

The Divine Pursuit

*Seeking God together in a season of
upheaval and uncertainty*



**Three Rivers Region
30 Days of Prayer
September 11- October 11**

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Seeking God together in a season of upheaval and uncertainty

Fourteen years ago, the Lord called us to clear our schedules and seek Him together in a Morning Watch from 5am-6am. ***The Divine Adventure*** brought people from all over our community to pray and seek the face of the Lord and participate in many acts of repentance. In today's uncertain times, there has been a stirring in some of our community leaders to enter **together** into a new time of prayer and worship wrapped around the idea of ***The Divine Pursuit***. This call is for everyone who wants to respond.

In the middle of a pandemic, racial unrest, and political discord, the only answer is for the church together to enter into the divine pursuit of God and His Kingdom through prayer. This devotional guide is built on the ideas of ***pursuing Christ, pursuing God's reign, pursuing peace, and pursuing hope***, and you'll find these themes throughout these thirty days. Don't be confined by these particular ideas, though- we fully expect the Holy Spirit to speak in new and fresh ways. Be attentive to Him as we move forward, and please share with others what God is saying to you.

I'm excited to see what the Lord says and does in our hearts, our region, and our nation in the coming days.

Chris Davis

Note: Many of these ideas and illustrations came out of books, conversations, and online discussions with lots of people. Though I was inspired by these, the opinions expressed here are my own. Don't blame anyone but me if you read something you don't like!

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." -Jeremiah 29:13

End Notes

- ¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Virus as a Summons to Faith: Biblical Reflections in a Time of Loss, Grief, and Uncertainty* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020), 39.
- ² Brennan Manning, *Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2015), 27.
- ³ Timothy Keller, *Encounters with Jesus: Unexpected Answers to Life's Big Questions* (New York; Penguin Books, 2013), 20.
- ⁴ <https://bibleproject.com/explore/genesis-1-11>.
- ⁵ Asher Intrater, "King of the Jews," *Revive Israel*, August 27, 2020. <https://tribe.reviveisrael.org/king-of-the-jews/>.
- ⁶ Eugene Cho, <https://www.facebook.com/eugenecho>, date unknown.
- ⁷ N.T. Wright, *God and the Pandemic: A Christian Reflection on the Coronavirus and its Aftermath* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 18.
- ⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *A Way Other Than Our Own: Devotions for Lent* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 46.
- ⁹ Wright, 75.
- ¹⁰ James K.A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 2.
- ¹¹ Daniel C. Juster, *Social Justice: The Bible and Applications for Our Times* (Clarksville, MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2020), 37-38.
- ¹² Wright, 42.

September 11, 2020

Marking the Moment

Hebrews 12:1-3

September 11, 2001 is one of the marker moments in history, one of those days that stand out for everyone who was alive. If you're old enough to remember when terrorists attacked the United States, most likely you know where you were and what you were feeling the moment you first heard the news. Unfortunately, there are no moments like that in the current season of pandemic and national unrest. Instead, life and culture have slowly changed, as week in and week out, new practices and information gradually alters our lives. In this season of upheaval and uncertainty, though, we *can* live with a solid foundation and a certain hope. Like Jesus, we can look to another marker moment, one not set in the past but the future. In the same way that Jesus looked to the joy ahead of Him, we can "fix our eyes" on Jesus Himself, and find peace and hope despite the confusion of the times.

Son of God, help us stay focused on you, and help us to listen to your voice above all others.

Prayer Points:

- For the church to focus its attention on Jesus.
- For the people of God to hear the Lord together.
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September 12, 2020

Averting Disaster

1 Kings 8:23-53; 1 Chronicles 7

One of the byproducts of an abrupt change in normal life that comes with the coronavirus is the rise of prophetic dreams, visions, and words of warning regarding the coming days and months. The trouble isn't that we have these warnings, it's that we don't know quite what to do with them. We could spend countless hours researching each of the warnings and calls to preparation. We could do that- and still not have the answers or know what to do. Instead of trying to dissect every one of these words and concerns, though, maybe the answer is rather to trust that *some* of these might be accurate, and the only response is to turn to the Lord, repent, and get low before God. In the Scriptures above, disasters, including pestilence or famine, are "...restated in the orbit of YHWH's steadfast fidelity."¹ The way we avert disaster, then, is to center everything around the steadfast love of God for His people.

