and remind yourself that you're His rich and glorious inheritance. Ask Him to show you how you can further delight in Him today.

**PRAYER:** God, thank You for delighting in me. What is it about me that lights up Your face? Show me things about You that will light up mine. Amen.

# THE POWER THAT GOD SHARES WITH US

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*I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms.*  
**Ephesians 1:19-20 (NLT)**

While I was in college, my economics professor was covering some of the foundational principles for the course. He wanted to make completely sure we were on the same page, so he did a *check-in* where he asked if we were tracking what he was saying. The class nodded assent, then he asked people to explain it back to him. When the first few people were unable to do so, he knew he'd need to cover it again. The knowledge that he shared hadn't translated into understanding.

In verse 18, Paul prayed that the Ephesians would grow in their knowledge of God. Here in verse 19, Paul wants that knowledge to inform their understanding of *the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe Him*. The same power that God used to raise Jesus from the dead has saved you from your sin. That same power has brought you from death to life.

To understand and believe in God requires more than intellectual assent—it requires you to walk in it. Similarly to the example with my economics professor, it's one thing to acknowledge the power God has given us through his Son, but true understanding comes when we believe it, experience it and share it. God literally died so He could transform you and share His power with you. How would that change your day if you walked in it?

**APPLICATION:** Now for the spiritual audit. Do you understand the greatness of God's power? Are you walking in this belief today? If so, celebrate it and thank God for sharing it with you! If not, then today can be Day 1 to believe it and walk in it.

**PRAYER:** God, thank You for the power You give to those who believe in You. It's awesome that You share the same power that raised Jesus from the dead with me. Help me to walk in that truth today and to see how You're using that power in me today. Amen.

# THE VIEW THAT CHRIST DESERVES

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*Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church.*  
**Ephesians 1:21-22 (NLT)**

Imagine the corner office with the best view of the city. The penthouse at the top of the skyscraper. The throne at the apex of the stairs. We equate power with height. The higher up the ladder you are, the better the view, the closer you are to the heavens themselves. In humanity's brokenness, the ego can swell when looking from this view because of all that is *beneath* you.

In the last temptation of Jesus in Matthew 4, Satan took Jesus to the top of a mountain, showed Him the kingdoms of the earth, and offered them in exchange for worship. Jesus, however, didn't falter in His mission to follow God's will to reclaim what was already His.

We could spend every day meditating on God's humility and still never scratch the surface of what He's done for us through Jesus. The Bible shows us a God who's constantly revealing Himself to reach the people He created. God created the world and gave it to us, then humbled Himself as a man to reclaim it for His glory and for our redemption. Jesus traded His heavenly view for an earthly one, then returned triumphantly to his throne.

Jesus proved the sincerity of His love for us through His life, death and resurrection. God could have claimed what was already His, however He wanted, but He chose to do it this way so He could identify with us. What a God!

**APPLICATION:** Meditate on God's humility for a few minutes. Think through your achievements and what you've earned over the years. What would it feel like to trade all that in, to start over, to show someone else how much you love them? God did that on a scale we'll never truly grasp, so give Him all the glory!

**PRAYER:** Jesus, thank You for proving Your love for me. Thank You for achieving victory over all creation and the world to come on the cross. You deserve your throne! Amen.

# THE CHURCH THAT CHRIST COMMANDS

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*And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.*  
**Ephesians 1:23 (NLT)**

Christ is the head of the church. The head sends signals to other parts of the body to move according to its will to complete its purpose. The foot doesn't have the full picture of where it's going or why, but the head does. The hand doesn't know why it's picking something up, but the head does. The hands and feet don't question the head or try to take the brain's place—they simply obey.

As we learned in Ephesians 1:21-22, Jesus earned His place as the head of the body. He lived the life none of us ever could, fulfilled God's redemptive work for us, and did so flawlessly, without sin. All honor, glory and power belong to Him, and in His goodness, graciousness and wisdom, He shares these qualities and attributes with us. Our perfect God could accomplish all His purposes on His own, but He chooses to use broken humanity so we can share in His power.

Through the Spirit and His power, Jesus *fills all things everywhere with Himself*. Think of a relationship you've had for years that keeps getting stronger and better with time. The more you hang out, talk with and grow with that person, the more of that person you're getting. The same principle applies to your relationship with Jesus. You want to be more like Jesus? Fill your time, your head and your heart with Him.

**APPLICATION:** Is there something you know God wants you to do, but you're dragging your feet to do it? Now is the time! Whether you're a hand, foot or other part of the body, don't question the head—just obey and experience the results. If not, ask God where He wants you moving today.

**PRAYER:** Jesus, thank You for being the head of the church. I can trust Your guidance and leadership, so help me grow in that faith and trust. Guide and direct me today so I can be Your hands and feet. Amen.

# BACK TO LIFE

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*"But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him."* **Luke 10:33 (NIV)**

I recall the phrase *Good Samaritan* being used loosely to describe being helpful and kind to others, but I didn't really know the biblical story of the Good Samaritan. In Luke 10, Jesus shares the parable of the Good Samaritan who helps a wounded, half-dead man on the side of the road while others pass by, choosing not to help him.

This parable goes beyond just teaching us how to extend a helping hand to our neighbors—whether they are our actual neighbors, coworkers, friends or family. Jesus represents our Good Samaritan. Like the wounded man on the road, we, too, are hurt and burdened by sin and the hardships of life, desperate for assistance. Yet, Jesus sees us and approaches us instead of passing by. He heals our wounds and shows us compassion. He offers us a second chance at a new life.

Scripture doesn't tell us how the wounded man felt when he realized a stranger had helped him, but I imagine he was deeply grateful. The Good Samaritan gave his time, energy and resources to care for a man in need. Jesus gave even more—His very life. I imagine the wounded man would have praised the Samaritan and spoken highly of him to others, grateful for the second chance at life he had received. In the same way, we praise God for His mercy and love in sending His Son, Jesus, to us.

If you're feeling broken and wounded today, remember that Jesus offers His rescue and healing when we need saving. He graciously takes our lives, dead in sin, and brings us back to life.

**APPLICATION:** Read the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Which character resonates with you? Are you the wounded man in need of help, the priest or the Levite who walks by, the robbers who inflict harm, or the Samaritan and innkeeper who provide shelter and care? As you reflect, remember that we all share a common need for a savior. How might this understanding shape your actions and relationships with others?

**PRAYER:** Dear Lord, thank You for rescuing me. I was once wounded, shattered and broken, but You came and rescued me. Lord, I lift my praises to You and thank You forever and ever for not passing me by. I love You. Amen.

# A GIFT FREELY GIVEN

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*Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.* **Romans 3:24 (NLT)**

My dad is the hardest person to shop for when it comes to Christmas gifts. He never wants or asks for anything, which makes it more challenging. One year, I had custom cufflinks made for him—one had a picture of his mother and the other a picture of his father. On Christmas Day, when he opened the gift, he was speechless. Tears filled his eyes, and he pulled me in for a hug. After a little while, he came back all dressed up in a button-down shirt, proudly wearing the cufflinks. He wore them all day.

As Christians, we bear witness to our salvation when we accept the gift of grace Jesus has offered us. If you're like me and grew up in the church, grace can easily become just another word, stripped of its wonder. The definition of grace refers to *simple elegance or refinement of movement, the display of kindness and courtesy, or the unmerited, freely given favor of God*. This meaning of grace can be broken down based on context, but if you think about it, isn't God offering us grace that encompasses all of them? God's grace is effortless and smooth, courteous and kind. It's undeserved and freely given favor from God because He loves us.

Ephesians 2 mentions that we are *saved by grace* twice within three verses. Paul emphasizes that grace is not something we earn, search for, or work for—it's a gift. We all know that we don't have to work for or earn the gifts we receive on Christmas, anniversaries or birthdays. When we receive a gift, we accept it with gratitude and thanksgiving towards the giver.

This is what happens when we are alive in Christ. God extends the gift of grace, and it's up to us to accept it. If you do, you'll be forever changed. You'll have a spirit of life, and just like my dad, who proudly wore his cufflinks right away, we too are called to bear the light of Jesus for those around us to witness.

**APPLICATION:** Have you accepted God's gift of grace? He loves you and wants you to experience the freedom and joy that comes with it. Open your hands to receive—there's nothing you need to earn.

