

[illegible]

DEVOTIONS FROM THE HILL

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.
I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*
John 10:10

21 DAYS TO KNOWING GOD MORE

“Fasting is more about replacing than it is about abstaining — replacing normal activities with focused times of prayer and feeding on the Word of God.”

“When was the last time you entered an extended time of prayer and fasting for spiritual, relational or missional breakthrough? Throughout the history of God’s people, great leaders reached out to God for a fresh encounter or divine intervention.”

The words above are taken from an abstract of another fasting journal by Gary Rohrmayer. For some of the same purposes that he wrote his journal, we want to introduce you to our 21-day guide titled “Devotions from The Hill.” In this guide we will be looking at the major doctrines (teachings) of our faith. It is our prayer that this will lead us into a deeper understanding of our beliefs so that we know God in a more intimate way.

As we look forward to what God has in store for us, we want to lead this family on “The Hill” in a 21-day period of fasting. As seen throughout the Bible, fasting is supposed to be a regular part of the believer’s life. As we enter into a time of fasting, it is our prayer that we will see the hand of God moving among us, emboldening us to be both hearers and doers of the Word, carrying out His Great Commission to make disciples in Lufkin and around the world.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This devotional is a look at some of the doctrines upon which the church is built. It is authored by church staff as well as members from our fellowship and offers 21 days of devotional scripture reading and a place to journal. During this time of fasting and prayer, ask God to enrich your relationship with Him as you spend time with Him through “Devotions from The Hill.”

Step 1— Excite: Cause an Interest

- Pray for personal understanding and wisdom.
- Rely on the Holy Spirit’s leading.

Step 2—Examine: Read

- Read the passages and choose a key verse.
- Think about your life and how this impacts the way you relate to God.

Step 3—Expand: Bible Journal

Express what you are learning in your journal. Keep your thoughts focused on each word as you write in your journal. Continue to pray and ask to know Him more.

Step 4—Excel: Share with Others

- with your family
- with a friend
- with a Bible study group
- on social media

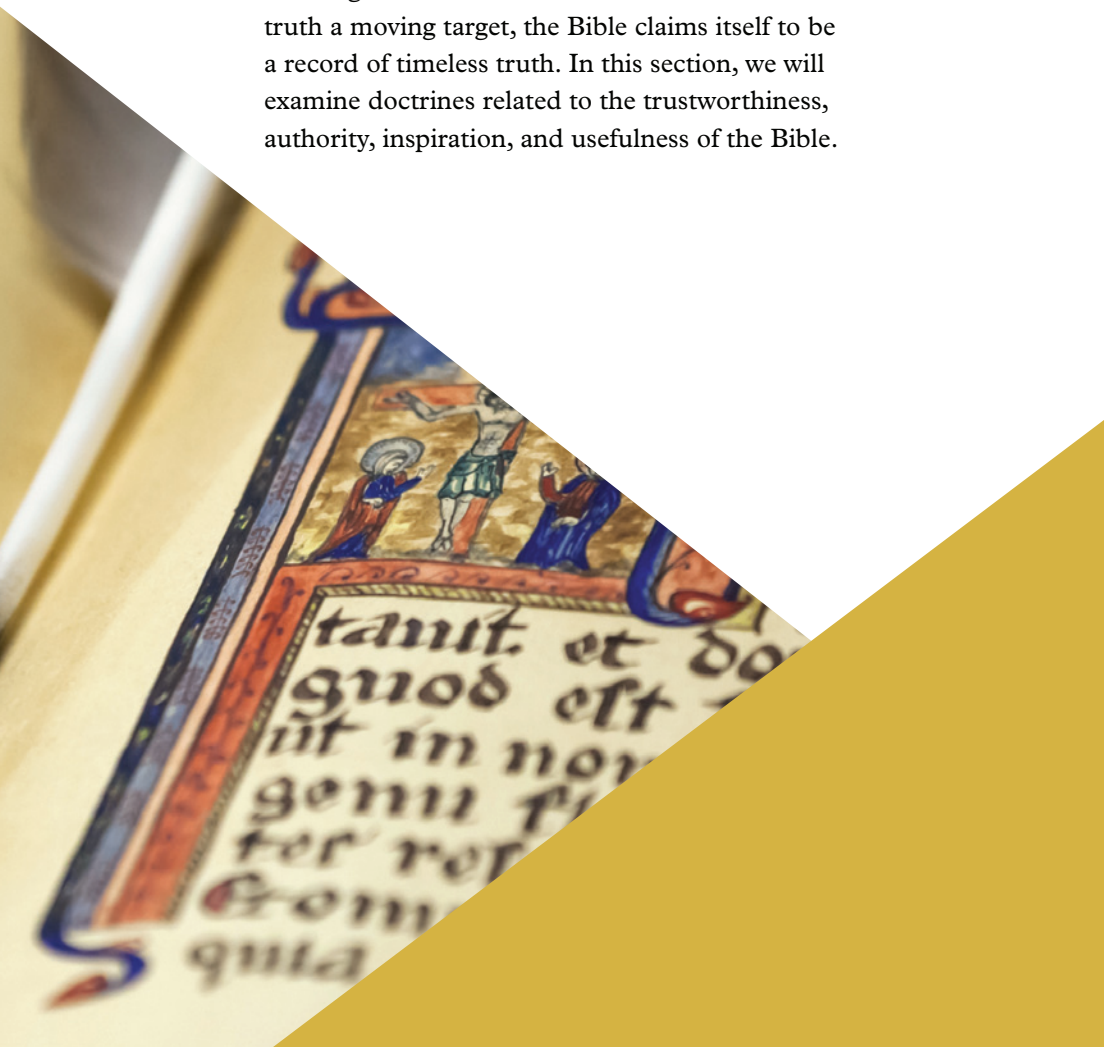
We are convinced that these 21 days can change the future. Help your church family experience the hand of God moving in our midst: **PRAY AND FAST WITH US!**