God, help us to know how to balance the words of warning with trust and hope in You.

Prayer Points:

- For wisdom and understanding regarding signs and warnings.
- For the end of the coronavirus pandemic.
- For God to stop disasters and tragedy from happening.

October 11, 2020

The Praying Church

Hebrews 12:1-3

It's been many months since the words *pandemic*, *coronavirus*, and *COVID-19* became common language for everyone throughout the world. In that time, there has been an increase in global tension, national unrest, and local conflict, as the culture and the church has struggled to know how to move forward. But the main answer isn't really much of a mystery- we're a people of prayer, a community set apart and devoted to communion with God, a people who know that He partners with us in intercession. This means that "when the world is going through great convulsions, the followers of Jesus are called to be people of prayer at the place where the world is in pain."¹² This is not just the answer for the pandemic or the presidential elections or the social unrest; it's the answer for everything all the time. *We pray without ceasing* (1 Thes. 5:17), we *devote ourselves to prayer* (Col. 4:2), we *watch and pray* (Luke 21:36), we *call upon* God (Jer. 29:12), and so on. May this always be the one activity that sets us apart. Pray on, church!

Holy Spirit, as you call us to prayer, enable us to answer this call not just for a short time but always.

Prayer Points:

- For the rising up of the praying church in the times of upheaval and uncertainty.
- For the people of God to become a people of prayer.
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October 10, 2020

Trusting God

Matthew 13; Psalm 20; Isaiah 9:6-7

In the Parable of the Weeds and the Wheat, Jesus tells a story about the Kingdom of God, using everyday Jewish life to explain a little about our enemy and judgment. This is one of those parables where Jesus gives a detailed explanation- the enemy is the devil, the weeds are his followers, the wheat are those who belong to God, and the farmer is God. But despite all the details about farming and pulling weeds and the end-times judgment, maybe this is less a story about those things than it is a story about our willingness to trust the man who sows good seed, the Farmer God. Trust that He can judge fairly; that He knows everyone perfectly; that He is patient and just; that His plans are perfect; that even when it looks like the enemy has won, God has it all worked out; that even when the plan of God makes us uncomfortable, it is good; that He will take care of us; that He will forgive us when we repent; that He loves us; that His ways are better than our ways; that our lives are safe in His hands; that He is trustworthy, that He's not done, and that the coronavirus doesn't have the last word.

Increase our trust in you, great and mighty God, and guide us to lean into you at all times.

Prayer Points:

- For a renewed trust in God for the Body of Christ.
- For a harvest of people who will trust in God.
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September 13, 2020

Pursuing Real Peace

Philippians 4:4-7; John 14:15-27

These days are defined by racial division and political strife as much as COVID-19, and one of the primary roles of the church is that of peacemaker. Regrettably, we're hard-pressed to say that the church is leading the way in making peace these days; we're as filled with discord and conflict as any other group. The response, though, isn't to get everyone on the same page, because, frankly, that's an impossibility. The way forward to achieving real peace in the church and the culture starts with each of us as individuals accepting who we are in Christ. Brennan Manning writes, "...The peace that passes understanding is not a subjective sensation of peace; if we are in Christ, we are in peace even if we feel no peace."² Whether it's racial peace, political harmony, or unity in the Body of Christ, these issues won't change only when some people change their actions; this is only a possibility when each of us is personally living every day in the peace of Christ.

Help us, Holy Spirit, know the peace that passes understanding, not just for a specific situation, but in our hearts.

Prayer Points:

- For people to find real peace in Christ.
- For genuine peace to invade our society.
- For the end of racial unrest.

September 14, 2020

Watch and Pray

Luke 21: Proverbs 25:2

It's never been easy to know what's really going on in the world. Throughout history, humankind has been trying to interpret and define every generation's current events in light of God's promises and plans. And God never makes it easy, does He? Rarely has He said $a + b = c$; instead, He spoke in parables and wrapped up the truth in symbols. He did this so that the Kingdom of God would be filled with people who think and meditate, though not on the signs of the times as much as on the words of the Creator of the universe. He is looking for a people who will watch and pray, for men and women with Kingdom eyes and ears who are not willing to accept the words of the culture at face value but are fighting to discover the ways that God is acting and how that affects our own lives. Often that means living with the tension of the unknown, and the ongoing commitment to watch and pray until God responds.