**PRAYER:** Lord, thank You for Your gift of grace. How amazing it truly is! I love You. Amen.

# I WAS, BUT GOD...

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*But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much...*     **Ephesians 2:4 (NLT)**

Over the span of five years, I felt like I couldn't get a grasp on my life. From the outside, it seemed like I was doing okay. I had graduated with my Master's degree, moved to Greenville, gotten married and started a career. But inside, I felt like I was drowning. My mind was a relentless loop of anxiety, depression, fear and grief, filled with questions like, *What are you doing with your life?* and comments like *You'll never make it*. It felt as though my world was crumbling around me. Finally, I started thinking, *This can't be how I'm supposed to live the rest of my life. God must have more for me, right?*

One night, in bed, I whispered to God, *I'm done trying. I'm tired. Help me. I know there has to be more from You. You can do whatever You want now*. That moment changed my life, and I heard His voice amid darkness. My surrender led to the chains of anxiety, depression and fear breaking. Since then, I've gone through many seasons, but one thing has remained constant: God. Whenever I start to worry or fall into old habits, I look forward and remind myself that God brought me out of darkness once, and He can do it again.

As I've fallen in love with God, I've learned that His love for me surpasses all understanding. It overwhelms me to the point of tears that the Creator of all things, seen and unseen, sees me and loves me so much and meets me where I am. He has made me alive in Jesus Christ.

There's a great song by Elevation Rhythm called *I Was, But God*. The chorus goes like this...

*I was sinking, but I'm singing now  
I was, but God, but God had a different plan  
I was drowning, but I'm, I'm dancing now  
I was, but God, but God had a different plan*

**APPLICATION:** Because of His great love, your story doesn't have to end in death and destruction. Reflect on the lyrics above and enjoy the full song when you have a chance, remembering His great love.

**PRAYER:** Dear God, thank You for loving us first. Like a mother who loves her child in the womb, You have loved us since the beginning of time. I love You. Amen.

# MORE THAN A MERE BODY

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*That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day.*  
**2 Corinthians 4:16 (NLT)**

When I was 15, my grandmother came to live with us. She had dementia, and over time, it progressed to Alzheimer's. The hardest parts weren't when she started forgetting people around her, but rather those fleeting moments of clarity when she sensed something was wrong with her mind. Those times were filled with tears, as she would say, *Something's not right in my mind*. It was a painful reality, as she seemed to recognize her decline even though she couldn't grasp it fully.

Aging can make us feel like we're losing control over our bodies, leading to a loss of independence we've known our whole lives. We can try our best to fight against the inevitable decline of aging, yet the struggles of this world seem to work against God's creation. That's why it's important to remember that we're more than just our bodies.

In Genesis 2:7, God creates the very first human from the dust of the ground and breathes the breath of life into his nostrils. The Hebrew word *neshama* (pronounced \*neh-shah-MAH\*) means *soul* or *spirit*, and shares a root with *neshima*, meaning *breath*. This connection elevates humans beyond just physical beings. God wove within us a soul that belonged to Him long before we entered our mothers' wombs—a soul destined for eternal life, either in the glory of the Lord or in the anguish of separation from Him.

Choosing to follow Jesus restores our souls, renewing them as we let go of pride and embrace God's Word. Just as we exercise and eat well to care for our bodies, we should also be preparing our souls for eternity. We must move beyond the notion that we're merely bodies with souls. In truth, we're souls living in bodies. While our earthly forms may wear out over time, our souls will endure forever. In Christ, God's love radiates through us, assuring us that regardless of what happens to our physical bodies, our souls will ultimately find peace in His glory.

**APPLICATION:** In moments of uncertainty and physical struggles, remember that your true soul lies beyond your earthly body. Trust in God's everlasting love, knowing that your spirit, when entrusted to Jesus Christ, will always find rest in His glory, no matter what challenges arise.

**PRAYER:** Lord, thank You for creating within us a soul that was ultimately made for You. Remind me today that my soul comes alive in your name, Jesus. I love You. Amen.

# CREATED FOR A PURPOSE

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*For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*  
**Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)**

The concept of *good works* can often be misunderstood. Many of us may be tempted to believe that our acts of service, kindness, obedience or sacrifice somehow earn us God's favor. However, it's important to recognize that faith is not the cause of our justification—it's the means by which we receive it. Our salvation is anchored in God's grace and mercy alone. We bring nothing to the table except our need for a Savior.

Yet, God does not save us only to leave us unchanged. The same grace that rescues us also transforms us. Our faith in Jesus should bring about a visible change in our lives. By proclaiming Jesus as Lord and placing our trust in Him, our actions begin to shift. We no longer perform works out of selfish ambition. Instead, we align our efforts with Christ's mission. The good works we produce are the natural fruit of our salvation.

God's purpose for our good works extends beyond our own lives. We engage in acts of love, mercy, generosity, service and obedience not to draw attention to ourselves or seek glory for our own salvation—which we could never earn—but to be a reflection of Christ and point others to Him. Our lives become signposts that direct others to Jesus.

The works that stem from a Christian's salvation play a vital role in God's redemptive plan. He often uses ordinary believers as instruments of His extraordinary grace. A word of encouragement, an act of compassion, a faithful witness, or a life marked by integrity can all help lead someone closer to Christ.

Good works are demonstrated in gratitude, character and action. Gratitude acknowledges the undeserved gift of salvation. Character reflects the transformative work of the Holy Spirit within us. Action displays God's love through tangible expressions of faith. Together, these elements reveal a life genuinely changed by grace.

**APPLICATION:** Today, remember that good works didn't save you, but you were saved *for* good works. God has already prepared opportunities for you to reflect His love and point others toward Him. Walk confidently in those opportunities, knowing that every act of obedience is not an attempt to earn God's favor but a joyful response to the favor you've already received through Christ.

**PRAYER:** Dear Jesus, thank You for using me in the work of Your Kingdom. What an honor to be a part of the good works You do. I pray You continue to use me for Your glory. I love You. Amen.

# JESUS' RESURRECTION GUARANTEES OURS

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*So, you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.*

**Romans 6:11 (NLT)**

Have you ever paused to wonder what that Saturday after Jesus' crucifixion must have been like? I can imagine it was a day full of overwhelming grief and confusion. The disciples were likely wrestling with the shock of what had happened, struggling to comprehend the significance of Jesus' foretelling of His own betrayal and death. They must have been filled with doubt about whether they truly understood His purpose when He promised that He would rise again on the third day (Matthew 20:17-19).

Then, on that glorious third day, everything changed. Jesus arose from the dead, and His first appearances were to Mary Magdalene and then to His disciples. In the following 40 days, more than 500 believers witnessed His resurrected presence, affirming the reality of His triumph over death.

As we reflect on this important moment, 1 Corinthians 15:21 reminds us that death entered the world through Adam, the first man created by God, when he sinned. Yet, through Jesus, the promise of resurrection is fulfilled: *For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive* (vs 22). Because Jesus rose from the dead never to die again, His resurrection became the foundation and guarantee of the resurrection promised to all believers. 1 Corinthians 15:55 says,

*"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"*

Without His resurrection, we would lack the basis of hope that moves us forward.

The beauty of this story is that through Jesus' death and resurrection, we're washed clean of our sins. This does not excuse sin; instead, it invites us into repentance, trust and a relationship with Him. As we turn from temptation and draw near to Jesus, He draws us closer to Himself and leads us into new life. Let us hold fast to this hope, celebrating the transformative power of Jesus' love and grace.

**APPLICATION:** Read and reflect on 1 Corinthians 15:56-57. Take a moment to thank God and Jesus Christ for His sacrifice and the victory we now have in Him.

**PRAYER:** Dear Lord, thank You for conquering death so that I can become truly alive in You! In You, death no longer has a hold on me. Thank You, Jesus, for Your abounding love for me. I love You. Amen.

# THE OLD FOUNDATION

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*...remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.*

**Ephesians 2:12 (NIV)**

*...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

**Romans 3:23 (NIV)**

As a kid, I once spent a summer helping my grandfather rebuild his barn. I remember wanting to jump straight into the exciting work—new boards, fresh paint and repairing the roof. Instead, my grandfather spent most of the first day walking around the barn, pointing out cracks, sagging supports and places where the foundation had settled. What seemed like a delay was the most important part of the project. If a barn starts leaning, the first thing a contractor does isn't repaint the walls or replace the roof. He inspects the foundation. Until you understand what's wrong underneath, every repair is temporary.

Paul begins Ephesians 2 the same way. Before he shows us what Christ has done, he reminds us of what was broken beneath the surface of our lives. We were separated from God, without hope and unable to save ourselves.