The Pastoral Staff of Harmony Hill

WEEK 1

The Bible

The Bible is the best-selling and most read book of all time. Everything Christians know and claim to be true about creation, salvation, the Messiah, and the afterlife come from the teachings of the Bible. In a culture that makes truth a moving target, the Bible claims itself to be a record of timeless truth. In this section, we will examine doctrines related to the trustworthiness, authority, inspiration, and usefulness of the Bible.



DAY 1

The Bible Is Inspired by God

By Richie Huval

Read 2 Peter 1:20-21.

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

We can find many things inspiring; a sunrise through the pines, a come-from-behind victory, even the story of a life well lived can inspire us and fill us with momentum. The word “inspired” in this passage means “God-breathed.” Peter tells us that the Holy Scriptures are the result of men being “moved” by the Holy Ghost (v. 21). It literally means “to be borne along” or to “be driven.” It describes a ship whose sails have been filled with wind and is driven forward by the power of that wind. The Holy Spirit of God moved upon men, drove them and pushed them to write the scriptures.

All of scripture is inspired. That means that every part of it is inspired, and because of that fact, it is without error. The scriptures do not need any additions or corrections, and their reliability does not depend upon our approval. Even the psalmist prayed, “Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law” (Psalm 119:18). This is a sobering reminder that human intellect on its own cannot grasp the true significance of scripture. When we have difficulty understanding the meaning of certain verses, we can give the Lord credit for knowing more things than we can understand.

We never meet in person most of the authors of the books that we read. We know very little about them outside of what is written on the jacket cover. Yet we can understand the average book without needing to know the author. The Bible is different. Until we know the Author of the Bible, we cannot know the Book itself. If we want to understand the Bible, we must be acquainted with the divine Author of the Bible. We need that personal knowledge of God that comes when a person trusts Jesus as Savior and

It takes the eyes of an artist to appreciate great art, and the ears of a musician to understand fine music, and it takes the eyes and ears and heart of the soul opened by the Spirit of God to understand the wonders of the Word of God. When you pray over this passage in 1 Peter, remember to thank God for the Word and for the Holy Spirit who inspired the scriptures and opens our eyes to His message of salvation in Christ.

Questions, thoughts, prayers...

[illegible]

DAY 2

The Bible Is Reliable

By Richie Huval

Read 1 John 1:1-5.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete. This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all.

John begins by declaring that he and the other apostles were there with Jesus, having seen, heard and touched Him. John was likely the closest earthly friend that Jesus had. He journeyed with Jesus as He performed His mighty miracles. At the Last Supper, John “was reclining next to Him” as Jesus talked of His approaching crucifixion (John 13:23) and is referred to as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23).

To John, Jesus was no made-up story, dream or mere vision. He was a real person who ate, drank, got tired, laughed, cried but He was also the embodiment of Life – Eternal Life. The memories of three and a half years spent with Jesus were heavy on the mind of John as he wrote to the churches under his care. He wanted to be sure they enjoyed fellowship with the resurrected Lord and with other disciples.

The joy that comes from that fellowship is available to us as well. Through faith in Jesus we can experience the joy that comes only from God. God, being light, is holy and untouched by sin. We need the sacrifice of Jesus to purify us so that we can have fellowship with Him. Our desire should also be for others to have that same relationship, to spread the gospel and complete our joy.

Take time in prayer to thank God for the real life of Jesus and the miracle

DAY 3

The Bible Is Proven

By Richie Huval

Read Isaiah 53.

Before you read this 12-verse chapter, understand that Isaiah 53 was written about 700 years before Christ. That is the equivalent of the guy who fired the first cannon invented in China writing in detail about the moon landing.

Isaiah begins the chapter by asking a question: “Who has believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” That word “report” literally means “doctrine or teaching.” So, he is asking the question, “Who will believe what I am teaching, what I am proclaiming concerning the coming Messiah?”

Verse 2 begins by talking of His lowly background. You remember when they told Nathanael that they had found the Christ? He said, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46) This indicates that Jesus had a very lowly background. Centuries before, Isaiah had said that this would be true of the Messiah.

Isaiah then writes about the suffering and humiliation of the Messiah in verses 4–6. It is hardly possible to read this and not picture Christ: *Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way. And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.* Isaiah wants us to understand that the significance of the Messiah’s suffering was that He was dying in our place. It was not for His wrong but for ours that He suffered, and in Him and through Him we have everlasting life.