***God, open our eyes and ears, but more importantly,
soften our hearts and sharpen our minds.***

Prayer Points:

- For people to be okay with living in the unknown.
- For the church to lead the way in prayer.
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October 9, 2020

A Starting Place for Social Justice

Malachi 2:13-16: Isaiah 58 and 59

There are a number of social justice issues that are consuming our society at this time- things like racial inequality, increases in hunger and homelessness, healthcare availability, and the global refugee situation. Every one of these issues are complex and layered, and there are no easy answers; in most cases, we don't even know where to start. In response to this, Dan Juster writes that the prophet Malachi gives us some direction here: "...If the society does not foster stable marriages and families, we cheat the children and compromise social justice. We need to emphasize again that social justice is based on an order of righteousness that maximizes the potential for each person to fulfill their God intended good destiny."¹¹ If that is the case (and it's hard to argue it isn't), then the starting place is clear- we fight for an increase in stable families through prayer and fasting, and we invest time and resources into strengthening marriage. It's won't be easy but it's a place to start.

***Father God, strengthen marriages and families in
our churches during COVID-19.***

Prayer Points:

- For the strengthening of families and marriages.
- For the church to develop multiple strategies to equip people to build stable biblical families..
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October 8, 2020

Buy the Field

Matthew 13:44-46; Luke 9:18-27

There was a man who had lived a full life- good job, multiple marriages, several kids and grandkids, various interests and hobbies over the decades- but nothing worked quite right. After coming to Christ in a dramatic moment (think bright light and the voice of God), he never looked back. He poured himself into the Bible, involved himself in the church, and always wanted to talk about Jesus or the Word. He even moved to a foreign country and became a missionary, and when God spoke to him in supernatural ways about selling his home, he put it up for sale. This man is a modern answer to the man who found the treasure in the field- someone who sees the beauty and worthiness of Jesus and is willing to sell everything he has to buy the field. What would happen if the modern American church was filled with people like this? What could God do with a people who are radically sold out for Christ and willing to give up everything to buy the field? God doesn't tell everyone to sell their homes, but He does call each of us to hold nothing back.

Jesus Messiah, open our eyes to see the beauty and wonder of yourself, and gives us strength to hold nothing back.

Prayer Points:

- For the church to be filled with radical disciples.
- For the beauty of Jesus to capture the church in new ways in this season of uncertainty.
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September 15, 2020

Identity Warfare

Romans 8:14-17; Matthew 4:1-11

My standard password for non-essential websites and apps used to be one word: *pastor*. It was how I thought of myself and how others thought of me- it was an essential part of my identity. As important as that role is for the church and our culture, though, it wasn't good enough. It left me wanting, and I felt like there had to be more to who I was. The Lord was working on my heart and slowly began to mark me with a new identity- *king's son*. When we can make a shift in our identity like this, whether it's moving away from denominational identification, career choice, or family role, we can make significant strides in becoming the people God has made us to be. It's only when our identity is *wrapped up in God* that we can stand firm in any season and every circumstance. Identity is the enemy's first line of attack and we can only endure when we ground ourselves in God.³

Abba, show us how much you love and value us. Let us experience your love in tangible ways.

Prayer Points:

- For the people to find their identity in Christ.
- For genuine self-awareness and acceptance of God's love.
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September 16, 2020

The Clean Safe Space

1 Peter 1:13-25; 1 John 1:8-10

From the days of the Garden of Eden, humans have been fighting to have their way, even if those ways contradict God's ideas and purposes. Tim Mackie says that humans have an urge not to trust God's definition of good and evil,⁴ an urge that we all wrestle with regularly. This urge to have our own way is the root of sin and the source of all of the social issues of our age. If we are to move forward in any way into peace and hope, unity and reconciliation, we have to repent of this impulse towards selfishness. As followers of Christ, we can choose to lead the way here and embrace a lifestyle of repentance, seeing it as a gift rather than an obligation. Mackie reminds us that "Jesus is the clean, safe space," the only place we can go to experience forgiveness, cleansing, and freedom.

Jesus, forgive us for fighting for our own way and free us up from having to be in control.

