

River Community Church

Closing the Gap Devotional Summer Season



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Closing the Gap 6.4.18

Summer doesn't hope for growth. It assumes it. Sunshine is all for it. Rain is all for it. Earth is all for it. Seeds are all for it. Summer is ever-confident...of course things will grow. How could they not?

Welcome to a season of focused attention to closing the gap on having a conversational relationship with God. He is the famous one, the powerful one, the wise one and he has invited you into fellowship with him. Grow this summer in seeing this invitation as the great privilege that it is. Pray your way through the days and nights this summer. Grow in understanding who God is and what he has called you to be. God is all for growth, just make sure you are as well. Focus, be intentional, and grow!

Week 22 "Why Pray?" Day 1

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Mark 1:35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Deut. 29:29 The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

Reflect:

If God knows everything, why pray? If God is in control and is going to do whatever he knows is best, why pray? Since I am limited and can't see the big picture, why pray? What do I know, how can I presume to know what should happen? You should pray because the scriptures say you should. In fact, they say you should pray a lot...you should pray continually (1 Thess. 5:17). We should seek to understand God's will and ways as much as possible, but we must understand that there is a limit to the capacity of our understanding. This is offensive to adults, but not to children who tend to be aware that they have limits. We are not adults in our relationship to God. We are children. We should try to learn how to better pray and we should also try to pray more often. But in terms of understanding why we should pray even though God is in control, we only need to know that we are told to do so. The fact that God is in control should be an encouragement to pray, not a discouragement from praying. If someone or something else was in control, we should be addressing our prayer and attention to them or it. But since God is in control and he has told us to pray, we are wise to direct our attention and our petitions to him. He can answer prayers because nothing can stand in his way. So ponder the deep things of God all you want, but in the end do the simple things he has told you to do. Pray at all times about all things. This is what he has told us to do and the mysteries of how it all works together is not our concern. Will you wait until you have figured God out before you experience God in your life? If you do, you will wait

indefinitely. You don't have to figure him out to experience him, but you do have to obey him. Pray today. Pray about everything that concerns you and learn to pray about everything that concerns him as well.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 6.5.18

Week 22 "Why Pray?" Day 2

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Mark 1:35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Deut. 29:29 The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

Reflect:

Jesus prayed. From eternity past God the Father, Son, and Spirit have lived in loving relationship. God is three persons in one being. This is not hard to understand; it is impossible to fully understand. But this inability to fully understand is fully understandable. We understand by analogy, "This is like that." There is no analogy to God. He is completely unique. But the fact that we cannot fully understand does not mean we cannot have adequate and accurate understanding of God. We know that because God exists as the Trinity he does not need us in order to express and experience love and relationship. Within the uniqueness of who he is there has always been friendship, relationship, and love. This fact helps us understand why Jesus prayed. His existence had always been one of intimate friendship. Now as he dwelt among us as the "Word made flesh" (John 1:14), he continued to live in that friendship. He got up early in the morning, at the beginning of his day, and left his new friends to spend time with his old friends. Why pray? It's because you were made for relationship with God. Relationships require regular communication in order to flourish and grow. Your relationship with God is no different in this regard than the ones you have with other people in your life. There are many forms that prayer can take, just as there are many forms that communication between any two people can take. In all relationships there is asking, and listening, and confessing, and thanking, and on and on. You should pray because Jesus did. But you should also pray because you understand why Jesus did. He was in a friendship and so he prayed because he wanted to. He liked to pray. It may have been hard for him to get up early in the morning just like it can be for us, but he did it because he wanted to pray and not because he had to pray. Do you "want" to "want" to pray? You can learn to "want to" pray if you begin by seeing prayer as a conversation in a very important relationship.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 6.6.18

Week 22 "Why Pray?" Day 3

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Mark 1:35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Deut. 29:29 The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

Reflect:

A "secret thing" is how human prayer and God's sovereignty work together. A "revealed thing" is that they do work together. You can wait until you have it all worked out in your mind before you enter deeply and consistently into a conversational relationship with God. However, if you do, you will wait indefinitely. God is sovereign; all things are under his control and, at the same time, you are still told by God to pray. The sovereign God has set things up in such a way that your act of praying matters in terms of outcomes. Don't spend much time trying to figure it out. It's not a math problem; it's a relational reality. You really only need to be convinced of the fact that God has told you to pray and that your prayer matters. If you are convinced of this one thing, then whether or not you figure out any number of other things will not make a significant difference. The best place to look for how to live the Christian life well is to look to Christ himself. He prayed and you should too. He asked God for what he wanted and he trusted God for what he gave. You can try to "get off the hook" by telling yourself that, since he was the Christ, it's really not helpful to look to his life as a model for yours. However, scripture points us directly to his life as a model for how to live ours. Of course he was not just a role model, he was the atonement for our sins. But though he was more than a role model, he was certainly not less than one. Look to him, do what he did, and try to live like he lived. Jesus prayed. You should as well.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 6.7.18

Week 22 "Why Pray?" Day 4

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Mark 1:35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Deut. 29:29 The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

Reflect:

A mystery is not a contradiction. A contradiction implies that an error is involved, while a mystery means there is more to be known than what we currently know. God is completely in control and our prayers make a difference in outcomes. This is a mystery, but it is not a contradiction. Part of seeing how this works together is to view prayer as more than getting God to agree with us on what we want to happen. Prayer can become mostly bargaining, or even attempts at manipulation, if we don't see our relationship with God as a sort of partnership. Not partnership in that we are his equal or that we can somehow "out vote" him on some issue. But a partnership in that you and God are both working towards the same goals. You both desire to see your life maximize his glory and the good of others. Prayer is not trying to get God to see things your way. It is first and foremost about fostering the health of the relationship. In human relationships, it is common for two people to sometimes see each other as opponents. Each one is vying for their own position and each one is somehow trying to "win." The truth is, in any healthy relationship what matters most is the relationship itself. When there is disagreement on key issues, then the ultimate goal is not to "win" but to protect the relationship so that it can continue to thrive. People will sometimes plead with God regarding some issue of great importance to them. As they plead it is hard to imagine how something so important to them could not be as important to God. When God does not "come through" as asked (or demanded), disillusionment can set in. Perhaps what happens is that they disagreed with God on a certain outcome and for them getting the desired outcome became the most important thing, not the relationship itself. Will you make prayer primarily about the relationship itself? Communication among friends and family should not be just about getting the other person to see things your way. It should be, ideally, about building the relationship itself. You can ask him for anything, and your asking does matter in the outcomes. But how will you respond when he doesn't agree with you on some matter of great importance? Move towards him, not away from him and in so doing you will be positioned to better understand what is of great importance to him.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 6.8.18

Week 22 "Why Pray?" Day 5

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Mark 1:35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Deut. 29:29 The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

Reflect:

Why pray? Because you can. If God did not exist, you could speak words to the ceiling or to the sky, but it would still not be prayer. It would be self-talk. If God existed but did not care, you could speak words to him but he would not listen. If he did not listen, it would not be prayer. It would be "wish-talk." You should pray because you can pray. You can pray because God exists and he cares for you. The fact is, most people do pray. Even about 1 in 5 atheists or agnostics prays daily. Which makes you wonder if they actually are what they think they are – atheist or agnostic. But although most pray, it is unlikely that most see prayer as the privilege that it is. Many people dream of being able to speak to some wise, famous or powerful person. They would love to be able to get that person's help, or their perspective, or just to have relationship with them. Prayer is a conversational relationship with the all-wise, eternally famous, all-powerful God. We may know this as "brute fact," but we may not see this as the beautiful truth it is. If we would take the time to remember, reflect, and rehearse out loud these truths, it would likely make our praying seem more like the privilege that it is. It's good to pray "as you go" about all kinds of things and, of course, you can't always recite the greatness of God before every prayer. However, sometimes when you pray, it would be good and helpful if rather than beginning by "asking in prayer," you would "tell in prayer." Tell God (and yourself) of the greatness and goodness of God. Speak to him (and yourself) of his power and love and "smartness." His ways are best for you because he is both really smart and really good...try to remember this as you pray. Position yourself to pray by turning your thoughts to who it is you are praying to. Learn to see prayer as the privilege it is. You don't have to pray, you get to pray.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask

Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 6.11.18

Week 23 "Pray Constantly" Day 1

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

1 Thess. 5:16-18 Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Reflect:

It is God's will that you "be joyful always," "pray continually," and "give thanks in all circumstances." Surely this means we will often live our lives outside the will of God because after all who can accomplish these lofty goals? We are sometimes joyful, sometimes prayerful, and sometimes thankful. So, is this a goal we aim for which is clearly unattainable? Is this a rebuke for how often we fall short of the will of God? Not at all. It is possible, even for a regular Christian (like you), to live a life of "always, continually, and in all circumstances." First, it is important to understand what these words imply. To be joyful always does not mean you will always "feel" a certain way. Jesus for the "joy set before him endured the cross" (Heb. 12:2). There is no question that he did not feel what we would normally call joy in the moments of his suffering. But it was the reality of joy that took him to the cross. His joy was a settled inner disposition that flowed from his relationship with God the Father. He had lived so well and for so long in relationship with God the Father that his heart was "trained for joy." But his joy was also a choice. He chose to move continually into the joy that is available to all who live in continual fellowship with God. So, "joyful always" and "pray continually" are two sides of single coin. When we live in a conversational relationship with God, we live in his joy. When we live in his joy, we will live in a conversational relationship with God. To experience his joy and to be able to live in his presence continually are both his gifts to us and our choices in regard to him. We are told to accomplish these things..."be joyful" and "pray continually." We are not told to merely wait for them to be done to us or for us. Close the gap on where you are right now and where you (and God) want you to be. Do not merely regret how far you might be from continual joy and prayer. Move a step closer today to this lifestyle. God is offering it to you. Will you take him up on his offer and practice his presence starting today?

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to

proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 6.12.18

Week 23 "Pray Constantly" Day 2

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

1 Thess. 5:16-18 Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Reflect:

Continual joy, prayer, and thankfulness are linked together like the molecules that combine to make water. These three choices come together to shape a clear picture of God's will for you. People will often search frantically to discern God's unknown will on the particulars of their lives. Who to marry, what to do vocationally, whether to make major purchases, where to go to school, where to live, or what church to join. It is odd that sometimes these same people are not as diligent to pursue the known will of God for their lives... which is to keep on being joyful, praying, and giving thanks. This is clearly the will of God for your life. Continual joy is a by-product of living in his presence in prayer. Giving thanks in all the circumstances of your life flows naturally from living in his presence and experiencing his joy. This kind of life is available to you. You don't have to wonder about it or say, "If it be your will, I would like to pray more, live in your joy and be thankful." It is his will, now move more faithfully and diligently into his will for your life. You can be sure that if God is all for something, then all that remains is for us to be all for it as well. He could keep us from this kind of life, but he won't. We can keep ourselves from this kind of life, though, and we often do. Close the gap. Move further into the will of God for your life - an ever joyful, prayerful, and thankful life.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 6.13.18

Week 23 "Pray Constantly" Day 3

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Rom. 12:12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Reflect:

Practice makes permanent. What you do repeatedly over time shapes who you are. What we repeat (intentionally or unintentionally) becomes reflexive for us. What you do reflexively is who you have become. If anger has been practiced, then anger now comes quickly and easily for you. You have become an angry person. If kindness has been practiced, then kindness comes "naturally" for you and you have become a kind person. You think it's not that simple? Yes, in fact, it is that simple. But it's not by any means easy to change your reflexes. This is especially true once you have practiced "wrong" for a long time. Now you have to both undo bad reflexes and train good ones. To be faithful in prayer simply means to practice prayer. It means to do it, over and over again. At first, you will need to remind yourself to pray as you go through your day. In response to these reminders to pray and also through the practice of praying, you are being faithful in prayer. How does your praying life compare to someone else's? That is not your concern other than maybe how you can be challenged by their example. But in terms of "measuring" how much you pray or how well you pray as compared to someone else, this is not to be your focus. Focus on faithfulness. Faithfulness is practice. Faithfulness is a lifetime of closing the gap between where you are and where you could be. What will you do today to remind yourself to pray? What will you do today in practice that will make prayer a bit more reflexive for you?

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 6.14.18

Week 23 "Pray Constantly" Day 4

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Col. 4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

Reflect:

The Scriptures frequently present prayer as a kind of wrestling or labor. This makes sense because most of us have experienced the reality of prayer as being difficult at times. The difficulties can take many forms. Some find it difficult to pray at all; their prayer life is inconsistent at best. Others struggle to focus in prayer or to know how they should pray. Many find it hard to pray in faith, they constantly wonder if praying is really worthwhile at all. The fact is, virtually all good and helpful things in life are difficult to maintain. To have good physical health over a long period of time takes constant attention. The same is true for relational health. Even if you desire something as relatively simple as a healthy lawn, you understand it takes a sort of devoted attention in order to accomplish this "yard health." Spiritual health is no different. It requires devoted attention. You must give ongoing attention to your relationship with God. This requires ongoing conversation with God. Don't be surprised if and when this conversational relationship proves to be difficult. Difficult is normal, there is nothing unusual about struggling in your prayer life. Some people do not struggle to pray and they are blessed, but they are not the norm. The reality of having difficulty is not an excuse to not pray. Rather, it is an encouragement to continue to wrestle in prayer. Devoting yourself to prayer means to continue to pray even when (especially when) it is a struggle. Don't be surprised that it can be hard to pray, just remember that hard is not bad or wrong...it's just hard. Devote yourself to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 6.15.18

Week 23 "Pray Constantly" Day 5

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

1 Thess. 5:16-18 Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Col. 4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

Reflect:

Prayer is communication. The number one problem with communication is the illusion that it has occurred. In human-to-human communication the message that is intended to be sent is often not the message that is received. It could be practical reasons like one person is a poor communicator or the other is distracted. It could also be personal reasons like one has an "anger filter" in place while the other has a "distrust filter." But in prayer God has no filters. All communication breakdowns are on our side of the conversation. There are some implications here for our hearing from God, but let's focus now on our speaking to God. Since God "hears" everything with perfect clarity, including our hearts and not just our words, it seems our hearts and not our words should get most of our attention. This is why you can pray another person's prayer, like the Psalms, and they can still be "your" prayer.

When their words match what is in your heart, it becomes your prayer. It's also why Jesus warned against using "many words" to try and get God's attention. He is paying attention to our hearts, not just our lips. Of course, often the words are the authentic cries of our hearts, but not always. Sometimes the prayers of the lips don't match the condition of the heart. In this case, God is not "hearing" the words, he is only hearing the "heart." What does this mean practically for prayer? It means it is worth the time to be still and reflect on what is really in your own heart. God always knows, but we often don't. Reflect and then pour out your true heart to God. Confusion, disappointment, anger, doubt, joy, anticipation, passivity - all of these heart issues are known by God, but as we pray with "heart-honest" words we are in a heart-conversation with God. This kind of praying positions us to be changed by God. God can increase your joy if you are honest with him about your current lack of joy. Speak to him honestly from your heart, then listen to him speak honestly from his. To hear his heart will change your heart.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 6.18.18

Week 24 "How to Pray" Day 1

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

Jesus did not say this is "what" you should pray. He said this is "how" you should pray. This is not a formula to merely be repeated by using these words. It is an approach to God that involves both the head and the heart. It is possible to pray the "intent" of this prayer without using the actual "content" of the prayer. What is the intent? It is to approach God in a way that is in line with who he is. Who is he? He is our Father and he is in heaven. In Jesus' time, people did not often address God as Father, but Jesus did it frequently. Because we are familiar with addressing God as Father, we are prone to miss how profound this really is. The God who is too holy and awesome for a mere mortal to even glance at and whose power and might are beyond comprehension is our Father. This term implies relationship, love, care, and closeness. God's closeness to his children is also known as his immanence. God is not far off and he is not too great and powerful to be concerned with insignificant humans. He is close and he is engaged because he is our Father. But he is "our Father in heaven." Heaven is not some distant geographical space. It is the realm of his holy and transcendent existence. As "immanence" describes his closeness, "transcendence" describes his distance in terms of how much greater he is than we are. He is our Father and we can have relationship with him. He desires for us to draw near to him so he can draw near to us, but he is still our Father in heaven. We must not take him lightly or for granted. He is God. His "rank," so to speak, is God. His relationship to us is Father. That we can call him "Father" is our great privilege. That he remains our God is his great right.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 6.19.18

Week 24 "How to Pray" Day 2

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

It is no small thing that Jesus said we are to pray "our Father" rather than "my Father." Of course we are to pray in private, but this passage that has been called the "model" prayer is given to us as a public or community prayer. It has been recommended that we "pray long in private and short in public." This prayer is short and it is public. Praying with others need not be formal, or long, or uncomfortable. It does not need to be tied to meals or special occasions. When you are with a friend or a family member enjoying time or enduring a difficult time, pray together. When you are having trouble connecting with a friend or family member, or having trouble working through a difficult problem, pray together. Peace with God through the gospel brings peace with others in relationships. Our salvation is personal and our relationship with God is personal, but our salvation and relationship with God is revealed interpersonally. Surely, he is "my Father" and "your Father," but the Lord Jesus said to pray like this, "Our Father." He didn't use very many words to tell us how to pray. Therefore, we should pay careful attention to those words he did use. Private prayer is assumed, most do it. Praying regularly with others is not as frequent for most people. It is very likely that as you pray "Our Father" with others you will grow in your depth of understanding and appreciation for the fact that he is "My Father."