This isn't meant to shame us—it's meant to humble us. Most of us would rather fix symptoms than foundations. We work harder at our jobs, try to become better Christians, improve our finances, or manage our habits. Those all matter, but none of them address our deepest need. The problem isn't simply that we need improvement—we need rescue, and this isn't something we can solve on our own. Sin separates us from God, and no amount of hard work can bridge that gap.

Remembering where God found us keeps us grateful and dependent on Him. It reminds us that our standing before God is based entirely on His grace, not our performance. The stronger our awareness of our former condition, the deeper our appreciation for God's mercy.

**APPLICATION:** Take time this week to reflect on how God has changed your life. Write down three specific ways He has transformed your heart, priorities or relationships. Thank Him for the grace that rescued you when you could not rescue yourself.

**PRAYER:** Father, thank You for meeting me in my brokenness and bringing me into Your family. Protect me from pride and self-reliance and help me never forget the grace You've shown me. May remembering where I came from deepen my gratitude for what You have done. Amen.

# THE GREAT RESCUE

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*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

**Ephesians 2:13 (NIV)**

*For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.*

**Colossians 1:13 (NIV)**

During my time in the Marines, I learned the Fireman's Carry. During training, Marines practice carrying a wounded brother across rough terrain while exhausted and under time pressure. The injured Marine wasn't expected to help much. His only job was to trust the one carrying him. Rescue happens when a person cannot escape alone. The person being rescued contributes very little except trusting the one who came for him. That's a picture of the Gospel. We aren't merely struggling—we're spiritually lost and unable to save ourselves. There have been seasons in my life when I thought I could carry myself spiritually, only to discover I was exhausted and unable to move forward on my own.

When Paul says we were *far away*, he isn't talking about physical distance. He's describing spiritual separation. Sin creates a gap between God and us that no amount of church attendance, good deeds, religious activity, or personal discipline can bridge. Left to ourselves, we'd remain separated from God forever.

Yet Christ did what we could never do. Through His death and resurrection, He brought us near to God. Many people spend their lives trying to prove themselves—to employers, families, friends and even to God. The Gospel tells us that our acceptance before God is not based on our ability to perform, but on Christ's finished work. We don't fight for God's approval; we live from it.

The Great Rescue is not simply about forgiveness. It's about adoption, belonging and receiving a new identity. The Gospel changes more than our destination. It changes who we are. We're no longer defined by our failures, regrets, achievements or titles. We are sons and daughters of God. That truth provides a security that no promotion, paycheck or accomplishment can ever provide.

**APPLICATION:** Spend time in prayer this week, thanking God specifically for rescuing you. Whenever you catch yourself striving to earn His approval, remind yourself that Christ has already accomplished everything necessary to bring you near to Him. Thank Him not only for saving you, but for making you His child.

**PRAYER:** Lord Jesus, thank You for rescuing me when I could not rescue myself. Thank You for bringing me near through Your sacrifice and welcoming me into Your family. Help me live each day secure in Your love rather than striving to earn what You've already freely given. Amen.

# REMOVING THE WALLS

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*For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.* **Ephesians 2:14 (NIV)**

*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.* **2 Corinthians 5:18 (NIV)**

One of the first skills I learned in the Marine Corps was how to build a fighting position for protection. Fighting positions are designed behind walls of sandbags, bricks and wood to shield us from danger. In combat, those walls would save lives. However, in relationships, the barriers we build often do the opposite. They can show up as avoiding difficult conversations, refusing to forgive, or convincing ourselves we don't need anyone. I've learned that the strongest walls aren't built with sandbags and lumber—they're built with pride, fear and unresolved hurt. We convince ourselves that these barriers protect us from being hurt again, but over time, they keep others from getting close enough to help us heal. Eventually, those walls can isolate us from God and the people who care about us most.

Paul reminds us that Jesus came to tear down walls. The hostility between Jews and Gentiles was destroyed through Christ. More importantly, the barrier between sinful people and a holy God was removed at the cross. Notice, Paul doesn't simply say Jesus gives peace. He says Jesus **is** our peace. Real peace isn't found in avoiding conflict or pretending problems don't exist. Peace is found in a restored relationship with God. When we experience that peace, we become capable of extending it to others.

Because Christ reconciled us to God, He also calls us to pursue reconciliation with others. The Gospel doesn't simply change our eternal destination—it transforms the way we live, love and relate to one another. Reconciliation requires humility to admit when we're wrong, courage to take the first step toward healing, and grace to forgive when it's difficult. God has not only reconciled us to Himself—He has entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation. We're called to be bridge builders, not wall builders, in a world full of division.

**APPLICATION:** Ask God to reveal any walls that have formed in your heart. Is there a relationship that needs forgiveness, healing or a difficult conversation? Take one practical step this week toward reconciliation.

**PRAYER:** Father, thank You for tearing down the wall that separated me from You. Reveal any barriers in my own heart and give me the courage to pursue peace with others. Make me a person who reflects the reconciliation and grace I've received through Christ. Amen.

# JOINING THE HOUSEHOLD

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*He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household.*

**Ephesians 2:17-19 (NIV)**

*"...that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."*

**John 17:21 (ESV)**

As the youngest of six siblings, I was blessed to grow up in a family where my mom and dad provided for our basic needs: meals, clothes, and a home. They also created an environment where my siblings and I shared bedrooms and bathrooms, ate together, played together, and learned the rhythms of family life. We were also blessed with outings like the community pool and church. My parents made sure we learned about Jesus at church and at home. Though we had plenty of household conflicts and challenges, we still experienced stability, protection, provision and belonging as one family centered on faith in God.

In the Ephesians passage, Paul teaches Gentile believers in Ephesus that God was at work through Christ to bring salvation to both Jews **and** Gentiles. Through Jesus, those who were once far away are brought near and joined together as one family, with Christ as the head. Paul helps them see their identity as *fellow citizens with God's people* and *members of His household*. Though Gentiles were once outside God's covenant promises given to Israel, God has made salvation available to **all** so that, through faith in Jesus and His blood shed for our sin, both are made one body in Christ.

That picture of God bringing outsiders near and joining different people into one household reminds me of how my family has grown. We began with parents and children under one roof, but over time, we welcomed in-laws, children of our own, and dear friends. Though our stories, personalities and backgrounds vary, our deepest commonality, oneness and joy are found in the centrality of Christ. In a greater way, God has joined Jews and Gentiles together through faith in Jesus, making us one family of believers who share the blessings of belonging to Him.

**APPLICATION:** Think of someone whom God has placed in your path. Pray for an opportunity to show His grace and kindness to them.

**PRAYER:** God, use me to demonstrate Your goodness to someone who needs to know You. Help me reflect the peace and joy of being a member of Your household so others may see the beauty of belonging to You. Amen.

# LAYING THE CORNERSTONE

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*...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.*  
**Ephesians 2:20 (NIV)**

*Therefore, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: "Look! I am placing a foundation stone in Jerusalem, a firm and tested stone. It is a precious cornerstone that is safe to build on. Whoever believes need never be shaken." **Isaiah 28:16 (NLT)***

Paul points out in Ephesians 2:20 that Jesus Christ is **the** foundational stone of the Church. Though the apostles and prophets served a foundational role through the teaching of Scripture, Christ is the premier and pivotal Cornerstone undergirding the Church's stability and integrity.

One of the great hymns of our faith is *The Solid Rock*, also known as *My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less*. Edward Mote wrote the lyrics in 1834, and William Bradbury added the music in 1864. Since then, the hymn has become a staple in both traditional and modern evangelical worship, and the worship song *Cornerstone* by Hillsong draws on it. Take a moment to read and reflect on the hymn:

*Verse 1: My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name.*

*Refrain: On Christ, the Solid Rock, I stand: all other ground is sinking sand; all other ground is sinking sand.*

*Verse 4: When He shall come with trumpet sound, O may I then in Him be found: dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.*

**APPLICATION:** Take a moment to ask God to show you an area of your life where He wants you to relinquish control and fully trust Him—instead of leaning on your own methods or *sweetest frame*. Then name one step of obedience you can take today, and ask Him for the courage to follow through.

**PRAYER:** God, thank You that You're completely trustworthy and true. Thank You that Christ is the *Cornerstone* and firm foundation on which I can fully place my trust and build the life You've called me to live in Him. Amen.