Prayer Points:

- For repentance to become a lifestyle in the church.
- For an awareness of sin in our culture.
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October 7, 2020

Pursuing Hope Together

Psalms 133; Proverbs 27:17; Romans 12

In the effort to get women the right to vote, Susan B. Anthony is the one who gets most of the press- there's a dollar coin with her image, she has a stamp, and even a commemorative holiday (February 15th). But as significant as her achievements were, she accomplished nothing on her own. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and several others worked with Anthony over several decades to make suffrage a reality, but their names go mostly unnoticed. In the same way that Susan B. Anthony needed others to tackle the discriminatory practices of a nation, we also need each other to tackle everyday life in the year 2020. When it comes to hope and peace and the ways of the Kingdom, we need to remember that we're never in this alone. The Body of Christ is a community, and the people of God should not operate in isolation. We're in this thing together, and the sooner we include others in our conversations and our activities, the better.

Redeem us, Lord, from our selfishness and our tendency towards individualism.

Prayer Points:

- For an elimination of division and barriers between churches.
- For accountability and friendship among ministry leaders.
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October 6, 2020

What Do You Want?
Mark 10: John 1:35-42

Jesus has an amazing way of getting to the core of things in the Gospels. In John 1, he asks two of the disciples, "What do you want?" and twice in Mark 10, he asks different audiences, "What do you want me to do for you?" (vv. 36, 51). In each of these cases, He was asking people to think for themselves and to identify what was driving their behavior. He was not simply asking a question; He was revealing their hearts. Of this question, James. K. A. Smith says, "This is the most incisive, piercing question Jesus can ask of us precisely because we *are* what we want. Our wants and longings and desires are at the core of our identity, the wellspring from which our actions and behavior flow."¹⁰ If that is true, then every follower of Christ needs to ask this of themselves. When we think of our personal lives, *what do we want?* When we think about our families, *what do we want?* When we think about the church, *what do we want?* When we think about our nation, *what do we want?* These are not just casual questions in a little devotional guide- the way we answer the questions directs our entire lives.

Holy Spirit, reveal our hidden motives and unspoken desires, so that we can be self-aware and begin a journey of transformation.

Prayer Points:

- For the Holy Spirit to show us who we are.
- For a willingness to ask hard questions of our lives and of our churches.
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September 17, 2020

Fighting for Unity
Ephesians 4:1-7; John 17

When Moravian believers, who had fled from Czechoslovakia and other places, gathered together and established the community called *Herrnhut* on the lands of Nikolaus von Zinzendorf, living together was not easy at first. Each of the different groups had faith practices that caused considerable conflict. It seems that living together, even with the best of intentions, is a challenge. Recognizing this, Zinzendorf went to every single home to pray with them and urge them to fight for unity. Eventually, after a season of intense prayer and study, things began to change. They developed a code of conduct that guided their behavior, and soon a revival was ignited that continued for decades. The church today needs to fight for unity like the Moravians, preferring others at every turn and taking every opportunity to choose peace. Like the Moravians, we know that this is not an easy task, but any movement of God in this season is going to arise out of a fight for unity.

God, reveal our selfishness and show us where our attitudes and behavior sabotages unity.

Prayer Points:

- For the church to experience fresh unity.
- For broken relationships to be made right.
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September 18, 2020

A People Prepared

Luke 1:17; I John 3:2; Philippians 3:7-11

In a recent video that crossed the internet, a pastor in Kentucky shared about a series of dreams he had that detailed the coming of the coronavirus and great upheaval and distress surrounding the upcoming election.* Frankly, I'm not sure what to do with all of these types of things- there are so many videos, teachings and articles flowing across the internet during the pandemic. I do know that no matter what we think about the specifics of this dream or other thoughts along the same line, as followers of Jesus the King, we're called to be prepared for *whatever* comes our way. Our preparation, though, doesn't start with collecting supplies and making emergency plans, but with knowing Jesus. A "people prepared" is a people who are intimately familiar with Jesus Messiah and ready to bear His image and bring His kingdom into existence in our world. There's nothing wrong with planning and prepping, but the church should always make sure our first order of business is Christ Himself.

We want to know you, Jesus, so we can be ready for anything. Show yourself to us.

Prayer Points:

- For the church to be prepared first by knowing Jesus.
- For wisdom in how to be properly prepared.