This was written centuries before Jesus Christ was ever born, when only the Spirit of God could have revealed this to Isaiah. In fact, this picture is so clear in the mind of Isaiah that every verb in the chapter is in the present tense. He speaks of the coming of Jesus, the sacrifice of Jesus, the

death of Jesus, the burial of Jesus as though it had already happened and we were all sharing in that wonderful event.

It is a marvelous testimony concerning our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the fulfilled prophecy found in scripture. It has all come true, just like Isaiah said it was going to happen, and we accept Christ. We bow before Him. We trust our souls to Him. Isaiah 53 could only have been written by the inspiration of God, and this is proven since it was written 700 years earlier.

Questions, thoughts, prayers...

[illegible]

DAY 4

The Bible Is Consistent

By Nat Robinson

Read Luke 24:27.

“And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself.”

This passage from the famous walk to Emmaus demonstrates how Jesus affirmed the consistent narrative of the entire Bible. God created a perfect world with beauty and peace, a place for us to have a perfect relationship with Him. He created us for that relationship. He also gave mankind a free will to choose. Unfortunately, from the beginning mankind has selfishly chosen to rebel, and sin entered the world, destroying the ability to have that perfect relationship with God. This brokenness brought death, suffering and hopelessness to the world. The consistent story of the Bible from Moses in the writings of Genesis through the cross, resurrection, and finally the second coming of our Lord in the book of Revelation is God's merciful plan, through Jesus Christ, to rescue mankind from our sin and death.

Pray that the Lord will open your eyes to the message of the scriptures like He blessed these men on the road to Emmaus. In order to receive this blessing, you must do your part by reading the Bible and praying.

Other verses to read: Luke 24:13-35; Luke 4:17-21; Genesis 12:1-3

Suggested reading:

- *The Story: The Bible as One Continuing Story of God and His People*
- *Seamless, Understanding the Bible as One Complete Story*

[illegible]

DAY 5

The Bible Is Authoritative

By LaVan Watts

There was an old song that was popular many years ago by the name, “Don’t Fence Me In.” It was played a lot on the radio back then, but looking back, it was not a true statement as far as living a Christian life is concerned. It is akin to Frank Sinatra’s song, “I Did It My Way.”

God puts up fences for us as His children to keep us safe. It is just like farmers and ranchers putting up fences to keep their livestock safe. What is great about it is that inside those fences, there is freedom. That’s what God does. God’s boundaries and fences are defined by His Word. God’s Word is His authority and is to be obeyed. How do we know that? Well, Romans 13:1 tells us that there is no authority except from God, and those that exist are established by Him.

The Bible is the Word or authority of God. It says about itself, according to 2 Timothy 3:16, that all scripture is inspired or breathed by God Himself. Scripture tell us who God is. Hebrews 4:2 adds to this to tell us that God’s Word is alive and has power. It is able to divide soul and spirit and discern the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will obey Me.” The words of Jesus are the words of God because He also said, “I do not speak for Myself but for the One who sent Me.” So, there it is. The Bible is God’s fence, the authority over us, our protection and our freedom. It brings with it the weight of judgment and the sweetness of blessing. We get to choose which one.

As you fast and pray during this season, ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and put light on any area of disobedience to God’s Word, so that you may walk in right relationship to Him.

Other verses to read: Psalm 119:1-11, 33-35, 40

[illegible]

DAY 6

The Bible Is Treasure for the Soul

By Dan Johnson

Read Psalm 19:7-11 (ESV).

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

One of my fondest memories growing up was looking for buried treasure. There was a creek on our property, and much time was spent exploring that creek. I thought about the people who had occupied the land in the ancient past: Indians, Spanish Conquistadors, or early settlers who might have needed to protect their valuable gold or precious gems by hiding them in the ground. Searching for clues to hidden treasure, I was sure to strike it rich. Many hours were burned looking, only to find a few rocks and bottles. The childhood things I treasured were soon to be tested as the reality of adult responsibilities engulfed me.

God's Word gleamed as pure gold in the smelting pot of life. Long workdays, a challenging work environment, house notes, car payments, school schedules, threatening bosses were all designed to give me a thirst for God's Word. Carrying a Bible at all times gave me access to true treasure. When pulled from my pocket, the refreshing words of life sustained a weary and tired heart. Wise counsel is available in the heat of conflict. When tempted to sin, His Word gives clear direction and a reminder that the bondage to sin has been broken by the power of the blood of Jesus. The truth of 2 Timothy 3:16-17 becomes clear. *"All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and training in righteousness, that the man of God maybe complete, equipped for every good work."* Its authority and power are unquestionable

Other verses to read: Proverbs 2:1-5; John 8:31-32

[illegible]

DAY 7

The Bible Is Essential for Spiritual Maturity

By Kerwin Smith

Read Ephesians 4:12-14 (NIV).

“To equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we reach the unity of the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.”

Today it is difficult to determine what is true and what is not, especially when reading or listening to news of current events. It seems our society is in a rapid decline to a post-truth, post-fact culture. Prior to 1960 most Americans believed that the Bible was God’s Word and therefore the absolute truth. Then a shift took place, and our culture decided that truth was relative to whatever situation we are in at a particular moment. Now it seems as though another shift is taking place right before our very eyes. Truth and facts have now become personal. If you don’t like what is being said, just deny it, say it never happened, or put your personal spin on it. The Bible refers to this tactical maneuver as deception.