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 6.20.18

Week 24 "How to Pray" Day 3

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

You are moving right now. The earth is spinning 1,000 miles per hour on its axis. It is traveling 67,000 miles per hour around the sun. In spite of this incredible speed of movement, you have no perception of any of it. What is true doesn't always feel true. God is the one true King. He is the eternal, all-powerful, and all-wise creator. This remains true whether you feel it is true or not. Whether it's when you read or hear the news or as you drive to work or school. Or even as you live "inside your head" and contemplate your own struggles and fears, you may or may not perceive of God as King, but he still is. The fact that he is the one true King should have bearing on how you perceive the world around you and the world inside of your mind. But you must "practice" perceiving what is real. Close your eyes for a moment and think of yourself as sitting on a planet that is spinning and speeding around the sun. Use your imagination to "feel" this movement. Can you do it? You can, if you practice. When you use your imagination like this, you are not trying to make yourself believe something that is not real. Instead, you are connecting your mind with something that is real. It takes what we often call imagination to make this connection because the reality of the earth's movement is not immediately available to our senses. In a similar way, when you stop and contemplate the reality of God, you are using your imagination to consider a reality that is not normally immediately available to your physical senses. Close your eyes and contemplate God, the mighty King, living before he created time and space. Alive and powerful now, the transcendent God is greater than all of the time and space he has made. Practice this so that your mind will more consistently "see" what is real but not immediately available to your eyes. Practice his presence so you will more consistently experience his presence in your life. This is not about "pretending" that something is true. It is about more consistently "remembering" what is true.

"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy." 1 Peter 1:8

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 6.21.18

Week 24 "How to Pray" Day 4

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

"Hallowed" be your name, means "holy be your name." Jesus is not, of course, praying that God would become holy, but rather that he would be treated with the respect and reverence that is due him. This is more than not using God's name as profanity; it is to live in such a way that demonstrates a belief in his utter holiness. His "name" is who and what he is. It is God as he has revealed himself to men and women. Holiness is less an attribute of God than it is a description of him. It means "separateness." He is set apart from all other beings in a way that is utterly unique. Christians have been declared to be holy by God, but this is a description of how God relates to us in light of the gospel. Christians can also choose to act in ways that are holy. But God IS holy; he is utterly set apart from all of created reality. To "hallow his name" means that we approach him as he truly is. He is the uncreated creator. We are not to approach him casually or flippantly, but with reverence and awe. Yet, it is "our Father" whose name is to be hallowed. How do we deal with this seeming contradiction? Can we approach him confidently, joyfully, even playfully? Of course, we can. After all, what do fathers enjoy more than the knowledge that their children enjoy them? But what about his holiness, how do we deal with this fact as well? There are many answers to that question, but one answer is that we rejoice in the fact that our Father is the holy God. For the child who has a heart to obey, having a "Holy Father" is a source of supreme comfort. For the child whose heart has turned away, having a "Holy Father" is a source of supreme discomfort. There is no conflict between "Holy" and "Father" when our hearts are set in his direction. It is the fact that he is holy that makes him such a good Father.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to

proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 6.22.18

Week 24 "How to Pray" Day 5

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

Solomon wrote that "God has set eternity in our hearts" (Eccl. 3:11). In general, people think more often about God than any other thing. Even those who do not really love him, think about him. But these thoughts can be quite different, depending on the kind of relationship they have to him. For some, God is a sort of elderly figure, looking down on them in a sort of detached way. He is sometimes amused, sometimes annoyed, but he is largely impotent. He is their "grandfather in heaven." Others think of God as their "policeman in heaven." He lurks on the side of life's highways, ready to bring judgment if any laws are broken. Fortunately for them, they do not believe he is always attentive to them, sometimes he is too busy pulling someone else over to notice what they are doing. Still others believe God is "my buddy" in heaven. He is understanding, reasonable, and able to be negotiated with. In fact, he exists entirely for their perceived good. He is a sort of wealthy benefactor who doesn't judge and has no real standards other than "a good time is had by all." There are, of course, many other perceptions of God that people hold in their minds and often those perceptions shift from one view to another. This is a terrible thing. It is commonly believed that, in regard to matters of faith, it doesn't really matter what you believe only that you do believe. We certainly don't think this about how airplanes operate, or what foods humans should consume, or virtually any other aspect of reality. Because we know that in the "real world" it is of vital importance that we believe and act in line with is actually true. The same is true in regard to who God is, but with even more importance. It is even more important because getting it right regarding who God is impacts both time and eternity. Jesus said he is our "Holy Father." We must hold his revealed nature consistently in our minds. Who he actually is must overthrow any false ideas of him in our minds. We must believe, value, and live in line with the reality that he is "Our Father" and his name is to be "hallowed."

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 6.25.18

Week 25 Day 1

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

Jesus inaugurated the Kingdom in his first advent. He will consummate the Kingdom in his second advent. Right now, we live "between" the times of the first and second advents. The Kingdom is "already, but not yet." It is "already" in that Christ reigns in the hearts of his people, and he is transforming them from the inside out. It is "not yet" in that his reign is not yet fully visible and experienced in its power. Therefore, in this in-between time, we pray for his kingdom to come and his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. The Kingdom of God is the place where what God wants done, is done. Because God has given human beings choice, we can choose to not do his will (and very often this is what we choose). This prayer for his kingdom to come has many implications, but one that is very important is that as his people, we must come to fully and joyfully yield to his will in our lives. If you are a follower of Christ, his kingdom has come in your life. But you still live in a personal "already, not yet." You are his and you want what he wants and, yet, you often find yourself wanting what is in opposition to what he wants. This prayer for his will to be done is not a generic prayer of global impact, but it is a personal prayer of immediate impact. Today, make it your prayer and your intention that his kingdom and his reign be fully manifested in your life. Today, move through your day as a joyful, loyal subject of a kingdom, a kingdom with a good and wise king. Believe this to be true so that you will value his will for your life. As you value his will, as his will actually seems like the highest good you could do, you will be positioned to do his will. Believe that you are a subject in a kingdom. *Value* the king's will for your life. *Do* what the king wants done. *Experience* the beauty of life in the kingdom of God today. You can close the gap in your life today. Choose your trajectory by pointing your heart and mind in his direction.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Closing the Gap Devotional Summer Season

A Focus on a Conversational Relationship with God

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 6.26.18

Week 25 Day 2

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

The kingdom of God is not political, but it changes the hearts of politicians. It is not a military, but it changes the minds of generals. It is not a public policy organization, but it changes the morals of all who enter it. We enter the kingdom by faith in the gospel of Jesus. When we enter the kingdom, we find that, in fact, the kingdom has entered into us. It grows inside us like a tiny bit of yeast in a lump of dough, taking over more and more "inner" ground in our hearts until it permeates us thoroughly and, in ever-increasing ways, directs the course of our lives. In the gospel of Mark, a religious teacher asked Jesus to tell him which was the most important commandment.