*<https://www.facebook.com/dana.coverstone/videos/10223378516160921>

October 5, 2020

King of the Earth

Psalms 47; Matthew 28:18-20

It's really easy for most people to default to a way of thinking that puts our "stuff" at the center of our worldview. For example, it's easy for us to become "Seahawks-centric" (relax, Steelers' or Jets' fans- just making a point), or even overly attentive to Kelso or Longview. Most glaringly, many people think that the world revolves around the United States. Any careful reading of Scripture, though, will easily show that God is the King over *all* the nations and every part of the earth (and of course has a particular heart for Israel). As the coronavirus has captured our attention in the past several months, it's become even easier to make our personal lives and concerns the center of our attention. But God is still the King of the Earth and the call of the church remains to disciple the *nations*, to help the lost and oppressed in places like Syria, Belarus, and North Korea. It's incumbent on the church to begin to think outside of our own little world.

King of the earth, open our eyes to the suffering around the world, and show us how we can help.

Prayer Points:

- For an end to war and oppression in every country.
- For an increase in outreach and care for oppressed and needy people throughout the planet.
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October 4, 2020

Delighting in God

Psalm 27:4; Psalm 37; Philippians 3:7-11

My teenage daughter “forced” me to watch the Broadway musical, *Hamilton*, with her and her friends when it came out in July. I have to admit that the story and the music have captured me in a way I would not have imagined. Even now, two months later, I find myself randomly singing some of the songs (under my breath, of course). It got me thinking about how easy it was for the music to fill my mind, and more importantly, how hard it is sometimes for Jesus to capture me in the same way. God says that when we *delight* in Him, He will give us the desires of our hearts (Ps. 37:4). When we delight in the Lord (*think about, meditate on, give energy to, take pleasure in*), then the thoughts, attitudes and mindsets of the Kingdom of God can begin to occupy our minds. In every season of our lives, whether one of strife or one of peace, we’re called to pursue Christ at a high level, allowing the “soundtrack” of His life to fill us and overflow our lives.

God, direct us to do our part and delight in you, and in return, overflow our lives with glory and wonder.

Prayer Points:

- For the church to become preoccupied with delighting in the Lord.
- That new music and new sounds would flow out of our region.
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September 19, 2020

The Weapon of Intimacy

Deuteronomy 4:1-4*; Psalm 27

Intimacy gets a bad rap in some circles; it either gets sexualized or it is misunderstood, and in some places is even overused. It’s not that intimacy isn’t powerful or that intimacy isn’t necessary; it’s that we often get weird about the concept, especially in reference to God. But if we can change our lens a little bit and see it in a new way, intimacy can become the powerful weapon that it has the potential to be. Google defines *intimacy* as “close familiarity or friendship; closeness.” God has designed each one of us for close familiarity and friendship with each other and especially with Himself. When we’re operating out of friendship with God, our lives are better- conversation, advice, support, and encouragement all mark intimacy with God. And when we’re operating out of friendship with God, we know better how to interpret the times, advise our friends, and walk with integrity and support.

God, show us how to operate in friendship with you, so we can be the people you need us to be.

Prayer Points:

- For a proper understanding of intimacy with God.
- For people to grow closer to God in this season.

*“The literal translation of Deuteronomy 4:4, ‘**You who are held fast to the Lord...**’ is *davek* (the noun form of *davek* means glue in modern Hebrew); those who have ‘held fast’ to the Lord have stuck close to God like glue. You can’t get any closer than glue.” -Asher Intrater

September 20, 2020

King of the World

Psalm 2; John 19:16-27

We often sing songs and make declarations in the church that Jesus is the king, but when it comes to putting this truth into practice, it becomes more difficult for us, especially in the west. When Pilate put up the sign, “King of the Jews,” he was doing more than rubbing it in the noses of the religious leaders. Asher Intrater says, “You might think this is a strange way for God to announce who would be His sovereign ruler. But this is just the point. God’s kind of authority is different altogether from worldly authority. God’s authority is loving, self-sacrificing, serving others. The world system of authority is based on politics, self-serving, controlling others. By the cross, God has defined love as a higher value than power in determining who will receive governing authority.”⁵ These days, it’s important to remember that the key to advancing God’s Kingdom is through the cross, not through a political party, and that our first priority should be worshipping Him.