We as the Church have an important role to play in defeating this deceptive world view. Verse 14 says that we are not to be satisfied as spiritual infants, but we are to strive for spiritual maturity so as not to be confused by deceitful schemes. Have you committed to seek after God and asked Him to help you to attain spiritual maturity or “the whole measure of the fullness of Christ?”

As God helps us mature spiritually, we as the Church will become more unified in our faith and beliefs. The spiritual maturity that God grants each one of us is not merely for us, but rather for all those around us. We must use what He freely gives us to equip others to live out the gospel.

Pray for commitment to seek after God and all He has for you, so that you

might be used to build up His people and unify His Church.

Other verses to read: 1 Corinthians 12:7; 2 Timothy 4:5; Ephesians 4:22

Questions, thoughts, prayers...

[illegible]



WEEK 2

Redemption

Redemption is God's rescue mission to save mankind from sin and death. Redemption stands in hand with creation. God created with the utterance of His Word; the greater work is redemption, which cost the life of Jesus to pay the debt of sin. It cost more to redeem us than create us, but that payment impacts the hearts and souls of every person who is saved. Redeeming people is more than arriving in heaven; it results in Christ's work being imaged on earth, proclaiming the gospel, and seeing lives become more like Christ (Mark 10:45).

DAY 1

Reconciliation: Reclaiming Rebels

By John Richardson

Read Romans 5:10-11.

For many believers, salvation is just escaping the punishment for sins in hell. What is often missed is the fact that salvation reconciles people to God, in other words, restores friendship with God. Relationship is restored, people lay down their arms against God as former enemies and begin to enjoy God as friend. Verse 10 shows that Christ died to bring people into right relationship with God. The reconciliation is the first step on the path of transformation. As you commune with Christ, you grow in your relationship with Him. People who have been friends for a long time are often cited as being “cut of the same cloth” or “just like each other.” Those phrases reveal that time with other people changes who we are and what we believe. Friendships are vitally important to the development of who you are and what you do each day.

When we are saved by Christ, we moved from enemies to friends. Now the relationship that believers enjoy with God shapes them into the image of Christ. Not only do believers become more like Christ, but they begin to, as verse 11 puts it, enjoy God. Do you enjoy God? Does the friendship you share with Christ move you to joy? Would you define your relationship with God as close friend?

Pray for your relationship with God, that you would spend more time enjoying Him and strengthening the relationship into which He has invited you. Also pray for those who are still rebels to our good King, seeking opportunity to share in the ministry of reconciliation.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

DAY 2

Justification: Our Just God

By John Richardson

Read Romans 5:1-2.

Romans 4 closes with the case for saving faith. Peace with God is found in faith. We cannot end the hostility God has for rebel sinners with effort, works, or behavior. Peace with God is found through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross to satisfy the wrath of God, ready to be poured out on our sins. The “therefore” used by Paul in the opening of chapter 5 joins our faith with being justified. Justified in our minds is a word of limited use. Justification is a legal term meaning acquittal, a pardon from God in the case of the text. God does not overlook sin or disregard sin to provide a pardon; instead He accepts the righteousness of Christ in the place of our sin. His acceptance of Jesus’ actions leads to our justification. We accept the right acts of Christ, and God accepts Christ’s right acts in place of our sin.

Justification does not mean that we are made righteous by Christ’s actions, but God declares us righteous. The beauty is that we know that we are sinners in continual struggle, but at the point of salvation we are declared righteous by God, acquitted of all charges of treason against our Holy King. Romans 5:2 shows that Christ gives us standing with God. Standing reflects the ability to trust the work of Christ and have confidence to worship because of the great work of Christ.

I often wrestle with seeing God as an angry boss that I’m failing to please. This text reminds me that God has declared me righteous, and the hostility that was once there has become peace. God is a loving Father who has given His Son, so that we could confidently worship Him in grace. How do you see God? How does the way you see God impact your response in worship?

Pray that God would use the peace He has given you to impact those who are still enemies to God and those who are struggling to find God’s peace in their life.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

DAY 3

Redeeming Our Past: Speak Out

By Chrissy Smith

Read Psalm 107.

Throughout this chapter we see people in a variety of situations: lost, hungry, in deepest gloom, in rebellion against the words of God...just to name a few. In all of these situations, we see that when the people come to the end of themselves and their abilities to handle their situations, they cry out to God and He is faithful to deliver them.

We see story after story of the Lord rescuing and redeeming, but there is an expectation attached. Those whom the Lord has pulled out of the darkness are to give thanks to God and tell others.

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! His faithful love endures forever. Has the Lord redeemed you? Then speak out! Tell others He has redeemed you from your enemies (Psalm 107:1-2).

Many of us have a past of which we are not proud. I am among those. For years I allowed Satan to use my past to control me. The Lord had saved me, but I allowed shame and fear of what others think to hold me back from the life He was leading me to live. Honestly, I still struggle with this. But the first time I stood up in front of a room of people and told them about all Jesus had saved me from...I'd never seen His light shine brighter than it did on that day! The Lord used my darkness to shine His light to others.

So, today I ask you: Has the Lord redeemed you? Then it's time for you to speak out and tell others!

Pray about how you can uniquely thank God, and pray He will provide opportunities for you to share your redemption story with others.