# BUILDING THE TEMPLE

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*In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.* **Ephesians 2:21-22 (NIV)**

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."* **Revelation 21:3 (ESV)**

In the Ephesians passage, Paul further develops the picture of Gentiles and Jews becoming one household, one body through union with Christ. Gentiles (non-Jews) in Christ are now full participants in the covenant promises God made to Israel. They're being joined with Jews in Christ to become one unified dwelling place or temple (Church) where God, by His Spirit, resides with His people, the redeemed in Christ.

You and I, individually and collectively, through faith in Christ, are the dwelling place of God. We're called to live as a unified, growing, holy community of believers centered on Christ, with the Holy Spirit residing in us. This unity shapes more than our individual growth in Christ; it also shapes how we love, serve, forgive and encourage one another. As God's dwelling place, we're invited to live faithfully among His people, serving one another and reflecting His presence in ordinary acts of love, unity and obedience.

**APPLICATION:** Consider the following questions. Which one of these is God leading you to act on first?

- How am I supporting what God is doing at my church?
- Is there someone I need to reconcile with or forgive?
- Am I growing spiritually or remaining stagnant?
- Do my daily choices reflect that I belong to God and His people, trusting and obeying?
- How can I use my gifts to strengthen other believers this week?

**PRAYER:** God, thank You for calling me to new life in Christ and joining me with other believers to live out that calling! Guide me to trust You more deeply and to faithfully live out all that You are calling me to do. Amen.

# THE GOD WHO REVEALS

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*God did not reveal it to previous generations, but now by his Spirit he has revealed it to his holy apostles and prophets.* **Ephesians 3:5 (NLT)**

The difference between the Old and New Testaments can be confusing. The Old Testament contains stories where God's judgment seems overwhelming. Meanwhile, the New Testament usually feels more understandable because we see God revealed through Jesus. So, did God change? Did Jesus' coming somehow make the stories before Him irrelevant?

No, God has always had one plan. He was revealing it slowly along the way.

Since the beginning, God has been slowly revealing His character, His purpose and His plan to His people.

- In Eden, God reveals that sin deserves judgment, but sinners receive mercy.
- Through Abraham, God reveals His promise to bless the nations.
- Through Moses, He reveals His holiness and humanity's need for a mediator.
- Through the prophets, He reveals hope for a coming Messiah.

In Jesus, the picture comes into focus. Because of Jesus and the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit, we now have access to the fullness of that revelation. Even so, growing in our understanding of it still takes time.

Why does God teach us so slowly? Because He is kind. God is a patient Father. He knows humanity's frailty and how He designed us to develop over time. God's patience doesn't delay His goodness. Rather, it's an expression of His goodness. Everything God does is good, right and perfect.

In the same way, He slowly reveals Himself throughout Scripture. He does the same in our lives. There's something beautiful about the slow, purposeful journey we're on with Jesus. He doesn't require us to know everything immediately or balk at our immaturities. Rather, like a good father, He walks through the process with us, giving us the revelation, wisdom, courage and time to grow.

The great gift we have in this life is the Holy Spirit. He's our teacher, guide and comforter. There's nothing—no knowledge, no achievement, no power that can replace the work He does in our lives. While the process of revelation may feel frustrating, we can be confident that He'll be with us along the way.

**APPLICATION:** Thank God for what He has revealed, and ask the Holy Spirit for faith to trust what He has not yet revealed. Rest in His goodness as you wait for more of His revelation.

**PRAYER:** Father, thank You for revealing Yourself to me. Teach me how to wait and long for Your presence. Amen.

# RICH INHERITANCE

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*"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field."*  
**Matthew 13:44 (NLT)**

It's in human nature to believe that the *grass is greener on the other side*. We think that if we get one more thing, reach one more goal, or move into a higher tax bracket, the noise within us will subside. But faith in Jesus doesn't simply silence those longings—it redirects them. Scripture shows that our deepest longing can only be satisfied in Him, so we don't need to chase treasures that can never fulfill us.

In Jesus' parable of the hidden treasure, the Kingdom of God is like a treasure hidden in a field. The man doesn't hesitate because he understands the value of what he's found. He gladly gives up everything, knowing the treasure is worth infinitely more than anything he'll lose. In Ephesians 3, Paul reemphasizes the vast richness of our inheritance. Through Jesus, we receive a treasure greater than anything we could ever purchase or earn. We have no idea how rich our inheritance through Jesus is. It may not be what the world calls treasure, but it is treasure no money could ever buy.

Just watch TV for a while, and it's easy to see how much the world markets satisfaction. With one more purchase, promotion, skincare cream or vacation, we're told we can feel the peace and fulfillment we desire. But that promise always leaves us wanting more.

What if we really believed Jesus when He said He had more for us? What if we pursued Him like we pursue that next big thing that promises satisfaction? What if we let the Holy Spirit transform our desires, teaching us to seek Him above the things we believe will finally satisfy us? If we did, much would change. So let's believe Him, pursue Him, and let Him transform our desires.

**APPLICATION:** What am I looking to for the peace and fulfillment that only Christ can provide?

**PRAYER:** Lord, thank You for the rich inheritance You've given me through Jesus. Teach me to treasure You above everything else in this world. Amen.

# NO LONGER OUTSIDERS

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*And this is God's plan: Both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God's children. Both are part of the same body, and both enjoy the promise of blessings because they belong to Christ Jesus.*

**Ephesians 3:6 (NLT)**

Here's something radical: the Gospel is literally for *everyone*. But if we're honest, we often struggle when God's invitation extends to people who are different from us. Yet God has always done it this way. Whether foreigners, pagans, sinners or those from the chosen race of people, all have been given the chance to trust and follow Him.

Throughout Scripture, we see God's heart for everyone to know Him—Rahab, Ruth, Nineveh, the Samaritan woman and the Ethiopian official—all outsiders who experienced God's mercy and grace. These stories crossed a boundary that religious people expected God to keep. But repeatedly, God's heart ached so much for all the world to know Him that He extended Himself beyond the limits of the *rules* to invite others into His Kingdom.

What's hard to grasp, however, is that many of God's people resisted His merciful heart, often adding expectations to the Gospel that God never required:

- Peter resisted the inclusion of the Gentiles.
- The Pharisees rebuked Jesus for welcoming tax collectors and sinners.
- The prodigal son's older brother resented their father's grace toward his brother.

The early church struggled because it confused God's requirements with cultural requirements. That's why Paul spent so much time explaining that salvation wasn't just for the Jews. Even now, we can find ourselves doing the same thing.

There's a difference between cultural conformity and Gospel transformation. Too often, we impose our preferences on conversion, accidentally requiring individuals to conform to human standards before recognizing their belonging in Christ. Obedience matters, but conformity isn't the same thing as obedience.

Throughout the Bible, God offers His invitation of salvation to anyone willing to say yes. His invitation extends to the richest, the poorest, the religious, the rebellious and the broken. The human boundaries we draw pale in comparison to what Jesus requires: He requires surrender, not perfection. Jesus removes our outsider status and additionally transforms our inward reality. It's never conformity that qualifies us—it's always Jesus.

**APPLICATION:** Jesus welcomed you long before you thought you had everything figured out. Who is He asking you to welcome today?

**PRAYER:** Jesus, thank You for welcoming me through Your grace. Help me love others as You do. Amen.

# THE LEAST DESERVING

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*Though I am the least deserving of all God's people, he graciously gave me the privilege of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ.*

**Ephesians 3:8 (NLT)**

*Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.*

**2 Corinthians 12:9 (NLT)**

Why does God delight in using unlikely people? The Bible is filled with stories of God choosing people who, on paper, may not have been the best choice.

- Moses was slow of speech.
- Gideon was the least in his family.
- David was a forgotten shepherd.
- Peter denied Jesus.
- Paul persecuted God's people.

The list could continue. God chose murderers, outsiders, anxious hearts, immature believers, the overlooked, the broken and the unlikely to build His church. He didn't base His choices on clean records or impressive appearances. Instead, He chose people who depended on Him and revealed His power through their weakness.

This is how Paul, a persecutor of the church, turned church planter, was able to boast in his weakness. He didn't see his past choices as something to hide, nor did he feel superior because of his education or conversion. Rather, he saw God's power revealed through him despite his weakness, as an even greater testament to God's love, power, grace and mercy.

That means when we're strong and competent, we depend on Him. When we're poor and needy, we depend on Him. When we know the right answer, we depend on Him. When we don't have the right answer, we depend on Him. In every season, choose to surrender control, trust Jesus, and let your weakness and strength point you back to Him. There's no season or circumstance in which we outgrow our need for Jesus.