***Jesus, mark the church with the beauty of the cross
and help us resist any other way.***

Prayer Points:

- For the submission to God to become a priority.
- For an increase of worship of Jesus the King.
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October 3, 2020

Praying for Leaders

1 Timothy 2:1-2; Psalm 2; Romans 13

In writing about how to approach the COVID-19 pandemic as the people of God, N.T. Wright says, “What we hope for includes the wise human leadership and initiative which will, like that of Joseph in Egypt, bring about fresh and healing policies and actions across God’s wide and wounded world.”⁹ With one month to go before our presidential election, and with many other national leadership roles in play that will set the course for the next four years (and beyond), we must ask the Lord for wisdom and guidance during this crucial time. It would be easy to say at this time that it’s one party versus another and leave it at that, but it’s important to remember that, as the people of God, we’re called to fight for the values of the Kingdom first. That means we seek peace over triumph, truth over political rhetoric, and hope in God over anything else.

***Father, fill our leaders with wisdom from heaven,
and give us godly understanding in this election.***

Prayer Points:

- For God’s firm hand on our national elections.
- For the truth to be seen in all political ads, speeches, and in the media.
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October 2, 2020

A Kingdom Accent

Genesis 1:26-31; Daniel 12:1-3; Matthew 5:13-16

Growing up with my grandmother, I knew something was different about her. She ate some strange foods, she said some odd things, and the way she spoke was different than most other people. Even though she had lived in the United States for most of her life, she still had behaviors, tastes, and especially an accent, that were formed by her formative years in Denmark. As Christians, this is also our story, but the perspective is a bit different. Although each of us is born on the planet earth, we are each created in the image of God. In essence, we were born with something inside of us that doesn't belong here. Once we begin to understand that we're made not for seventy or eighty years on the earth, but for eternity, we can begin to think differently about how to live. While my grandmother's origin was most noticeable because of her accent, for the people of God our lifestyle should tell others that we're different. We shouldn't try to hide this, but instead let our "Kingdom accent" reveal that we're not like everyone else.

Holy Spirit, overflow our lives in such a way that people want to know why we're different.

Prayer Points:

- For the people of God to make a difference in the world.
- For a renewed desire in the church to be salt and light.
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September 21, 2020

Chasing Peace and Justice

Luke 4:14-30; Matthew 25:31-46; Acts 11

The current racial unrest, though it may have entered a new phase nationally, is, unfortunately, nothing new. Wherever you stand on the complex issues surrounding policing, equality, and social justice, we cannot deny that oppression and social inequality have been part of the human story forever. The gospel of the Kingdom stands in stark contrast to these divisions and disunity, as it crosses every boundary- gender, economic, ethnic, and racial. The call of the church has always been to affirm equality and unity in tangible ways. In fact, in His first official "campaign speech" Jesus Himself declared that He had come to free prisoners, give sight to the blind, liberate the oppressed, and bring good news to the poor. The challenge in this time is for the church to make Jesus' proclamation a reality even though the nation is more divided than ever.

God of love, show the church how to move forward in this time and help us bring justice and peace.

Prayer Points:

- For an increase of peace and justice in our nation.
- For wisdom in how the church can address these issues.
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September 22, 2020

Hidden Pictures

Isaiah 43:14-21; Matthew 13:31-35

When I was a kid, I used to love finding the hidden pictures in the *Highlights* books in the doctor's office. It was always satisfying to discover the everyday items that were concealed throughout the bigger picture. There is always a level of hiddenness in the kingdom of God, and as much as we want to find the "clues" about the times and the future, we simply cannot always rely on our own senses. We *can* trust that God is always at work, even if we don't recognize it, and that He loves to surprise His people in unexpected ways. The Red Sea, the Jordan River, Jericho, the fiery furnace, and *the cross and the tomb*- each of these events are reminders to us that God is not done and that the church is not dead. Instead of giving in to despair and doubt, let's see what we can do to be people of confidence and hope- the world definitely needs it!

Fill us with confidence and hope, Holy Spirit, and remind us that you're not done with the surprises.

Prayer Points:

- For a decrease in stress and anxiety in the Body of Christ.
- For an ability to see God at work in our world.
- For light to be shined on the current tissues of the day.