[illegible]

DAY 4

Sacrifice: Dying for the Unworthy

By John Richardson

Read Romans 5:6-9.

Understanding Christ as the sacrifice for our sin begins with understanding verse 6, “While we were still weak.” Weak describes the inability of man to fix his sinful condition apart from Christ. Weakness is not in relation to physical aptitude; weakness is the state of man indwelt with sin. People’s weakness sets the stage for Christ’s redeeming work; Christ died at the appointed time, the planned time, the right time. God, being infinite in wisdom and knowledge and bringing all things to pass, decided that Christ should die on the cross for your sin because man was unable to restore relationship to God. Sacrifice means that Christ died for you, in your place, so that you could spend eternity in right relationship with God. Christ died for you, the ungodly.

God shows matchless love in dying for those not worthy. One wouldn’t die for a righteously religious man, but maybe one would die for a good man, one who does more than appear righteous. Would you die for a drug lord, a mass shooter, or a terrorist? Christ shows His immeasurable love by dying for His enemies, rebels to His kingdom, former drug lords, murders, and terrorists.

How will you live in joy of Christ’s love for you? How will you show the sacrifice of Christ to others? Is there someone who needs to see Christ’s sacrificial love through you?

Pray for those who you would consider enemies (both personally and positionally), that God would use you to share the love of His Son with them.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

DAY 5

Restoration: Releasing Control

By Sarah Gandy

Read James 4:1-3, 7-8.

The book of James is the ultimate “come to Jesus meeting.” Chapter 4 is a call to action and comfort for those who believe. James highlights our innate tendency to step outside the will of the Father, pursuing our own passions, and the destructive consequence of that choice. In his letter, James challenges readers to carefully examine their walk with the Lord in contrast to that of the world.

My husband and I recently bought a house, and every room had wallpaper in it. Everyone will tell you there’s no easy way to remove it. Still, full of determination and grit, we got to work on our “do it yourself” (DIY) project. Fast forward two days and we had successfully removed some of the wallpaper but were left staring at a damaged wall full of imperfections and a giant mess to clean up.

Isn’t that an interesting parallel to our walk with Christ? Professing Christ as Lord and living a life in full submission to Him daily isn’t the “easy way.” Often, we attempt to “DIY” our life, losing sight of His will and chasing our own, only to be left with a giant mess to clean up.

Verse 8 reminds us that God is a God of restoration who longs for His children to repent and humbly seek Him. *“Come close to God and He will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world.”*

Are there areas of your life where you are trying to “DIY”? Have you made a mess and can’t see the path to redemption? Pray today in repentance, humbly seek His direction, and release full control to Him.

[illegible]

DAY 6

Imputation: Great Exchange

By John Richardson

Read Romans 5:18-21.

Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden set in motion a sinful nature into which everyone was born. One doesn't have to teach a child to be selfish; it is innate. Having a sin nature means that we will sin, and we will wrestle with sin throughout our existence. The good news of verse 19 is that Christ's obedience to God made those who trust Him as Savior to be credited with righteousness. Many people call this the Great Exchange—we bring our sins to the cross of Jesus; Jesus takes on our sin (2 Corinthians 5:21) and gives us His righteousness (right relationship with God). The term used throughout church history is “imputed righteousness.” The word “imputation” comes directly from the Latin word “imputare” which is an accounting term meaning “to apply to one's account.” So, the obedience of Christ is applied to your account. Christ clothes us with His rightness before God, therefore when God looks at us, He sees the good works of Christ His Son.

Because Christ's work is applied to our account, we cannot acquire the work of Christ on our effort; we simply receive it. Our sin is imputed to Christ or put on His account, and His perfect obedience is so satisfying that He overcame the death brought on by our sin. Do you live in the righteousness of Christ? Are you battling the thought that God is always disappointed in you? What is it that God may be moving you to turn over to Him today?

Pray that you would not live in guilt of sin but enjoy the right standing you have before God. Pray that you would continue to live a life that is a reflection of Christ's work for and in you.

[illegible]

DAY 7

Freedom: Embracing Forgiveness

By Miranda Rudd

Read John 8:31-36 and Hebrews 10:22-25.

In these passages of scripture, Jesus tells us several key things about His disciples: they abide in His word, draw close to Him, and are freed from the bondage of sin. This passage assures believers that the grace we receive through Christ's sacrifice puts us at peace with God. Our sins no longer serve as barriers to our Creator but are lessons to remind us of the grace God offers us through the sacrifice Jesus made for our atonement.

Each of us is guilty of sin, and our lives bear witness to our specific sins; we are self-centered, and our relationships suffer; we don't practice self-control, and our health suffers; we follow the world instead of the Word, and our discipleship is stunted. If we find ourselves falling into old patterns, anxiety blooms in us, and we are moved to do better, work harder, and pray more in the hope of earning His peace once more. In doing this, we ignore the foundation of our faith: it is not our actions or efforts that bring us peace with God, but our faith in Him through Jesus.

While we may live with consequences of past sin, we are free from eternal punishment, and as we learn to submit to Jesus' expectations of His disciples, we grow in wisdom, intimacy, and understanding of God. As we are transformed, our lives bear witness to a merciful God who pursues broken people and makes them new.