**APPLICATION:** Where am I holding on to control instead of trusting Jesus to work through my strengths and weaknesses?

**PRAYER:** Jesus, thank You for using imperfect people. Teach me humility and help me depend on Your strength alone. Amen.

# A GOD OF REDEMPTION

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*"You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good."*

**Genesis 50:20a (NLT)**

Have you ever found yourself in a place where hope felt impossible? Whether because of your mistakes or someone else's actions? Have you faced a painful situation and wondered how things could ever be made right?

Joseph experienced profound loss. Betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, taken to a faraway land, and wrongfully imprisoned. He spent years as both a slave and a prisoner before God used every hardship to place him in a position of influence. When he came face to face with the brothers who betrayed him and now needed him to save them, all he could say was, *"You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good."*

God turned injustice and sorrow into a blessing. But God can overturn not only betrayal, but also our own mistakes. The same God who redeemed Joseph from his suffering also redeemed Paul from his rebellion.

Only the Lord could take a life marked by zealous religious persecution and hostility toward the church and turn it into a life of evangelism, discipleship and love. Paul's story is remarkable because God redeemed the very things that once made him an enemy of the church and used them to advance the Gospel.

Persecuted the church → Built the church  
Hunted Christians → Shepherded Christians  
Tried to stop the Gospel → Spread the Gospel  
Trusted his righteousness → Proclaimed Christ's righteousness

Why would God choose the church's greatest enemy to become one of the greatest messengers of the Gospel? How could a slave and prisoner become the person God used to save thousands of lives? Because God is committed to redemption.

The same God who elevated Joseph and transformed Paul is still redeeming our stories today. God does not author evil, but He's powerful enough to redeem what evil intends for harm. He takes what seems disqualifying and uses it for His purposes. Setbacks become opportunities for God to reveal His faithfulness. Your past and failures don't have the final word when Jesus is involved. The God who redeemed Joseph and Paul is still writing redemption stories today. Grace doesn't simply forgive our past—it redeems it.

**APPLICATION:** What part of your story have you been tempted to believe is too broken, too painful, or too far gone for God to redeem? Invite the Lord into that place.

**PRAYER:** Lord, thank You for redeeming broken stories. Help me trust that Your ways are always higher, greater and better. Amen.

**WEEK FIVE • FRIDAY**

# BOLD ACCESS

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*Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence.*  
**Ephesians 3:12 (NLT)**

Can you imagine trying to walk into the Oval Office, Buckingham Palace, the Pentagon, or any other highly restricted place around the world? We wouldn't get very far. Those buildings are protected for a reason, and it's appropriate that only a designated group has access. The people of the Bible understood restricted access. They knew that sin kept humanity at a distance from God's holy presence. Access came only through the sacrificial system God had established, and even then, it was limited.

Imagine what it was like in Old Testament times—the crowds, the dust, the constant bleating of goats and sheep, the smell of the burnt offerings, the sight of splattered blood around the altar. Depending on the offense—even if it was committed unintentionally—sin offerings included unblemished bulls, rams, male or female goats, lambs, or, for those with limited means, a pair of turtledoves or pigeons. These animals represented something valuable and pure—a costly reminder of sin's consequences. Yet the sacrifices continued day after day and year after year because they could never fully remove sin. The worshippers knew that sin carried the penalty of death and that atonement required the shedding of blood, and another sacrifice would soon be needed.

But through Jesus, everything changed. On this side of Jesus' resurrection, it's easy to miss how dramatic our bold and confident access to God is because it's familiar in our theology. We've never had to participate in the sacrificial system. We've never known what it is to be disqualified or restricted from God's presence.

Jesus' life and death give us confident access to God, so that we can approach His throne of grace and mercy without fear or a sacrifice of our own. This truth protects us from these opposing dangers: *entitlement* and *shame*. We fight entitlement by remembering that access to God was never something we earned. We fight shame by remembering that Jesus has already made the way. Our bold access rests on Him alone.

Jesus made the way. We don't enter because we're worthy—We enter because He is.

**APPLICATION:** How would our relationship with God change if we truly lived every day remembering that we've been invited into His presence through Jesus?

**PRAYER:** Jesus, thank You for the gift of presence. Teach me how to approach You boldly and confidently. Amen.

# WHAT STORY ARE YOU LIVING IN?

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*For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.*

**Romans 15:4 (NIV)**

During a childhood trip to Disney World, my family attended one of the 3-D shows. We slipped on our funny glasses and sat mesmerized as the images jumped right off the screen. So vivid. So lifelike. So close. So much so that at one point, my brother reached out to grab one. To his surprise, all he felt was the lady's hair in front of him.

The glasses we wore shaped our perception of the world around us. While it was fun and entertaining, we couldn't really take hold of what they offered. What seemed real was not actually true.

When the show ended, we tossed our glasses and went on with our day. Although we no longer had physical lenses shaping how we perceived the world around us, we still had a lens influencing our view of reality.

We all have a lens through which we interpret life. Think of it like imaginary glasses. These glasses are shaped by our beliefs about God and the world, and these beliefs determine how we interpret and process the world, our purpose in it, and the beauty and pain in this life. Some people see a world where they're their own god and life is all about self and personal pleasure. Other people believe in God but consider Him distant and irrelevant to their lives. Many others only see God as a judge, waiting to evaluate their good versus bad behavior, so they strive and perform for His approval.

While seeing life through these lenses may seem appealing, when you reach out to take hold of what they offer, you'll eventually come up empty-handed. There's only one set of lenses that gives you a true picture of the story you're living in, and that comes from what God has written for us in His Word, the Bible. It's the epic story of a glorious creation, a tragic fall, a remarkable redemption, and the promised restoration of all things.

The Bible isn't just a book to read; it's the context for the world in which we live, and seeing your life through its lens will give meaning to everything beautiful and painful in your story.

**APPLICATION:** To what extent is your view of God and the world filtered through the lens of Scripture?

**PRAYER:** Father, give me eyes to see my story as part of Your grander story. Amen.

# HOW IT STARTED VS. HOW IT'S GOING

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*Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.*  
**Genesis 2:8 (NIV)**

Several years ago, the *How It Started vs. How It's Going* meme took over social media. The trend involved placing two pictures side by side to compare how things have changed from a point in the past to the present day. Social media certainly didn't exist for Adam and Eve, but if there were ever two people whose *How it started* looked vastly different from their *How it's going*, it was them.

God formed Adam and Eve, and He placed them in a beautiful garden in Eden with the responsibility to care for the garden and every other living creature He'd made. Life in the garden was good and perfect. It was like heaven on earth, a place of flourishing and delight. They lived in harmony and peace with each other and the animals. They knew no fear or shame. Oh, what it must have been like to never be plagued by the thought, *Am I good enough?* Pain, frustration and stress never tainted their experiences, nor did brokenness, sickness or death.

Unlike the rest of God's creation, God made Adam and Eve in His image, and He blessed them with the privilege of His friendship. He also gave them a tremendously significant purpose: to glorify Him and enjoy living in relationship with Him.

In the beginning, Adam and Eve fully lived their purpose. Their hearts were satisfied by God alone, and they lived every day in God's presence, experiencing the greatest joy the human heart can know. The joy of friendship with God. The joy of freely talking with God. The joy of living in God's perfect paradise. The joy of knowing and loving God and of being fully known and fully loved by God.

They had everything one could ever dream of, and life was very good. But rather than appreciate all they'd been given, they fell into a trap of doubt and desire that led them away from God's best for them, breaking their pure and perfect relationship with God and each other. What started well quickly unraveled into the world we find ourselves in today, where we desperately ache for someone to make things right again.

**APPLICATION:** Spend some time imagining what life was like in the garden. What about Eden do you long for the most?

**PRAYER:** God, my heart longs for life like Adam and Eve knew in the garden. Fill me with hope and assurance that one day, You'll make things like Eden again. Amen.

# WE ALL FELL DOWN

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*When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.*  
**Romans 5:12 (NLT)**

We don't live in Eden. You don't need me to tell you that. The cancer diagnosis, the broken relationships, the funerals, and your stress and anxiety levels scream at you that life is not the way God first ordered it to be. So, how did we get here?

Well, like every good story, the Bible has a villain. His name is Satan, and he seeks to destroy everything wonderful God has made. He hates God, and because he couldn't overthrow God, he went after the next best thing: humans made in God's image. He approached Eve in the form of a serpent and twisted God's words to create the perception that God was holding out on them. She fell for his lie that the alluring fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which God had put off limits, would taste good and make her like God.