October 1, 2020

Remembering God

Psalm 106; Isaiah 54

Someone has said that *The Lion King* is Disney's version of the Jewish exile- it's a story of power and change and learning how to live in a new world. After the death of his father, Simba runs away and hangs out with a warthog and meerkat, and soon stops acting like a lion and takes on their characteristics. He is finally stirred back into reality as he is reminded to "remember who you are." Sometimes it feels like the church has lost its way and has forgotten not just who *it* is but who *God* is. We live in a world of moral ambiguity, rampant consumerism, and selfish hedonism. It becomes easy in that environment to doubt our story with God and think that the customs and mannerisms of the culture can satisfy us. But as we remember who God is and the ways He has acted in history and in our lives, and we recall His promises, we can begin to recover our identity and become people of faith and courage. It may mean we have to go back home and fight the "lions and hyenas" that have taken control, but, as Psalm 106 reminds us: "many times he delivered them" (v. 43).

God Almighty, recall us back to ourselves and empower us to be a people of faith and courage.

Prayer Points:

- For the people to remember God in new ways.
- For an increase of confidence in God's customs and practices.
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**Thanks to Scott Daniels for the Lion King idea*

September 30, 2020

Defined by the Future

Philippians 6:9-13; Isaiah 43:16-21

In writing about the season preceding Easter, theologian Walter Brueggemann said, "Lent is ...seeing how to take steps into God's future so that we are no longer defined by what is past and no longer distracted by what we have treasured or feared about the present."⁸ The same can be said about this time in the history of the world. Firstly, it would be helpful for us to find a means to become unentangled by the way things used to be; no longer tied to church services that have to look a certain way or traditions that are no longer effective. Secondly, it's necessary to abandon those routines and practices that we have come to rely on for pleasure and fulfillment. Instead, as Brueggemann suggests, let's find ways to "take steps into God's future" and become messengers of hope and joy. It would be easier for us to stay in the past or struggle in the present, but if we can allow the hope of our future with God to overwhelm us, the result could be amazing.

***Returning King, gives us an ability to be energized
by our future while living faithfully in the now.***

Prayer Points:

- For the church to let go of the "way things used to be."
- For people to become energized by our future with God.
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September 23, 2020

Sharing in Suffering

Romans 8:14-17; Philippians 3:7-11

In Romans 8 and Philippians 3, Paul encourages believers to "share in the sufferings" of Jesus. Both of these chapters are magnificent reminders of the beauty and wonder of Christ and the kingdom of God, but many people skip over these references to suffering, and when that happens, we miss out on a key ingredient in our walk with the Lord. We like the sharing in God's glory part, but the part where we have to suffer is a challenge. What would happen if we approached this season of discomfort as an opportunity to share in the suffering of Christ? What would happen if we wore our masks and kept our distance not in a spirit of resigned obedience but in a spirit of embracing Christlikeness? What would happen if we stopped fighting for our "rights" in light of the reality that Jesus did the same? Maybe those "guidelines" wouldn't feel as restrictive.

***Jesus, in our divine pursuit, help us to embrace all of
your ways, not just the ones we like or agree with.***

Prayer Points:

- For the church to lead the way in a healthy approach to the coronavirus restrictions.
- For joy to fill the people of God in new ways.
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September 24, 2020

Kingdom Politics

1 Peter 2:1-10

Eugene Cho recently wrote, “The reality is that for many Christians, we’ve allowed our politics to inform our theology, rather than our theology and faith in Christ informing our politics. This is a critical time- not just for prophetic courage to speak truth to power- but courage for deep introspection.”⁶ This statement is not only challenging but for some people might also be irritating. In truth, however, the Body of Christ *is* called to be a different kind of people, a *chosen race*, a *royal priesthood*, and a *holy nation*. We’re not supposed to act like any other group- we’re to be set apart for God’s use, acting differently than the others- politically, socially, economically, and spiritually. This is not an easy thing to do, especially when we try to do it together with people from other cultures and traditions, but if we can start living out these principles, real change is a real possibility.

Search us, God, and know our hearts, and show us the things that shape and inform our lives.

Prayer Points:

- For the church to be grounded first in God’s definitions.
- For theology to inform our politics.
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September 29, 2020

No Fear

Philippians 1:21-26; Psalm 23; Psalm 34:4-5

When I was a younger adult, I had a sticker on the back of my truck that said, “No Fear.” To be honest, it came from a line of trendy skateboarding gear that I had no right to wear, since I couldn’t skateboard very far without falling. But the sticker looked cool, and I liked the message of living unenslaved to fear. I had a professor recently ask something like this: “What would it look like to live without a fear of dying? How would your faith behave if you weren’t afraid of financial discomfort or the loss of things that bring you security?” We have an opportunity to be the people in the world who aren’t just putting “No Fear” stickers on their vehicles but are living fearlessly and boldly in the world. The church should be leading the way here, promoting the ways of the King and His Kingdom as the answer to every worry, anxiety, and fear that arises in the culture and society. Easier said than done, I know, but worth attempting with all our energy.