As you pray this week, give thanks to the Lord for His work in your life. Ask Him to reveal areas where you are disobedient to His plan and to make obvious any sin from which you need to turn.

Questions, thoughts, prayers...

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

WEEK 3

The Church

For many people, the word “church” can evoke a range of images and emotions. Often when we talk of a church we think of a building with a pitched roof and a steeple or even a grand cathedral. Yet the Bible never references a building when speaking of the church. So what is the church? Why does the church perform certain ordinances? What is the purpose of a church? In this section, we will examine doctrines related to the purpose and mission God has for His church.



DAY 1

The Bride of Christ

By Jeffie Burns

Read Revelation 19:6-9.

At every wedding, as the back doors open and the bride emerges, the triumphant music begins, and everyone stands in her honor. The bride then descends down the aisle, dressed in white, a representation of her purity and righteousness.

A lot of work and preparation has been done to get to this moment. Every detail planned—from the flowers, to the color choices, to the invitation lists, to the money spent—was all for this moment when she would become one with her groom.

One thing I love to do is watch the groom's face as the bride walks down the aisle. He is ready, excited and most of the time overwhelmed at the beauty of his bride. He has been preparing a place to live, a job to provide, and she is everything he thought she would be... radiant, beautiful, pure, and the one he has chosen to be his.

This is such a beautiful picture of the church body with Christ. All the preparations, decisions and plans of God will be fulfilled when He returns for His Bride. When Jesus shed His own blood for our sins, it allowed us the privilege of being represented as sanctified, pure, and without blemish... a beautiful Bride for her holy Groom.

As believers, we are the Bride of Christ. When He comes again, we will be presented in white, not because of our own purity and righteousness, but because of who we are in Christ.

God chose Christian believers to become one with Christ, but in this union, God did all the wedding preparations when He reconciled us to Himself. This reconciliation came through Christ's redemptive work on the cross to cleanse and present us holy.

Someday we will live forever with Jesus; we are His intended bride. As the people of God, the elect from every race and nation, as His church, the Bride of Christ, we should eagerly await and anticipate His coming back

to take us to live with Him forever.

Pray today that you will desire to fellowship, love, long, and hunger for a romance with Christ! Pray that your attention to Christ will cultivate affection for Him.

Other verses to read: Ephesians 5:21-33; Genesis 2:24; Matthew 25:10; Revelation 21:2, 21:9, 22:17

Questions, thoughts, prayers...

This image shows a single page from a notebook or ledger. It features ten evenly spaced horizontal blue lines across its entire width. The lines are thin and light-colored, set against a plain white background. There are no margins, text, or other markings present on the page.

DAY 2

The Body of Christ

By Jeffie Burns

Read 1 Corinthians 12, Colossians 1:18, and Ephesians 1:22.

Do you have a part of your body you like better than another? One you like less than another? I think we all do. We have some parts we try and accentuate more and some we try and hide more. Sometimes in the body of Christ (His church), we do this with one another. 1 Corinthians 12 tells us that as the body of Christ, each part of the body is needed, important, and even has a specific responsibility.

Physically, the body needs a head (brain). The brain sends messages, warns, directs, leads, and is responsible for the best interests of our body. It helps our body and its thousands of parts move and function together, so that every part moves in the same direction.

Spiritually, the “body” needs a head (brain). Spiritually, believers are the body of Christ, and Colossians 1:18 and Ephesians 1:22 explain that Christ is the head of the body or church; He is the “brains of the operation.” With Christ as the head, we are able to move, work, and function together.

Every member of the body of Christ has been given a specific and individual gift from God, intended and designed to be a part of His body, the church. Although our gifts are diverse, specific, and important, they are all needed and required in the role of the church.

The New Testament describes the church as the body of Christ. The church lives and operates as Christ’s representative here on earth, with Christ as its head (Colossians 1:18). This means that the church is an extension of Christ’s ministry, carrying out His work by fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). In addition, the picture of the church as the body of Christ shows us the interconnectedness of individual Christians, with each member dependent upon one another for growth and sanctification (1 Corinthians 12).

Today pray for each part of the body of Christ. Pray that each part of

our body understands their importance. Pray for unity and growth of our body.

Questions, thoughts, prayers...

[illegible]

DAY 3

The Priesthood of the Believer

By Dr. Walt Scalen

Pastor John often jokes that he is the “hired holy man.” He is making a tongue-in-cheek reference to the clergy/laity division that has its roots in the early development of the Roman Catholic Church. You will not find this distinction in the New Testament; rather you will discover that while there are different spiritual giftings, we are all believer-priests.

Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9 KJV).

The notion that regular church members are exempt from the requirements of ministers and pastors is false. Pastors are not a special category who are “higher” than “regular” believers. Again, we are all believer-priests.

Those who practice Old Testament priesthood-like standards today are generally Roman Catholics, Orthodox, and the Church of England or Episcopalians. The priests are “special” and assigned to “priestly” duties such as leading the liturgy, serving communion, and hearing confessions. But this is not the New Testament pattern. As believer-priests we all are to pray, fully participate in communion, give the sacrifice of praise, be biblically literate, and evangelize.