So, Eve took the fruit, ate it and then gave some to Adam, who did the same. They immediately saw that they were naked and felt ashamed and exposed, so they scrambled to make coverings for themselves. In fear, they hid themselves from the God they were made to enjoy. The sweet, unrestricted relationship they'd had with God was now broken.

Their rebellion not only broke their relationship with God, but it also fractured their relationship with each other. Adam blamed Eve for giving him the fruit, and Eve blamed the serpent for deceiving her. Accusations, distrust and division became a normal part of human relationships that day.

The fallout continued into creation itself. The ground produced thorns and thistles. Weeds crept in amongst the beauty. Darkness carried a new heaviness with it, and animals turned dangerous.

On top of shame, broken relationships, and the tainting of creation, another great tragedy shook the world that day. Death. Adam and Eve didn't physically die upon eating the fruit, but they did experience spiritual death in their relationship with God, and the clock started ticking until they'd experience physical death.

Their disobedience shattered the perfect world God had created, which is how we ended up living in a sinful, fallen world so different from Eden. But God is too good to let this be the end of the story.

**APPLICATION:** How does knowing this story help you make sense of the brokenness you see in the world?

**PRAYER:** God, thank You that the story isn't over and that You love to pick us up when we fall. Amen.

# JESUS IS THE HERO OF THE STORY

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*Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst. 1 Timothy 1:15 (NIV)*

If you've ever watched a superhero movie, you know that at some point in the movie, things look grim for the hero. Defeat looks all but certain, and the villain appears victorious. But suddenly, the plot twists, and the hero roars back with power, taking down the villain and saving the day.

While superhero films are fictional tales, their underlying themes point to the desire within us to see life conquer death, good triumph over evil, and victory prevail against the odds. This is the story of Scripture. Only the biblical narrative is 100% true and far more magnificent than any screenwriter could dare to imagine.

At its core, the biblical story is the Living God's relentless pursuit of wayward, rebellious sinners who cannot save themselves from sin, death and Satan. We all need a hero, and despite what our pride may tell us, it's not us. Enter Jesus, the perfect Son of God and ultimate hero, who plunged Himself into the brokenness and suffering of this world in a divine rescue mission to free us from darkness and bring us into His Kingdom of light.

At a real time, in a real place, on this actual earth, Jesus' body lay dead in a tomb. For three days, death was real, and evil appeared to have triumphed. But even though it was real, it was not forever. Nothing could hold Jesus down. Not death. Not Satan. Not the entire world's sin that He took upon Himself. So, three days after giving up His life on the cross, He roared back to life and victoriously walked right out of the tomb against all odds.

His victory is our victory! Even though we're still in a fallen world, His life, death and resurrection give us power over sin and Satan and hope beyond the grave.

**APPLICATION:** You don't have to be the hero of your story. In fact, you were never meant to be, so take the pressure off yourself and live like you have a Savior, because you do.

**PRAYER:** God, there is no one like You. Who else longs to save people who rebelled against them as You do? Thank You for Your relentless pursuit of sinners and Your power to redeem. Amen.

# GOD'S STORY BRINGS JOY TO YOUR STORY

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*"These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."*

**John 15:11 (ESV)**

God has wired our hearts to desire joy. The world offers us countless options to satisfy that longing, but if we're honest, no amount of temporary pleasures, material possessions or applause from others can completely fill this void. Think about it, have you ever noticed that even when you get the thing your heart desires, you quickly become aware that something else is missing? It's only in God that we'll find the deep, eternal joy our hearts crave.

A proper understanding of God's story points our hearts to Eden and the ultimate purpose for which we were made: to glorify God and enjoy living in relationship with Him.

Today, we find ourselves living in the middle of the biblical narrative, where the reality of the fall is tangible. However, the redemptive work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit inside us makes the full and forever joy of God's presence accessible to us today as we navigate the highs and lows of life.

God longs for you to encounter the deep, unbreakable joy that comes from living in relationship with Him – the One who made you, gave everything to be with you, knows you fully, loves you completely, cares for you daily, comforts you deeply, and shares His victory over sin, Satan and death with you. This is the joy you were made for!

Your life is not happenstance. It's a unique and precious part of the most joy-filled story the world has ever known. The day you decide to follow Jesus, your life becomes the start of a magnificent adventure in loving and enjoying the heart of God, your Maker, that'll go on for eternity. The joy that comes from rooting your life in His grace and truth, as opposed to your feelings, circumstances, performance or possessions, is unbreakable. It has the power to magnify your awesome days and sustain you on your hardest days.

**APPLICATION:** Stop searching for joy that you've already been given.

**PRAYER:** Father, thank You for the joy and significance Your story brings to my life. Help me continually seek You as my greatest source of joy, not the things of this world. Amen.

# STAY IN THE STORY

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*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.* **Romans 8:18 (ESV)**

To live in our Father's story, we must accept that the story won't always go the way we think it should. This can be hard, particularly if you're the type who loves a good plan, but we mustn't shut down when things go sideways. There's never a moment when God is sitting idly by in Heaven just watching and wondering how our lives will turn out. He's always working in ways far beyond what our minds can conceive and is always present even when He seems silent. No tear goes unseen. No suffering is ever wasted. No circumstance is beyond His redemption.

As I look back over my life, I can see how God has woven my story and worked good from difficult things, which gives me faith and hope that He'll also weave good from whatever part of my story doesn't feel good and doesn't make sense right now. So, I keep trusting. I keep praying. I keep persevering. And I keep close to Jesus and hold tight to His promise that one day He's coming back.

We may not know all the details, but we do know that when Jesus returns, He'll bring about the restoration of ALL things. Yes, the end of God's story is good. Very, very good. I'm talking no more tears, no more death, no more pain, no more fear, no more chaos, and we will dwell with God in a perfect new heaven and earth.

One day, you'll fully behold the face of God that you can't see today. The joy that Adam and Eve knew will be all yours. The glory of Eden will be fully restored. John Eldredge describes it wonderfully in his book, *Beautiful Outlaw*:

*My friends, I hope you understand that we get the entire glorious kingdom back. Sunlight on water; songbirds in a forest; desert sands under moonlight; vineyards just before harvest - Jesus fully intends to restore the glorious world he gave us. Paradise lost; paradise regained. A hundred times over.*

So, stay in the story, friend. Keep trusting. Keep praying. Keep believing. The best is yet to come.

**APPLICATION:** What part of your story are you struggling to trust God with today?

**PRAYER:** Father, may Your past faithfulness and Your promise of future glory stir my hope and perseverance in my present moments. Amen.

# BEYOND AFFECTION

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*God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.*

**1 John 4:9-10 (NLT)**

We've heard it said that love is a many-splendored thing. We effortlessly break into song when we hear the chorus of Whitney Houston's *I Will Always Love You*. We love our country, our family and our friends. Personally, I also love pepperoni pizza and the color pink. If love applies to all these things, how do we determine what love really is?

I love studying words, so I compared a few dictionary definitions of love. Depending on the source, love is defined as a strong affection for another *rooted in* kinship or personal ties, admiration or common interests, warm attachment, enthusiasm or devotion. Scripture invites us into a deeper and more specific understanding of love. 1 John 3:16-18 explains: *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.* True love, the love of God, is transformative. It's more than affection or admiration. It's sacrificial, active and rooted in the character of Christ.

I'm thankful that His love for me isn't grounded in my behavior, my likes and interests, or my characteristics. His love is grounded in *His* character, not mine. He proved that His love for us is so intense that He gave His Son as a sacrifice for us. He has instructed us to love others by sacrificing ourselves for them, by caring for them, and by generously sharing our resources.

**APPLICATION:** How can you show Jesus' love today? Grand gestures are wonderful, but not always necessary. Be intentional about looking for the needs of people around you and ask God to help you love them sacrificially.

**PRAYER:** Heavenly Father, thank You for Your perfect and sacrificial love. Please help me to be mindful of the needs of people around me and show me how to love them with the resources You've given me. Allow others to see Your love through my actions. Amen.

# HIS FAITHFULNESS FOR OUR FAILURES

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*When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.*

**Genesis 3:6-7 (NIV)**

Genesis contains rich details of God's love for mankind. He placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, where they could live freely and enjoy His miraculous creation. They lacked nothing, and the Lord gave them only one restriction: they were not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He warned them that if they ate from the tree, they would surely die. But the serpent deceived them by suggesting that God was withholding knowledge from them. That tiny seed of doubt led to the fatal bite that brought sin into the world. God's perfect creation was now tainted by sin. Immediately, Adam and Eve knew they had sinned and tried to hide from the Lord. But God is sovereign, and nothing escapes His eyes. He questioned them and allowed them to explain what they had done, much like children who try to justify their wrongdoing to a parent.