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:29-31)

The teacher then replied to Jesus, "Well said... these things are more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices." Jesus, THE teacher, then replied "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34). We do not know if that religious teacher ever did enter the kingdom, but he was standing on the border looking in when he acknowledged that the kingdom of God is not merely external and ceremonial. This kingdom is love that begins internally and reveals itself externally in our relationships. When we pray for his Kingdom to come, we are praying that our lives would be more and more dominated by love for God and love for others. Do not despair if you believe you are not growing in these areas. Pray, from your heart, right now: "Your kingdom come!" Then go into your day, taking what he brings into your life as his answer to that prayer. You can move through your day trusting God to manage things for your good. When his kingdom comes, he is in charge not you. You can live with gratitude and not grumbling because the king is in charge, and all that you face today is the reality of his kingdom coming more fully into your life.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 6.27.18

Week 25 Day 3

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

In his agonized prayer in the garden, Jesus poured out his heart to God the Father. He confessed that all things are possible for his Father (Mark 14:36) and he also asked that if possible this "cup" be taken from him (Matt. 26:39). The cup is the wrath of God that was to be poured out on Jesus for us. There is no contradiction in these passages. As Jesus prayed on that dark night and his disciples heard and remembered his prayers, they heard him say both things. In a sense, all things are possible for God because he can do anything that can be done. He can create the universe from nothing. He can raise Jesus from the dead. But he cannot lie. He cannot die. He cannot choose to not be God. God cannot make a square circle because that is not a real thing that can be done it is a contradiction. Jesus asked, "Father, you can do all things, is there another way this can be done?" Then Jesus immediately confessed, "But let me be clear, if there is no other way to do what must be done, then what I most want is what you want." The fact is that God could not redeem humanity apart from the death of Christ and his bearing our wrath in his body. His love could not allow us to remain in our sins without a means of salvation. His justice could not allow us to escape his wrath without a means of justice. All things that can be done are possible for God, but God could not save us apart from the death of the Savior. Jesus did not want to bear the cup of God's wrath and Jesus wanted to bear the cup of God's wrath. He wanted another way, but what he most wanted was his Father's way. What about you? Are there things in your life now in which you do not want to submit to God? Do you fear the future and find yourself hesitant to fully give your life and hopes to Jesus? It is okay to pray, "God your will be done, but if there is another way than this one, I'll take it." Jesus prayed in that way and we can as well. But in the end, when the answer is, "No, there is no other way except this one," what will you do? Will you pray: "Your will be done, your kingdom come...in my heart and life as it is in heaven"? Will you pray that now and ask God to help you live it in all that comes your way this day?

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 6.28.18

Week 25 Day 4

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

Paul wrote, "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4). The "god" of this age is Satan. "This age" refers to this period of time prior to the return of Christ. This age has made Satan its god, so all across the globe in nations, cities, homes, and hearts, "his" kingdom has come. It doesn't often come in terms of overt Satan worship, but mostly in the more subtle worship of self. Satan comes in disguise; he doesn't normally show his true evil form. What he offers is satisfaction, fulfillment, and the opportunity to live life on our own terms and get what we want. When we live to please self as opposed to God, we fall right into Satan's hands. We are operating in his kingdom. Life in the enemy's kingdom feels initially like liberty. We may believe we are free from the bonds of that seemingly eternal tyrant, God. We are the masters of our own lives and we set our own course. We get to decide what is right, real, and good. Then, when the god of this age has set his trap, he demands his due. We have not been living freely; we have been living as his puppets. God brings liberty, while the enemy only brings misery. God offers freedom through submission to his will and ways. Satan offers freedom from submission to God. God's offer brings increasing joy, peace, and love - all the blessings of his great kingdom. Satan's offer brings ever-decreasing life satisfaction and a final loss of real liberty. In the enemy's kingdom, we increasingly experience the loss of the desire and the ability to do what we ought to do, because we are trapped in the gravitational pull of doing only what we want. Now, do you see? Cry out to God right now, "YOUR kingdom come, YOUR will be done!" Never mine, never mine...always yours!

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to

proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 6.29.18

Week 25 Day 5

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

"Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age' " (Matt. 28:18-20). Authority is power, dominion, and jurisdiction. It is a word used to describe a king and his kingdom. Kings have some power; they have limited jurisdiction over specific geographical regions. But Jesus has all power and unlimited jurisdiction over all of heaven and earth. His kingdom comes now as he reigns in the hearts of men and women. "Therefore," Jesus said, "Go and make citizens of my kingdom." He tells us, "Immerse them in the name of the Triune God and teach them the opportunity and necessity of obedience to me as their king." Then he finished this royal commission of sending us, his people, as emissaries of his kingdom with a powerful and encouraging reminder: "I am always with you, even until I return again." Pray for his kingdom to come, his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. His kingdom comes as people submit to Jesus as king. His will is done as his people go into the world and make him known. He has not given some edict from a throne and then sent us off to succeed or fail. He is a king who has sent us and has also promised to go with us. He has sent us as his ambassadors, not as someone who will go and "sell" what we have to others who do not have. He has sent us to go and "tell" what a great king he is. We are to tell of the opportunity of the good news. "Selling" is often about pressure. "Telling" is about confidence; it is simply letting people know what you know to be true. Pray for his kingdom to come. As you go into the world today see to it that his will is done in your life. As you have opportunity, tell of the king and his kingdom.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask

Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 7.2.18

Week 26 Day 1

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

In the New Testament, the word translated "bread" is often used to indicate a meal or food. A prayer for "daily" food is a prayer for what we need today; it is a practical request, but it is also a request that provides perspective. It is a constant reminder of our need and his provision. This is especially true for those who live in countries where the daily eating of food is commonplace rather than a rare occurrence. The food chain in a modern society is quite complex. It begins with those who sow and harvest the food at the "ground" level to those who transport it, process and package it, then sell it at local groceries or restaurants. Where is God in all of this? How is he "providing" daily food? In the wilderness God provided "bread from heaven." The Israelites called it "manna" (a word that literally means "what is it?"). For the wandering Israelites, it was quite obvious that God was the entire food chain. It was clear that God was providing the daily bread. In fact, except for the day before the Sabbath, they were forbidden from collecting any more manna than they needed for today. If they tried to collect more than their daily bread, the manna would be rotten and inedible the next day. God wanted them to trust him each day for today. But apart from that specific group of people during a specific time in history now called the "Exodus," God's role in the food chain is not nearly as obvious. In fact, many (and probably most) people would not dream of giving thanks for a meal because God was not responsible for their food, they were. They earned the money to purchase it. Some farmer grew it and a trucker transported it. God is not providing daily food, they are. Jesus said pray like this, "Give us today, our daily bread." Why? Because it is true that he is providing our daily food. More importantly, it is true that we are prone to miss this fact. Even those who believe God is not providing anything for them are, in fact, enjoying his provision. However, they are not enjoying God, the provider. As you go to your grocery store, restaurant, or kitchen to obtain a meal today, ask God to provide your daily needs. Do this because the assumption that the human food chain cannot fail is a false assumption; it can fail. Do this because even if the human agents active in providing your meal do not fail, it is God who is providing all that is needed along the way. Sun, rain, crops, human wisdom and strength are all gifts from God. Ask for his daily provision today and give thanks for it today. Position yourself not merely to enjoy God's provision but also to enjoy God the provider.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 7.3.18

Week 26 Day 2

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

How do you ask God to provide food when it is in your kitchen right now? All you need to do is get up and go eat it. Does this prayer not apply to you? Has it already been answered and you can pray for something else instead? No, if this prayer has been answered for you, then pray not for something else, but rather pray right now for someone else. Remember this is an "us" prayer, not merely a "me" prayer. "Oh God, give us our daily bread!" Do your brothers and sisters around the world have food today? Are there not many who are hungry and crying out to God for food? Not just for food, but for peace, safety, and relief from war. Some have it and some do not. This is not just a prayer for self, this is a prayer for others as well. Why do some people lack daily bread? Often it is because of the sins of those in positions of power in their countries. Of course, there are droughts and famines, but lasting misery among large groups of people are not traced to "natural" disasters, but to sinful and corrupt leadership whose wickedness and ineptitude prolong and multiply the suffering. So, pray not just for bread, but also for leaders in places where people are suffering. "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone — for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:1-4). As you pray for others who are desperate for daily bread, do not feel guilty that you have access to food. Guilt is something to be confessed and left behind. Do not live in guilt. It robs you of productive, forward movement towards God and others. Let the needs of others produce gratitude in you. Be grateful for daily bread and do not take it for granted. Let the needs of others produce a sense of stewardship in you. If you have been given more than others, then along with that increased privilege comes increased responsibility. Pray, be grateful, and then ask yourself, "What else does God want from me today?" Not to earn his grace, but to express it to others. "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (Luke 12:48).