The Old Testament priests were a “special” class. They had a unique family lineage and a specific set of priestly duties. They were the conservators of the Revelations from God. They offered the ritual sacrifices; they were the leaders of worship in the tabernacle or the temple. They maintained the elements of sacrifice or worship, and they were the spiritual leaders of the people. Clearly, they were not identified as common people or worshippers. They were special, set apart.

When Jesus was “sacrificed” as the Lamb of God for the sins of the whole world, the great veil of the temple “was torn in two from top to bottom” (Matthew 27:51). This event ended the Old Testament priesthood. Animal sacrifices ceased to be required. The Ultimate Sacrifice has been made and

Jesus becomes the Great High Priest for all believers.

After the “sacrifice” of the Cross where Jesus died for sins, we are now all believer-priests, and He is our High Priest who is interceding for us. We are believer-priests who are equal in standing but different as to our special spiritual giftings. However, the priestly duties that we have in common include prayer, Bible study, praise, and evangelism. This is a far cry from the common practice of many church members who feel they discharge all their responsibilities as Christians by occasional church attendance and being part of a passive “audience.” This is found nowhere in the history of the early church or the writings of the New Testament.

All believers are now priests serving a Holy God. We can now go directly to the Father in prayer, confession, praise, and worship. We are the representatives of His kingdom in this world. We live and speak His Word. We are gifted differently for service in the churches, but our priestly duties are the same.

Other verses to read: 1 Peter 2:9; Galatians 3:26-28; Hebrew 7:23-8:13

Questions, thoughts, prayers...

DAY 4

Local and Global Church

By Austin Holcomb

Read Revelation 7:9-10.

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

Christian myopia, or nearsightedness, is the tendency to focus only on ourselves or our immediate surroundings. Spiritually speaking, it is the inability to see God’s plan of redemption from a global or cosmic perspective. Perhaps this is why Jesus began so many parables by saying, “the kingdom of God is like...” The Bible helps us to look beyond ourselves and view the world from God’s vantage point. In the verses above, Jesus came to save a people for Himself, and not just people from one nation, but every nation and tongue. This truth has astounding implications.

It removes us from self-centered Christianity. Jesus loves me, and He died for me. God has big and wonderful plans for my life. These thoughts are true and normal to have but to remain there is to be spiritually nearsighted. Jesus does not call His people to self-absorbed spirituality but to robust missional love.

It reminds us of a forever family. The church is more than a building, it’s a body. It is not good for man to be alone—we need other brothers and sisters around us in community to obey Christ’s commands. That is the purpose of the local church. Jesus does not call His people to isolated discipleship but communal fellowship and exhortation.

It frees us from ethnocentric prejudices. Church-shopping is a real thing in contemporary western society. We want to be in a group that is just like us—a group that accepts us and suits our preferences or preaching styles. In reality churches look different on every continent. Jesus does not call His people to one cultural style of worship but to embrace unity and diversity.

Ask God to grow your love and understanding for both the local and global church. Next time you read one of Paul's letters to a church, try reading "you" as plural.

Questions, thoughts, prayers...

[illegible]

DAY 5

Baptism

By Kristin Greene

Read Romans 6:1-4 and Galatians 3:26-29.

Here are a few questions you may have asked or thought about baptism:

- Why does the church baptize?
- Why is it important for the believer?

The New Testament establishes two ordinances of the local church: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The ordinances of the local church commemorate the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Ordinances are not "sacraments." To clarify, churches that practice sacraments try to dispense grace through a ceremony or work rather than through Jesus Christ. There is no special grace received in an ordinance. Jesus left us these memorials to keep before us a reminder of His sacrifice on the cross for our sins.

My first act of obedience as a believer is following Christ's example of being baptized. Let's look at what the Bible says about baptism and the important role it plays in the life of a follower of Jesus Christ (from the scriptures referenced on the next page).

Baptism is NOT essential for salvation. My salvation is through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Nothing I can do can be added to the grace of God for that salvation... it is faith in Christ alone. (Eph. 2:8-9)

Notice the requirements for baptism are the same requirements for salvation: heart belief in Jesus Christ and confession that He is MY Lord and Savior. Until you meet conditions for salvation, baptism would just be a public bath. (Rom. 10:9-10)

Next, baptism is an act of my submission to obeying Christ's example and making public testimony of what has happened in my life.

Baptism is a tangible display of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. In Romans 6 we see we are buried (joined) with Christ in baptism, and just as He was raised from the dead by God's power, now we also may live new lives.

Other verses to read: Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 6:1-4; Romans 6:23; Galatians 3:26-29; Colossians 2:11-12; Matthew 3:11-17, 28:18-20; Romans 10:9-10

[illegible]

DAY 6

The Importance of the Lord's Supper

By Michael Sessions

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-29.

The night before His crucifixion as Jesus introduced His disciples to the Lord's Supper, twice He said, "Do this in remembrance of me." The disciples did not know it at the time, but the Lord's Supper was meant to be like the celebration of a wedding anniversary. We are to remember Jesus' sacrifice just as a bride and groom celebrates their wedding anniversary. During this time, we remember the joy of our salvation, reflect on our current life, celebrate God's faithfulness, and renew our vows to follow Jesus.

Before taking of the bread and cup, Paul calls us to examine ourselves. He warns that failure to do this brings judgment on ourselves. In this time of reflection, we reflect on sin and on God's promises. Believers should take time to bring any sin to the forefront of our lives, to see our sin on Jesus as He hung on the cross, and to confess any sin before God. Once our sins are confessed, we can celebrate in the faithfulness of God's promises:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9 NKJV).