God delivered their consequences and banished them from the garden. This is the part of the story where ***we may be tempted*** to question God's goodness and love, but it's also where His goodness shines brightly. He followed through with the consequences because He never goes back on His Word; He is trustworthy and righteous. Yet before sending them out of the garden, He made garments from animal skins to cover their nakedness and prepare them for life outside Eden. His justice and His grace are not contradictory. They're beautifully displayed together. Even in our disobedience, His love is faithful.

**APPLICATION:** Think of a specific time you disobeyed God, yet He continued to take care of you. You may have faced consequences, but reflect on His goodness despite your disobedience.

**PRAYER:** Heavenly Father, thank You for Your faithfulness to me. Please forgive my sins and help me to walk in obedience to Your divine commands. Help me to recognize Your goodness and love in all circumstances. Amen.

# LESSONS FROM THE LOVE OF JESUS

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*"So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."*  
**John 13:34-35 (NLT)**

When I first met my husband, I was instantly smitten. I'm sure I looked at him with the starry eyes of a schoolgirl's first crush, and I hung onto his every word. As we spent more time together, I was drawn to his character, his integrity and compassion for others. My love for him grew, and I began to study him—how he gives and receives love.

If this sounds familiar, you may have read Gary Chapman's book *The Five Love Languages*, which identifies the primary ways people receive and express love. These languages help determine how we can show love to others. Since Jesus has commanded us to love others, how can we love as He does? It may be helpful for us to examine His love for us in the context of the five Love Languages.

**Words of Affirmation:** *Your new name will be "The City of God's Delight" and "The Bride of God," for the LORD delights in you and will claim you as his bride.*  
**Isaiah 62:4b (NLT)**

**Acts of Service:** *So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.*  
**John 13:4-5 (NLT)**

**Receiving Gifts:** *God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another.*  
**1 Peter 4:10 (NLT)**

**Quality Time:** *"Come and see," he said. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when they went with him to the place where he was staying, and they remained with him the rest of the day.*  
**John 1:39, NLT**

**Physical Touch:** *Then he took the children in his arms and placed his hands on their heads and blessed them.*  
**Mark 10:16 (NLT)**

Jesus is the original author of love, and He left evidence all over the pages of Scripture.

**APPLICATION:** Without saying *I love you*, show someone you love them today through one of the five love languages.

**PRAYER:** Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of Your Word. Continue to show me how I can love others well, just as You do. Amen.

# THE JOY OF THE FATHER

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*This is the written account of the descendants of Adam. When God created human beings, he made them to be like himself.* **Genesis 5:1 (NLT)**

*What are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? Yet you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor.* **Psalms 8:4-5 (NLT)**

Have you ever noticed how parents light up when someone points out that their child has their smile, their laugh or their kind heart? They delight in seeing glimpses of themselves reflected in their children. Those similarities are cherished, not because they make the child more valuable, but because they remind the parent of the special bond they share.

Our Heavenly Father delights in His people in an even greater way. When God created humanity, He made us in His own likeness. We were created to reflect His character, His goodness and His love. Imagine the joy of our Creator as He looks upon those who bear His image. Although sin has distorted that reflection, it hasn't erased the dignity God gave us as His image-bearers. In Christ, we're restored, redeemed and brought near as beloved children. Our worth isn't based on what we achieve, but on whose image we bear and Whose grace has made us His own.

When you begin to see yourself through God's eyes, you no longer have to chase approval or measure your worth by comparison. You can rest in the truth that you are deeply known, intentionally created and, through Christ, welcomed as God's own. The One who crowned humanity with honor is also the One who redeems, restores, and calls you His own.

**APPLICATION:** Today, come to God in stillness. Replace one negative thought about yourself with a truth from God's Word. Let Him remind you that you were created in His image, that He delights in you, and that you're crowned with honor as His child.

**PRAYER:** Heavenly Father, thank You for creating me in Your image. Help me to see myself the way You see me and to find my identity in You alone. Remind me that I am deeply loved and valued because I belong to You. Amen.

# BECAUSE HE LOVES YOU

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*"Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need. So don't be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom."*  
**Luke 12:31-32 (NLT)**

*For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory.*  
**Romans 8:29-30 (NLT)**

Have you ever been invited into someone's home for a meal and discovered that your host had thoughtfully prepared your favorite dish? They weren't simply checking a box or fulfilling an obligation. Every detail reflected their desire to make you feel welcome, cared for and known. The greatest hosts don't find joy merely in preparing the meal—they find joy in watching others enjoy it.

Jesus paints a similar picture of our Heavenly Father in Luke 12. Not only will He give us the Kingdom, but it gives Him great happiness to do so. This reveals something beautiful about the heart of God. He's not distant or begrudging in His generosity; He delights in blessing His children. Romans 8 reminds us that our salvation begins with God's loving initiative. He knew His people, called them, justified them, and promised to glorify them. We do not obey to gain God's love; we obey because, in Christ, we have already received it. His love is not a prize for those who deserve it; it is a gift freely given through Jesus Christ.

We can trust that the Father who gave us His Son will also faithfully provide everything we need to accomplish His purposes. The God who chose us and called us has never stopped loving us. His heart has always been for His children, and it always will be.

**APPLICATION:** Think about an area of your life where you've been striving to earn God's approval. Surrender that burden to Him today. Thank Him that His love is a gift, not a reward, and choose to seek His Kingdom from a heart of gratitude.

**PRAYER:** Heavenly Father, thank You for loving me long before I ever sought You. Thank You for choosing me, calling me and making me Your own. Help me to rest in Your love and seek Your Kingdom with confidence, knowing that You delight in caring for Your children. Amen.

# YOU'RE INVITED

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*So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.*

**Hebrews 4:16 (NLT)**

*Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.*

**Philippians 4:6 (NLT)**

One of the greatest expressions of love is making yourself available to someone. We all know what it feels like to reach out to a friend only to hear *I'm busy, or Can we talk later?* Life is full of interruptions and competing priorities, making uninterrupted access to another person a rare gift. Yet God offers us something no one else can. At any moment of any day, we have an open invitation into His presence.

Because of Jesus' sacrifice, prayer is not a privilege for a select few. It's a gift given to every follower of Christ. Hebrews tells us we can come boldly before God's throne. Not timidly, wondering if we'll be welcomed, but confidently, knowing we're deeply loved. We don't have to make an appointment, earn an audience, or hope God has time for us. The King of the universe invites us to bring every burden, every fear, every question and every joy before Him.

Prayer reminds us that we have a Father who listens attentively, responds with wisdom, and gives us what we need. He invites us to exchange anxiety for communion with Him. Every concern becomes an opportunity to experience the Father's love. As we pour our hearts out to Him and thank Him for His faithfulness, our confidence grows—not because every circumstance changes immediately, but because we know Who is listening.

**APPLICATION:** Spend a few quiet moments talking with God. Thank Him for being available and eager to hear from you when you come to Him in prayer. Be still and listen for what He has to say to you.

**PRAYER:** Heavenly Father, thank You for inviting me into Your presence. Thank You for the reassurance that I never have to wonder if You have time for me because Your ears are always open to my prayers. Teach me to bring every joy, burden and need to You with confidence. Amen.

# FOLLOWING THE CALL

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*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with another in love.*  
**Ephesians 4:1-2 (NIV)**

In Ephesians, Paul emphasizes the importance of following our calling in life. In this passage, he reminds us that we have been called—but also that we have a choice in whether we respond.

Paul uses the word *urge* (while other translations say *beg*), which is significant. He doesn't command us; instead, he appeals to us. This highlights that, sadly, not everyone will choose to follow God's calling. The word *then* (or *therefore*) signals that this calling is not just something to understand, but something to live out as part of our relationship with Jesus.

The verse goes on to encourage us to be completely humble, gentle, patient, and to bear with one another in love. That is certainly a challenge. Notably, humility is listed first. If we can truly be humble, we remain teachable—and from that posture, the other qualities can grow.

Here's a practical example. Imagine your phone rings, and you see the name on the screen—do you hesitate, take a deep breath, and silence the call?