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 7.4.18

Week 26 Day 3

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

Many 1st century workers were paid one day at a time. This meant that a few days of illness or an injury could have tragic consequences. This prayer for daily bread reflects this kind of short-term lifestyle. Long-term planning is wise, but we do not have ultimate control over our future. It's not wrong to save money or put away food for a time of disaster or need. It is wrong to rely on our own planning and saving. Listen to what Jesus said in this regard:

"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'" "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:15-21)

Can you see how a daily prayer for daily bread can be a protective barrier against the folly of pursuing personal security over the pursuit of a rich faith in God? How many have lived exactly as that parable describes? They have lived with no sense of need, no prayers for daily bread, no need for God in their present or their future. Then, suddenly, all their planning has come to nothing. Oh God, give us today our daily bread and give us today the wisdom to understand our daily need for you. Today, tomorrow, and forever make us rich in faith towards you.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 7.5.18

Week 26 Day 4

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

Praying for daily bread does not substitute for work. Of course, there are those who are unable to work in order to provide for their own needs and to help with the needs of others. But for most people, faithfulness to God means they will take responsibility for themselves. "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody" (1 Thess. 4:11-12). The phrase "work with your hands" does not apply only to those who engage in physical labor. It applies to everyone, no matter what is actually done for a "living." The phrase "for a living" is interesting. What most people do vocationally takes up a good bit of their lives. These jobs take most of our waking hours for most of our adult lives. It is also true that these jobs "pay" for our living, including housing, food, transportation, entertainment, etc., all of the things of our lives. So, we do work "for a living." It is not tragic that people spend much of their lives working a job. Work is a gift. We are designed to be productive and creative. It is a gift to enjoy your work, but it is also a gift just to have good work to do whether you enjoy it or not. What is tragic is when people trade their lives "away" for a job without recognizing what the purpose of their lives actually is. Our lives are to be spent for his glory and one way we bring him glory is by working. Some, maybe most, labor in vain because they do not do what they do for the glory of God and the good of others. "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3:17). Consequently, prayer for daily bread does not substitute for daily work, it compliments it. As you do what you do "for a living," remember why it is that you live. You live for his glory and for the good of others. Praying for your daily bread should include praying for your work, your health, your boss, and your co-workers, all those things that are a part of "earning" your daily bread. There is a sense in which you do "earn" a living, there is a higher sense in which nothing you have is earned; it is all received. "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7).

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 7.6.18

Week 26 Day 5

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

There are two mistakes we can make in regard to how we think and pray about our daily, or more mundane, needs. First, we can determine that God is much too busy to be concerned with trivial things. I must only ask for things that are of great importance. The second mistake is to pay so much attention to our daily needs that we forget there are bigger things going on in the world. How do we hold these things in balance? That word "balance" is the key. God is not "busy" in the normal sense of the word. His omnipotence (all-powerful) and his omniscience (all-knowing) mean that nothing he does is taxing or distracting for him. He doesn't grow tired or overwhelmed. All that he does, he does without effort. All there is to know, he knows immediately and completely. This means there is no detail that is big or small in terms of scope for God. All details are equally small or big, depending on how you want to think about it. You have an all-powerful, all-knowing Father in heaven. Your daily bread is a concern to him, as are the multitude of other things that happen in your life day-to-day. It is no compliment to God your Father to think, "I'll not bother him with insignificant things." Don't good fathers value what is important to their children? A very small child might be concerned with something that is trivial, but the good father will not make light of what is important to the child. On the other hand, we must grow up in our faith. We must not approach life like a perpetual child where the earth revolves our own needs. We must see there are many people with many needs all around us. We must see that God has multi-generational purposes of which I am one part. We must work to have perspective as we pray for our daily needs, but not our daily "greeds." So, balance is the path forward. Pray as a child to a good father. Whatever is on your heart you can take to God, no matter how small. But seek to grow up in your faith as well. As you pray for your needs and wants, move to the place where you consider the needs of others more consistently. Pray for "our" daily bread. Have a heart for what God is doing in your life as well as the lives of people all around you and all around the world.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 7.9.18

Week 27 Day 1

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." In the passage which immediately follows the Lord's model prayer, we see this idea repeated. "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matt. 6:14-15). Does this mean that we must earn our own forgiveness by forgiving others? No, it doesn't. Clearly the Gospel indicates that we cannot earn forgiveness, we can only receive it. In that case, then what are we to do with these passages? You see in Jesus' prayer both an assumption and a confidence. The assumption is that we will forgive those who sin against us. The confidence is that God will likewise forgive us. This is not about earning forgiveness; it is about the fruit of having been forgiven. Jesus ministered to a woman who was said to have "lived a sinful life." Of course everyone sins, so the implication is that she "sinned for a living." This broken woman came to Jesus in repentance, weeping so profusely that her tears splashed on his feet as she washed and anointed them with perfume. The people around Jesus failed to understand what they were seeing. They believed Jesus didn't know "what kind of woman this was." They assumed if Jesus knew how much of a sinner she was, then he would send her away. Jesus knew who she was and he also knew what was in the hearts of those who condemned her. He told the story of two men who both had debts that were forgiven. One debt was much larger than the other. He asked, "Which one would love more?" The answer was obvious, the one who had been forgiven more. Jesus then said to those with hard hearts, "Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven — for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little" (Luke 7:47). How does this story speak to this verse in the Lord's Prayer? It shows us the heart behind the simple phrase, "Forgive our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors." There is the assumption that those who have been forgiven much will have hearts to forgive. There is the confidence that those who have hearts to forgive have been and will continue to be forgiven. Close the gap on gratitude for having been forgiven much. Close the gap on readiness to continually forgive those who sin against you.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 7.10.18

Week 27 Day 2

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

Often we pray for things not knowing for sure if they are God's will and our will or only our will. If they are only our will, then we must learn to pray, "Not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Because, in the end, we "want to want" what God wants. But here in the model prayer, we have clear guidance on what God wills for us. We can ask God to "forgive our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" and we know that it is done. His answer to this request will always be, "Yes." "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us — whatever we ask — we know that we have what we asked of him" (1 John 5:14-15). Can we be sure that it is his will to forgive our sins if we ask? Look at what John wrote earlier in his letter: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). So yes, we can pray with confidence to be forgiven, knowing that when we do we are praying in line with God's will. That being said, it is important to remember the whole context of this prayer. The prayer is, "forgive us as we have forgiven others." Again, this is not about earning forgiveness it is about living as one who has been forgiven. The one condition for forgiveness is repentance. Repentance literally means a "change of mind," but a real change of mind leads to a change of heart and life direction. The reason repentance is a condition of forgiveness is because without it we do not really want what forgiveness brings to us. Forgiveness from God brings restored relationship with God. Sin is doing things our own way; it is living in opposition to the will and ways of God. Think about it, how could we be forgiven (have restored relationship with God) if we do not repent (desire relationship with God)? You can ask God to forgive your sins and you can be sure he will do so. But this is not merely a "get out of jail free" card where we desire to be disconnected from our actions and attitudes so that we will not be held to account for them. This is a prayer for relationship. Our sins break fellowship with God, while our confession leads to restoration with God. Ultimately we must be learning to confess because we love God, not merely because we fear punishment. If we are secure in our faith, we know that we have escaped condemnation. Since we have received this great gift of salvation, our hearts long for intimacy with God. Our sins are a wedge between God and us. We know that God wants that wedge removed because he wants relationship with us, and all that remains is for us to want what he wants and to ask,

"Forgive us our debts." When you ask, he will answer you: "Done!"

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 7.11.18

Week 27 Day 3

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

Forgiveness is a prerequisite for worship. Jesus said, "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift" (Matt. 5:23-24). In this passage, Jesus is instructing us on the place which having right relationships with one another has in our relationship with God. When we come to God in worship and, right there at the altar, we remember we have sinned against someone else, then we leave the offering and go seek reconciliation. Once we have done so, we are then ready to return and continue our worship. Pay careful attention to the order here: "First go and be reconciled... then come and offer your gift." Many operate under the delusion that they can treat the people around them poorly, and yet still be in a healthy relationship with God. They believe that it is possible to be "wrong" with people and "right" with God. Jesus was instructing; he was not praying for himself. Jesus had no debts with either his Father or other people. He lived in perfect, sinless liberty. So, pay careful attention to the instruction which Jesus gives for your life: "Pray and live like this...forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors." It is assumed that those who move toward God looking for grace would also move toward others with grace as well. As you offer God your time, your prayers, and your attention right now, stop and ask. Ask God to bring to your mind if there is someone from whom you need to seek forgiveness. If there is not, then continue with your "devotional offering." If there is someone, however, then finish your time with God right now with a prayer of commitment and a request for strength. Commit to go, as soon as you are able, to make things right with the person(s) with whom there is a relationship breach. Then, ask God for the strength to follow through with grace. If the breach in relationship is on "their end", that is if they have sinned against you, then will you forgive them right now? You do not always have to seek restoration of relationship; it is sometimes not possible or wise. You do need to forgive them from your heart, however. It is always possible and it is always wise. Forgiving and seeking forgiveness from one another is essential for true worship.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 7.12.18