The Supper celebrates that God says our sins are cleansed, covered, and remembered no more; no matter how terrible, they have been cast into the sea of forgetfulness.

We can now feast on forgiveness and faithfulness that comes through Jesus. In the taking of the bread and cup we can now renew our vows to follow Jesus and look forward to His return.

Pray that God would show you any areas of sin in your life, and confess those sins. Celebrate that no matter how great the sin, His love is greater. Renew your vow to follow Him.

Other verses to read: Acts 2:42; Matthew 26:26-29; John 6:53-54

[illegible]

DAY 7

The Mission of the Church

By Jonathan Lazarini

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

In simple terms, Deuteronomy 6 might read like this: “Believers! Listen up and receive your marching orders. First, this is the Word of the One and Only Most High God whom you will love with all your being. You will declare My words, works, wonders, and ways in your home and outside of it. You will proclaim it to your children and to others. Don’t forget! Do whatever it takes to remember. Everyone around you needs to know about Me.”

These important verses in the Jewish faith are called the Shema. The Shema describes faith as an all-consuming, every-facet-of-life-penetrating, active demonstration of our love for God.

Jesus’ two “Greats,” the Greatest Commandment and the Great Commission, remind us of our Father’s mission for us in Deuteronomy 6: to love the One True God with all that we have, love others, and tell the Good News. These weren’t special orders for only His twelve apostles—these were a reminder of God’s marching orders: for generations of disciples to make disciples to make disciples to make disciples... So that means you—yes, you—a teacher, a student, a plumber, a barista, a mechanic, a doctor, a stay-at-home mom, a truck driver, etc. You are a disciple of Christ who is called to make disciples.

Wow! What would it be like if every follower of Christ, every day, in love, was living in obedience to declare Him as King, Lord, Master, Christ, Friend, Forgiver, Defender, Savior?

As you pray now to be used by Him and to declare His Kingdom among the lost with whom you interact daily, ask yourself and talk with your Father about this question: What are the reasons you may not be sharing the Greatest News in the history of the world with others?

Meet with others and discuss how you can encourage, pray, and team up together to go and make disciples in your community.

[illegible]

Thank you for reading this devotional!

We have included a few extra resources below if you would like to dig a little deeper into the doctrines of the faith. May the Lord bless you as you continue to study His word.

Website:

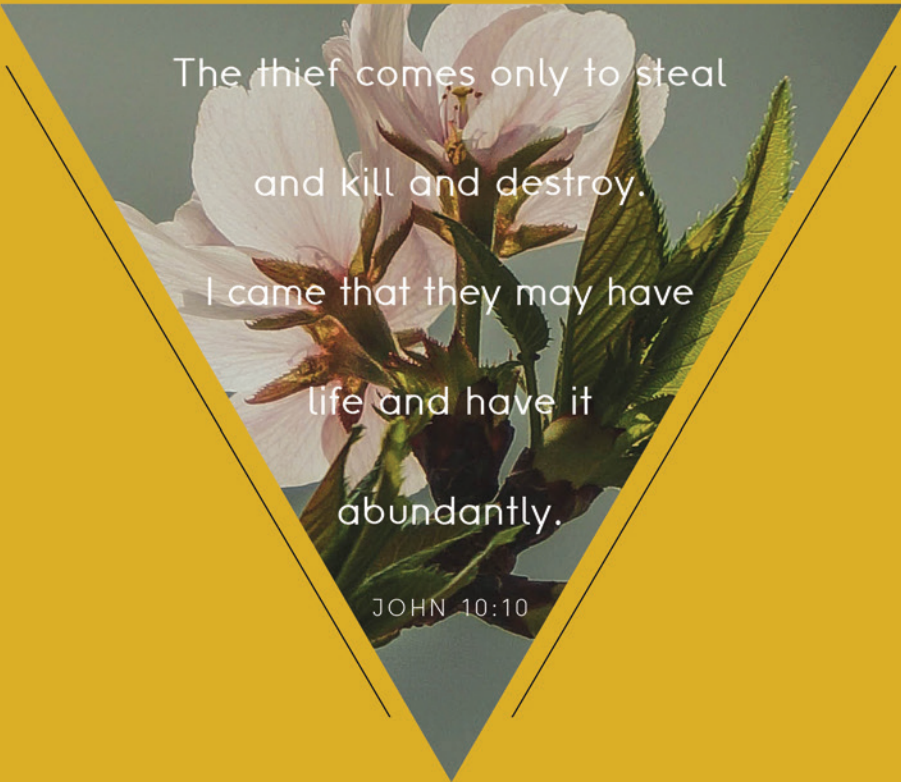
Gospelproject.com – 99 Essential Doctrines (videos/downloadable PDF)

The Baptist Faith and Message – sbc.net (Find under resources tab.)

Books:

Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know by Wayne A. Grudem, Zondervan 2005

Why I am a Baptist, Contributors: Russell Moore, Tom Nettles, Alistair Begg, B&H Publishing 2001



The thief comes only to steal
and kill and destroy.
I came that they may have
life and have it
abundantly.

JOHN 10:10