It might be a brother or sister who simply needs someone to listen to them. And yes, from experience, those calls can come often, feel tedious or even repetitive. They can stretch us and challenge us. But more importantly, they help shape us into the kind of people Paul encourages us to be. So often, people don't need advice—they just need someone present. Today, let's choose to be worthy of our calling: to bear with one another in steadfast love and grow in unity together.

**APPLICATION:** How do you define *humble*? What do you consider *gentle*? Match those against what Jesus says they look like. Do they match the call He gave you? Urge yourself to seek God to grow you in those areas.

**PRAYER:** Father, O how we fall short so often. Create in me an awareness of the call You have made before me and help me to live that out in all I do and speak concerning others. Amen.

## WHAT HOLDS IT TOGETHER?

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*...for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together.*  
**Colossians 1:16-17 (NLT)**

*"I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me."*  
**John 17:21 (NLT)**

I sit and think of the vastness of the universe. How is it that everything has its place—and that even one small shift could throw it all off? It's mind-bending. The planets, the stars and the sun all work in unity to sustain life on Earth. God paid careful attention to every detail of His creation—especially us.

We, as humans—well, that's another story. We're prone to wander from God and each other, losing our focus on unity.

Marriage is one example that requires caring, intentional attention. To maintain unity, two individuals from different backgrounds must come together as one through their commitment to God. At times, I've disagreed with my wife—a comment, her perspective or even her kindness in speaking the truth in love to me. Through those moments, I've found that the greatest thief of unity is not indifference but forgetting *Who* holds us together. Every time we turn back to Jesus and His love for us, we're held together, and unity is restored and sustained.

This may come as no surprise to some, but for others, it may be a needed gut check. Unity is the product of unconditional love—of overlooking wrongs and choosing forgiveness. It means choosing to love our neighbors and actively living out God's love. This is what brings real unity—not a duct-tape kind of unity, but one that's solid and everlasting. Love is an eternal adhesive that cannot be broken.

**APPLICATION:** Is there a conflict within my life hindering unity with someone? Ask the Spirit to speak to you about how to love like Jesus in that relationship.

**PRAYER:** Father, I am prone to wander from Your care, and I admit that I often want my way. Allow my heart to remain soft to Your call and be obedient to Your voice, so that I stay united with You and others. Amen.

# UNITY TAKES PRACTICE

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*All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's supper), and to prayer.*

**Acts 2:42 (NLT)**

*However, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ.*

**Ephesians 4:7 (NLT)**

The phrase *I get along with everybody* is used loosely. I've met people with whom that phrase rings true. However, I own a mirror, and it tells me that it's rare to find that within myself. The truth that shines here is that we haven't met everybody in life yet. Unity requires practice. Acts tells us that *all the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship*. The word *devoted* is defined as *loyal, faithful, or steadfast*. Being true to the call is another way to put it. Practice makes perfect. That's not entirely true, but practice certainly drives us to be devoted to something.

If I knew I had the gift to be a baseball player, I wouldn't be devoted to golf. No, I'd spend my time in the batting cages, on the diamond, and studying the great baseball players of all time. The same is true for staying in unity as Christ-followers—we spend a lot of time with other believers, we stay in the Scriptures, we share meals, and we pray for each other.

In Ephesians, unity in the body of believers also highlights the gifts others have been given. Imagine the hand saying to the foot, *Hey, foot, thanks for the ride. You got us here well*, or the foot saying to the hand, *Hey, nice grip. You hold stuff well*. If your pastor communicates well, tell them. If your Community Group leader teaches well, tell them. Practicing this type of encouragement helps build confidence so people's gifts can mature.

As a kid, I remember not getting along with my siblings, and we were forced to sit on the couch together until we learned to get along. As believers, we must spend time together to develop unity as one body in Christ. It's going to be hard at times, but practice gives birth to unity.

**APPLICATION:** If you're part of a Community Group, allow yourself some vulnerability in the Group. When you see someone using their gifts well, encourage them by sharing that with them. If you aren't part of a Community Group, get connected, dive in and let your gifts shine.

**PRAYER:** Jesus, may I remain teachable and not hold back on the gifts You so generously gave me. Amen.

# WE ARE BETTER TOGETHER

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*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called.*

**Ephesians 4:3-4 (NIV)**

*Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.*

**1 Corinthians 12:12 (NIV)**

Have you ever found yourself working on a project and realized it's not a one-person job? How about constructing a house? It requires many different talents, such as plumbers, roofers, electricians and carpenters. In the end, they work together with the sole goal of completing the house. If at any point one of them decides not to perform their function, the whole project slows down, frustration builds, and the shared goal is affected.

As the body of Christ, we're created to fulfill a mission based on the gifts we've been given. Sunday morning services are made possible by many different gifts, all with the same goal: to glorify God and draw everyone to the presence of our mighty Savior. Wouldn't it seem odd to walk into church on Sunday morning, experience worship, then sit in silence staring at the stage for 45 minutes when the pastor walks out and says, *Have a great week!* This may be a bit exaggerated, but you see how every role affects the whole body.

We need each person to grow and serve together as the full body of Christ. Every gift given by the Holy Spirit matters because each one uniquely strengthens the body. When we faithfully use what God has given us, we grow personally, others are encouraged, and the body of Christ becomes stronger together.

**APPLICATION:** What gift has God given me that I may be withholding from others? Ask the Spirit to show you if you're holding back and how you can strengthen yourself and the body with this gift to foster unity.

**PRAYER:** Father, reveal to me the gifts I've been given to benefit Your body and grow Your kingdom. Strengthen us and protect us from spiritual laziness that harms the body. Amen.

# NO UNITY, NO COMMUNITY

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*How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!*

**Psalm 133:1 (NIV)**

*May God, who gives this patience and encouragement, help you live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus.*

**Romans 15:5 (NLT)**

*Again I say, don't get involved in foolish ignorant arguments that only start fights.*

**2 Timothy 2:23 (NLT)**

Unity is built right into the word community, and biblical community grows as believers share a devotion to Christ. The strongest communities are shaped by people who bring different stories, gifts, and perspectives together around one shared purpose. It's an environment that makes room for honest conversations, prayer, differences and growth without judgment.

Psalm 133 confirms that unity is *good and pleasant*. Romans 15, beginning with *May God*, implies that we should seek God first for patience and encouragement. Harmony begins with God. If we want to live in unity with one another, we must first seek Him for the grace to be patient, the courage to encourage, and the humility to pursue peace.

In 2 Timothy, Paul speaks plainly to Timothy. The word *Again* shows that Paul is repeating this warning because it matters. Small disagreements can grow into deep divisions when they're left unresolved. *Don't sweat the small stuff* is often wise advice, but it doesn't mean we should ignore small irritations. Instead, we should handle them with patience, truth and love while the stakes are still low. We maintain unity by doing our best to live in harmony with one another—not perfectly, but with grace.

**APPLICATION:** Evaluate the relationships in your life—marriage, children, friendships, church and work. Would you say you have unity in those relationships? Ask the Spirit to highlight anything hindering unity and guide you toward a plan of restoration.

**PRAYER:** Father, give me wisdom, patience and discernment to live in unity through Your Spirit in my relationships. Amen.

# TRUTH THAT GROWS US UP

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*This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth.*

**Ephesians 4:13-14 (NLT)**

Everyone who's been around children has heard, *I can't wait to grow up!* And we've heard adults say, *If I knew then what I know now.* Children hope for grown-up freedom, and as adults, we'd love to go back and deliver wisdom from our experiences.

The reality is: wisdom that lasts is formed through application, not information alone. It takes work, trial and error, heartache and happiness, laughter and tears, and most importantly, time with Jesus. People say knowledge is power. I believe knowledge becomes power when we put it into practice. Head knowledge about Jesus doesn't grow your relationship with Him. Applying the knowledge in your life strengthens your discernment and deepens your belief.

Unity is stressed so many times in Scripture because a strong, faith-filled community, grounded in knowledge, tested by practice, and growing in strength, keeps us from distraction. The next lie wrapped in what looks like truth will come. With unity in the body, we don't stand alone. God gave us brothers and sisters who have our backs—people who speak truth when it is needed and remain open to correction themselves.

A healthy body of believers is willing to use their gifts for the benefit of the body and the glory of Jesus.

**APPLICATION:** Test everything against the truth of God's Word. If it doesn't match, toss it. Replace it with a truth in Scripture.

**PRAYER:** God, soften my heart to Your truth, open my eyes to the enemy's lies, and remind me that in unity, I am not alone. Make me bold to point others to the truth of who You are, Jesus. Amen.







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