Week 27 Day 4

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

There may be someone in your life that has done great harm to you. Perhaps this person remains a danger and should be avoided. These situations are not uncommon and often require very specific guidance and responses in order to handle them in healthy ways. However, the vast majority of the "debtors" we are to forgive are of the "garden variety." They are people who are rude, or unkind, or uncaring, or at least we perceive them to be so. They are people who seem to put their own interests first and who hurt with words, actions, and attitudes in ways that make us feel diminished, or stupid, or without real value. These people are the sorts of debtors we are most often called to forgive. But how? Especially when they continue to stack up debts against us. How can we continually forgive them? What did Jesus say? "Forgive us, as we forgive them." How often do you want Jesus to forgive you of your debts against him? How fully do you want him to forgive you? If we could see the enormity of our offense against God, then we would see how often we exaggerate the offenses of others against us. Do not begin with their sin, begin with your own. Do not begin with how much you will need to forgive them of, instead begin with how much you have been forgiven for. When we learn to move towards others with grace like this, we will begin to see things we did not see before. Maybe we will see how much our own selfishness has colored our perspective of others. Perhaps they did not intend to hurt you. Perhaps we were more at fault than we first believed. When we move toward others in grace with the desire for restored fellowship, we will learn to emphasize what is good between us and others rather than simply focusing on what is not. How do you really want to live? Are you feeling justified in your judgment? Do you believe you are not to blame for the breach in relationship so you will not make the first move? Again, how do you want to live? Do you want joy, peace, and relationship or do you mostly want to feel justified for your judgment on others? Choose his life, choose his truth, and choose his way. Choose to approach others as you would have them approach you and as Jesus does approach you.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 7.13.18

Week 27 Day 5

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

The good news of the gospel is that God forgives us more quickly and more completely than we forgive others. Of course we are to forgive as we have been forgiven, but the fact remains that we are just not as good at forgiving as God is. As much as we might intend to not hold people in their past, we cannot help "seeing" past choices in the present as we deal with others. We cannot help but to "remember" the sins of others. God on the other hand, though his memory is perfect and immediate, is able to "not remember" our sins. "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more" (Isa. 43:25). Of course this doesn't mean God forgets, it is a figure of speech that indicates God is able to see the "present us" untainted by the "past us" because he sees us through the window of Jesus' death for us. "He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Ps. 103:10-12). Do you believe God truly sees you right now, if you have received his Son, as forgiven? Think carefully about this question. Your sins are forgiven and your sins are forgotten. As you look at the "real you", you see failure. As he looks at the real you, he sees forgiven. This is not an easy thing to grasp, so it is important that you take the time to grapple with it. Finish your time right now by reflecting carefully on this verse: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Glance at your sins...then confess them. Gaze at your savior...and consider him. This kind of spiritual and mental exercise of the truth will be a powerful factor in changing you into a person who more and more remembers less and less the sins of others towards you.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask

Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 7.16.18

Week 28 Day 1

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

"When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed" (James 1:13-14). How does what James wrote jibe with what Jesus said? Is there a contradiction? No, because God does not tempt people to disobey him. When Jesus said we should pray to not be led into temptation, the word can have the connotation of "testing." But then there is another problem because James also wrote, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds" (James 1:2). In that case, why would we pray to escape trials if we are to consider them pure joy? The solution, once again, is in finding a biblical balance. Jesus, when in severe soul agony in the garden, prayed that God would deliver him from the trial of the cross, but then immediately afterwards he prayed that God's will would be done. Therefore, in order to "pray the biblical balance," we are to ask God to keep trial and testing from us and we are also to pray for his will to be done in our lives. Pray for deliverance from trial, but if he still takes you there, trust his good purposes and pray for endurance and JOY in the face of testing. Rejoice and be grateful when God takes you "around" trials and also trust God and find his joy when he chooses to take you "through" them. The Bible does not contradict itself and neither, of course, does God. However, the Bible is not a "simple" book. How could it be? It is the book of God and though he is not intentionally vague or hard to understand, it would be an understatement to say he is complex. As you wrestle with what sometimes appear to be competing truths, be sure you understand that they are, in fact, complementary truths. To pray for escape from temptation and to also pray for safe passage through temptation are not prayers that contradict each other; they are prayers that together comprise a single principle. The principle is this, "Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done in my life as it is in heaven...whether you take trials from me, or take me through them. Amen."

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 7.17.18

Week 28 Day 2

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Cor. 10:13). Not everyone has the exact same temptations, but everyone is tempted in the same ways. Everyone is tempted to put self first, to trust self over God, to live for pleasure and not for God, and to make idols and cherish them. Our temptations are common and they cross all cultural boundaries. In sin, there truly is racial solidarity. This is an unhappy truth about human nature, but it does help to understand this fact for several reasons. First, it might help you to not feel sorry for yourself. Being sorry for sin is a healthy habit/choice, but feeling sorry for yourself is an unhealthy one. To believe that your struggles are harder than anyone else's does not prepare you to withstand temptation; in reality, it prepares you to give in to them. A second reason it helps to understand the commonality of our temptations is that we can be "encouraged" by the struggles of others. Not that it is good to gloat over the troubles of others, but we can be helped in our own battles by realizing that other people are just like us. We are not alone and, in fact, others are successfully doing battle in the very same kinds of struggles we experience, so we can do the same. There is some value in understanding that others are tempted like we are, but there is power in understanding the second part of that verse: "God is faithful"! He will not allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to withstand it and he will provide a way out for us. You may very well feel like this verse has not proven true in experience; however, our experience of "what is" is not the same as "what could be." If you moved through the battlefield of temptations armed with the confidence that God is going to provide a way out – which he will and you can - how would that change how you live? Think about it. If you believe there are temptations out there that are simply too strong to resist, how likely are you to give your full energy to not giving in? But if you believe God is faithful and there is a way out and what is required of you is that you actually take it, what then? If you believe you are able to resist, you are much more likely to actually do so. But think clearly about this "way out." It may not be an escalator; it may be a difficult climb up a rock wall, but it is a way out, nonetheless. God is faithful and what remains is for us to be faithful as well.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 7.18.18

Week 28 Day 3

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin" (Heb. 4:15). When Jesus, our high priest, was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, he countered the temptations with truth. Temptations are lies. How do they lie? They offer what they cannot deliver. They offer freedom to do as you please and then to have liberty from unhappiness or discontentment. Instead, they deliver bondage and loss of liberty. They offer fulfillment and opportunity to truly be satisfied. Then they deliver disappointment and lasting dissatisfaction. Jesus countered the enemy's lies with truth. Truth exposes the false advertisement of the temptation to sin. In culture at large, resisting temptation is seen as a form of suppression of what is natural. In a way, this is true since sin has become "natural." But many things that are natural must be suppressed, if we are to live as free people. It is "natural" to strike back when people hurt you. It is "natural" to put yourself first at all costs. It is "natural" to let physical pleasure drive the course of our lives. All these natural things, if allowed to run their course, will lead us into pure bondage and far from true liberty. The truth of God is a spotlight on the dark deceit of temptations. Jesus knew this and deployed God's truth expertly. Contrast Jesus' approach to that of our first parents, Adam and Eve. When Satan cast doubt in Eve's mind by asking, "Did God really say?" her response was confused. She added to what God had said rather than simply repeating what he had said and confidently exposing Satan's lie. Satan then took the gap left open by her confusion and directly contradicted God's word. "'You will not surely die,' the serpent said to the woman" (Gen. 3:4). She believed the serpent rather than God and the rest is "history." But it is not just history, it is contemporary reality. All over the world today people will believe the lie and trade liberty for bondage. Will you see the lie, believe the truth, and live in the liberty of God? You should pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" with a heart and a mind ready to believe truth and to see temptation as the lie that it is. Temptations on the surface look appealing, but they never deliver on what they promise. Pray now for the day ahead: "Lead us in to truth and deliver us to the Holy One."

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 7.19.18

Week 28 Day 4

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one" (John 17:15). Jesus prayed for us that we would be protected from the "evil one," who is Satan. Satan is a word that means "adversary." He opposes us because he opposes God. Why hasn't God just "ended him?" For that matter, why hasn't he just "ended sin" as well? God is in the process of ending both Satan and sin. That is why the time we live in is called the "last days." We are living in the middle of the end. It might help if you consider that all time is "now" for God and that his "lifespan" is eternal. He is working his purposes out on his eternal time scale while we live out our lives in a cosmic microsecond. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus marked the beginning of the end. Satan's back has been broken and he is an adversary with an expiration date. Yet even so, Satan remains fierce and dangerous. Sin, likewise, has lost the war but continues to win many battles in our lives. So, we attempt to live for God's glory, but remember that we do so in a world that remains in opposition to him. We must endeavor to demonstrate that the final victory is sure by living lives of daily victory. Our deliverance, in the end, is final and complete. Our deliverance in the meantime is trust-by-trust and choice-by-choice. You must not become complacent. Many have died from battle wounds even after the war has been declared over. Your enemy is defeated and yet he can still do you great harm. Pray today and pray every day, "deliver us from evil." Then go into your day with confidence and with caution. Close the gap on your faith and on your humility. You do not have what it takes to stand up to Satan, but Jesus does. Lean into God today and pray throughout the day, "Deliver me from the evil one and deliver me to your liberty."