Warrior God, strengthen us to become a bold and fearless people who are giving others hope and peace.

Prayer Points:

- For a new fearlessness and kind boldness to capture the Body of Christ.
- For renewed trust and security in God.
- For financial solutions to our current crisis.

September 28, 2020

Competing Attachments

Psalms 106:34-39; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

“Competing attachments” are those things in a relationship that draw one partner away from another; things that one may turn towards to provide satisfaction, fulfillment, or comfort. In a marriage or romantic relationship, competing attachments can kill any hope of relational longevity or success. This is not much different than our relationship with the Lord. We live in a culture that offers numerous activities, issues, and causes that can operate as competing attachments in our communion with God. The biblical concept for this psychological principle is *idolatry*. This season offers even more opportunity to allow things into our lives (and into our churches) that have the potential to take priority over God. Have we allowed pandemic concerns, social media fears, or even efforts to improve our digital church presentations to compete with our devotion to God and His Word? It’s worth thinking about.

Lord God, help us to ruthlessly eliminate anything that competes with the energy and attention we should be giving to you.

Prayer Points:

- For an awareness of any competing attachments in our hearts.
- For the ruthless elimination of idolatry in our church cultures.
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September 25, 2020

Self-Emptying

Philippians 2:5-11; Ephesians 1:17

Kenosis is the biblical term for the self-emptying of Christ, the willing abandonment of power and divinity that occurred when Jesus came to earth in the form of a human. This principle of self-emptying sets the tone for any accurate understanding of power and submission, of authority and surrender. In other words, *kenosis* is crucial for answering today’s power struggles and control issues. When Jesus “made himself nothing,” He established that the way to change the world is not to grab for power or to demand our way, but to go low in humility. When the church can do this, when it can learn the lesson of abandonment and self-emptying, whether through the practices of prayer or service or worship, cultural transformation can begin to take place, even if its slower than we like.

Again, you show us how to act and think, Jesus, and again we need your help to live it out. Help us.

Prayer Points:

- For help in living out Christlikeness during these days.
- For the elimination of barriers to humility and submission.
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September 26, 2020

Conspiracies and God
Psalm 130; Luke 12:37-40

The source of the coronavirus. Mail-in balloting. COVID-19 statistics. QAnon. These are just a few of the conspiracy theory topics that are rampant in this age. It's tempting to invest significant time and energy to investigate each of these in some way; after all, we want to be wise and attentive to the "signs of the times." What often happens, though, is that we give these conspiracies a priority that is out of balance with the time we give to the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. N.T. Wright says that this is nothing new: "Conspiracy theories were thriving in the first century, just as they are now. Jesus pushes them aside. Stay calm, he says, and trust in me"⁷ Psalm 130:5 says it this way: "I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope" (NIV). Another way to say this is- "Watch and pray."

Give us the wisdom to put our trust in you, Lord, and believe that you will help us to interpret the times together.

Prayer Points:

- For light and truth about these controversial topics.
- For the first lens of the church to be the Bible.
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September 27, 2020

Loving Jesus
Matthew 12; Revelation 2:1-7

In most relationships, the excitement and energy that comes with first love doesn't usually stay at that same level. Relationships, by their very nature, do not stay the same. Either they grow deeper and mature, or as often happens, people begin to get comfortable and slowly take each other for granted. When Jesus says that the church at Ephesus has "forsaken the love you had at first," He was declaring that they had entered into the dangerous place of taking *God* for granted. It serves as a warning to us that, if we're not careful, we can give our excitement and energy to things that don't matter in the long run. It's a reminder that as important as it is to pay attention to signs and current events, if we don't attend to our own hearts, our love for God and others can easily grow cold. It is always helpful to think through those "first love days," so that we can "do the things ...[we] did at first!"

Jesus, show us where our love has grown cold, and highlight the ways we can love you more.

Prayer Points:

- For a willingness to ask about the status of our love for God.
- That love for God would be the defining characteristic of the church.
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