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to

proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 7.20.18

Week 28 Day 5

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:9-13 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Reflect:

Jesus taught us how to pray, not what to pray. You can repeat this very prayer, word for word, over and over and that would be a very helpful thing...if. If you are praying and not merely repeating words. There is no magic in these or any words. There is no "power in prayer" either. God is powerful and he is able to accomplish his purposes. To say prayer is powerful is like saying an extension cord is powerful. An extension cord is a means of tapping into and directing power towards a purpose. But an extension cord that is unplugged has no power. Prayer is an important way of aligning our will with God's and making requests accordingly. Prayer without a yielded relationship with God is like expecting an unplugged extension cord to power a machine; it will not. The realm of God's power for your life is the realm of God's will for your life. To live in his power for your life, you must continually return to the realm of his will for your life. "Not my will, but yours be done" is always a very good prayer. He will not empower you towards a life that is away from him, so surrender is a prerequisite in effective prayer. His power in your life is always to more fully and accurately reveal himself in your life. Many religions around the world pray mindless prayers, repeating words over and over. Sometimes prayers are put in a sort of "wheel" that is able to be spun without thinking and then you are able to pray constantly without giving any attention to those prayers. This is tragic because it turns prayer into magic. Prayer is communication with God and from God. Prayer is built on relationship. Prayer requires engagement and commitment. It is never "mindless" activity; it always requires all of who we are. There are times when we don't know what to pray, perhaps we are overcome with grief or confusion. During these times our prayers may be a sort of "groan," but even then our minds and hearts are turned fully to God. We are not distracted; we are focused because our pain or confusion has turned our full attention to God. This daily prayer for daily bread, and for his will in our lives, and for forgiveness and protection is an ongoing reminder to pay attention. Do not move through life with a distracted relationship with God. Be still, remember, pay attention, and pray with attention: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 7.23.18

Week 29 "The Lord's 'un-prayer'" Day 1

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:5-8 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

Reflect:

To get clarity on important ideas and practices, it is helpful to both know what to think and do as well as what not to think and do. Jesus taught us how to pray in the model prayer, but in the verses prior to that he also taught us how not to pray. He first warns against praying like the "hypocrites." Religious hypocrisy is a frequently misunderstood concept. When a Christian fails to live up to the faith they profess, they might be considered to be a hypocrite by some around them. Sin or failure is not hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is when a person is "playing at faith." To say, "I never sin" and then to judge those who do is hypocrisy. It is hypocrisy because all people sin and it is playing games to believe or try to imply that you are sinless. The word "hypocrite" originally meant a stage player, an actor. This is not about "perfect praying"; it is about authentic versus "pretend praying." What makes this person an "actor" is not their location, whether synagogues or street corners. It is not their posture, "standing." There are many authentic prayers in the Scriptures that were prayed in a variety of locations from various physical postures. The problem here, that turns this prayer into hypocrisy, is the posture of the heart. You see, the real issue is apparent in the phrase, "they love...to be seen by men." Stage actors love to be seen by others, and there is nothing wrong with that. They use their gifts and talents to entertain. Prayer is not entertainment; it is a conversational relationship with God. Prayer is directed at God, not to those who might be listening or praying with you. Again, this is not about perfection in prayer. Anytime you are praying in a public setting, whether with one another person or with many, it is impossible to forget others are there. It is not even wrong to pray to God in a way that speaks to those around you. Jesus did it. "Then Jesus looked up and said, 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me' " (John 11:41-42). Jesus spoke to his Father, but also to those around him. The difference is that Jesus did not pray in order to please people. You can pray a "pretend prayer" even if others are not around. If your heart is far from God, then it's possible you are praying because you just want to hear yourself pray. Don't "pretend pray," but also don't get "locked up" in looking for perfection in prayer. Just pray because you

want to have relationship with God. He's not looking to see if you get "it" right in prayer. He is looking to your heart; he wants you to want him. He certainly wants you.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 7.24.18

Week 29 "The Lord's 'un-prayer'" Day 2

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:5-8 “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

Reflect:

Jesus said that when we pray we should go into our rooms and pray in secret so that only God will hear. This must be taken in context. Clearly public prayers are important and not under the Lord's condemnation. The Psalms contain notable examples of public prayer. Jesus said that when two or three gather in his name, he is there with them. Surely this gathering would, at times, include praying together. There are many other examples of public prayer. In Acts chapter one, Luke wrote that the early church was constantly praying together. One implication of this warning from Jesus about how not to pray is that public prayer has a direct link to private prayer. If there is no unseen prayer, then the seen prayer is likely to be playing at prayer. On the other hand, if you pray with a person in public and you find yourself feeling like you are "listening in" to a conversation with a good friend or a beloved father, it is likely because that person has a meaningful private prayer life. Jesus is not teaching that we should never pray in public, but rather that our public prayer life will not outrun our private prayer life. The reason why we pray in public is the same as why we pray in private. We pray so we can take our requests, our hearts, and our desires to God as our Father. To pray in order to sound spiritual or to look impressive is ridiculous. Imagine trying to "show off" in prayer. Can you think of many things more absurd than that? Yet that is what Jesus is addressing here. He is telling us to beware of “pride prayers,” because when you pray for the applause of people, you better enjoy it because that is all you will get from it. Your reward for pride-filled praying is the illusion that others are impressed. The people who would possibly be impressed with this kind of thing are, at the same time, too busy trying to be impressive to actually be impressed with you. Can you see how this is all like actors on a stage? There is nothing of reality in it. The gospel of Luke gives the clearest example of both playing at prayer and really praying...both done in a public setting.

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The

Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:9-14)

Do not play at prayer. God is not impressed by you, but he does want to talk with you. That is an amazing thing to ponder and a terrible thing to play at.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

Closing the Gap 7.25.18

Week 29 "The Lord's 'un-prayer'" Day 3

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:5-8 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

Reflect:

Praying the same prayer over and over is not a problem. In fact, one of the most heartfelt and meaningful prayers that can be prayed is, "Help me Jesus. Help me Jesus." Repetition is not the problem in this passage, it is the "babbling." Babbling is meaningless and mindless speech. We are not to babble like the pagans, literally "Gentiles." This critique was directed at the non-Jews who believed that their gods were moved to action by the words of their followers. However, Jesus was not limiting his critique to non-Jews, he was warning the Jewish people to not fall into that same trap. In the world of man-made religions with man-made gods, prayers can be a kind of incantation. You must get the words just right, like combining different elements in a chemical compound. Then you must repeat them over and over until they "work." Do you see how this whole enterprise is void of anything that resembles a relationship? Can you imagine talking to anyone else you know in this manner and expecting anything good to come from it? It is very helpful to consider actual relationships you have with people in order to make sense out of certain Scriptures that have bearing on our relationship with God. What do you want from people you enjoy and desire relationship with? You want honesty. You want to hear their hearts and minds. You certainly don't want to feel like they are trying to manipulate you or treating you as if you are not a real person, but rather some kind of barrier they have to get through to get what they really want. The difference between "babbling" and "help me Jesus" is not in the words, but in the source of the words. Jesus said, "The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45). Prayers that are repetitive but not "babbling," flow from a heart that wants relationship with God. As you consider closing the gap on a conversational relationship with God, ask him to help you to "want to want him" more deeply and authentically in your heart of hearts.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 7.26.18

Week 29 "The Lord's 'un-prayer'" Day 4

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:5-8 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

Reflect:

Jesus said we are not to think that God responds to the quantity of our words, but rather to the quality of our words or, actually, to the quality of our hearts. His reasoning is, "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him." On the surface, this doesn't seem like an encouragement to pray at all. If he knows what I need before I ask him, then why ask him? Again, think in terms of actual relationships. If you are a parent and you know what your child needs, does this mean you will give it to her regardless of whether she asks or not? What if what you really want for your child is something deeper than merely for them to "get what they need" from you? What if you want deep relationship with them? What if you want them to see what they actually need and not just what they want? What if you want them to grow into maturity and part of that growth requires them learning to humble themselves and ask? There are many reasons why a good parent would want a child to ask for what they need, even though the parent knows. Think about it another way, how could God NOT know what you need? Is he not God? Is he not all-knowing? Of course he knows, but that does not change the fact that he wants you to pray. What this indicates is that he is not just about "getting stuff done." We often turn life into a series of tasks and days to be completed in order to get to the next one and then, when we run out of days and tasks, we die. God, I think, views our lives as journeys with him. We must learn to think that way as well. On a journey we are going somewhere, but on this journey "where" we are going is the same as "who" we are going there with. We are journeying to God, with God. This being the case, our praying is part of the journey. So, it may seem silly or inefficient to ask God for what God could easily provide since he knows already, but then again, this is seeing life as other than it actually is. It is not silly in a relationship to do things that may seem inefficient, but also very effective. Your loved one may know you love them, so why continue to tell them so? Because it is part of the relationship to do so. Your friends may know your story, but want to hear it again anyway. Why is this? Because they are your friends and they enjoy hearing about and living "in" your life with you. No, God doesn't respond to "babbling" because he already knows what you need, so he doesn't need to be convinced or coerced (as if this were even possible). But yes, God does

respond to simple, honest prayer because it is an important part of relationship with him.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 7.27.18

Week 29 "The Lord's 'un-prayer'" Day 5

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Matt. 6:5-8 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

Reflect:

There are no rules for praying, either in this warning against how not to pray or in the model prayer that comes after this passage. There are, however, important principles for prayer here. The largest principle is that of trust. Prayer is about developing a trust relationship with God. When trust is low between two individuals, it is important to get every word just right. Any word that is misspoken can be taken the wrong way, even if the intention was good. When trust is low, conversation is slow because every word must be carefully measured to ensure the other person will not take it out of context or misunderstand a single meaning. The principles Jesus gives here and in the following passage are much more about heart direction than word perfection. A relationship with God is based on trust. We are only able to come to him at all because of Jesus and the way which he has opened up for us. Now, because of this trust relationship with God, we do not have to get every word right. In fact, we can come to him when we are confused, or angry, or doubting. We can speak directly and honestly from our hearts because that is what he desires from us. Some people use only pre-written prayers to be sure they say the "right" things to God. There is nothing wrong with pre-written prayers, but there is something wrong with a perspective that drives praying such prayers mostly because of the fear of getting it "wrong." The one thing that we must be concerned with not getting wrong is our hearts. A single word prayer such as "help" or "thanks" or "why" that comes from a heart set in God's direction is more profound than a long and eloquent prayer that comes from a disinterested heart. As you consider how to close the gap on a conversational relationship with God, do not be concerned with methods and patterns of prayer. Give great attention to a surrendered and honest heart. "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory" (Matt. 12:20). When we see our great need for God and talk to him out of that need, we don't have to get all the words just right because our hearts will be right. When we come to him as the "bruised reeds" that we are, we experience his compassion. Jesus said, "Your Father knows what you need before you ask." What exactly does he know that we need? First and foremost, we need him. He knows that and it remains for us to more fully know that as well.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 7.30.18

Week 30 Day 1

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

1 Kings 19:2-14 So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them." Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

Reflect:

Elijah was a man called by God to speak truth about the spiritual corruption in his culture. This corruption started at the highest levels of government and trickled down to the false prophets and the people who listened to them. Elijah had been trained by God in faith and prayer through a program that included a great deal of time alone as well as increasingly challenging opportunities to trust God. His faith journey culminated in a dramatic encounter with a large group of false prophets where the true God showed himself powerful and the false gods of the culture were defeated. Immediately following this dramatic experience, Elijah found himself on the run from the wrath of the queen whose prophets had been destroyed by God. Now the prophet of God, fresh from an amazing display of the power of God, is hiding

from a murderous queen. His prayer at this point is "take my life." This prayer is surprising and, yet, it is not. It is surprising in that this man had seen so much of the power of God. He had seen God provide food for him and others in miraculous ways. He had seen a dead boy raised to life. He had seen God destroy wicked and deceitful prophets. Now, his prayer is "kill me." It ought to surprise us that Elijah had seen so much of God and, yet, still fell short in trusting God. It ought to surprise us when we are like Elijah. It seems the human race's common prayer is, "Yes, but what have you done for me today?" We need to grow up in our faith. When the things of today are discouraging, we must remember to remember what God has already done. Now, on the other hand, this prayer is not surprising. We are human and we also live in physical bodies. Not enough food, not enough sleep, or too much stress or pain can "undo" us. James wrote, "Elijah was a man just like us" (James 5:17). Take comfort in the fact that even this great man of faith was prone to the same kinds of discouragement that we are. We will always be closing the gap on where we are and where we could be in our faith. But don't take too much comfort in his weakness; instead, be challenged by it as well. Just because it is often true that our faith in God's faithfulness falls short, it doesn't mean it has to. You have reason to trust God today, even if today is full of discouragement and challenge. Will you?

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

Closing the Gap 7.31.18

Week 30 Day 2

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

1 Kings 19:2-14 So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them." Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

Reflect:

Elijah prayed an honest prayer, but it was a foolish prayer, "Take my life." The Bible records what did happen, but not always what should have happened. In his model, Jesus "prescribed" how to pray. Elijah's prayer here is "described," but it is not a model for how we should pray. Of course, gut-level honesty is essential to praying. But that honesty is best coupled with biblical-intelligence. This was an honest, but not intelligent, prayer in regard to how Elijah should have seen his situation. At any rate, God did not despise him in his desperation. He was kind to him, providing for his needs. Notice that the answer to his prayer "take my life" was not, "Elijah, you know better than that!" It was not a theological treatise on suicide, or even a word of encouragement that all will be well. Instead, God let Elijah sleep. Then when

he awoke, the angel of the Lord (angel comes from a word that means "messenger") delivered this message, "get up and eat." Then after eating Elijah fell asleep again. The messenger of God then delivered the second message, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." It was only after resting, eating, and drinking that Elijah finished his journey and went to the place where God was going to speak directly to his questions. What do we learn about prayer from this narrative? We should always speak from our hearts, but we must realize that what is in our hearts is not always what is real or true. We are spiritual/physical hybrids. When the physical "us" is worn down, no amount of "willing spirit" will be able to make up for that fact. God made Elijah and you and me. He knows what we need. Elijah did not need truth at that desperate point in his journey. He needed rest and food and drink first, and only then would he be positioned to actually hear and absorb the truth when it was given. Sometimes we must have the wisdom to know when we do not have wisdom in our perspective. Sometimes the struggles in our minds and hearts are best answered by sleep and food. Do not fail to see the physical in your spiritual struggles. Do not fail to see the spiritual in your physical struggles. Pray as a "whole" person. Be honest with what is in your heart, but realize that what is in your heart may at times be out of sync with what is actually real and true. Sometimes the answer to your heartfelt prayers may be, "sleep, eat...then we will talk more later."

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

Closing the Gap 8.1.18

Week 30 Day 3

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

1 Kings 19:2-14 So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them." Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

Reflect:

It has been said that when we speak to God it is called prayer, but when God speaks to us it is called insane. It is true that many claim that God has spoken to them when certainly he has not. Some who claim God has spoken to them are mentally ill. However, God does speak to people. He speaks most often and most clearly through the Scriptures. But he speaks to people in other ways as well. Prayer is often speaking to God, but prayer is also listening to him. Learning to discern his voice versus our own inner thoughts is a process that takes time and attention. It is important to have others around you that you trust so you can ask them about what you believe God may be saying to you. You would be foolish to not take the counsel of wise people around you in discerning whether God is actually speaking to you or not. How

does God speak to people? Certainly, as already mentioned, he speaks through the Bible. He also speaks through others, through circumstances, and in our "hearts." If you desire to better hear from God, it is very important that you understand the primary goal of hearing from him. The primary goal of hearing from God is to have a mature love for God and for others. If you miss this point, you will consistently miss the voice of God. Beyond that key principle, you must approach God with humility. If and when God does direct you, it does not indicate you are special. It simply means that God, in his mercy, wants you to understand something about him and his will for your life. It doesn't make you authoritative, because God is the authority. You can be wrong, but he cannot. Do you want to hear from God? Why? Because you are bored? Because you want him to tell you some good news? Because you don't really believe and want validation? If God speaks to you, it will have as its goal HIS glory revealed in your increasing love for him and obedience to him. Your love for him and obedience to him will show up in love for those around you. It is truly a great thing for God to speak to a person, but his speaking is not primarily about us. It is about him. God spoke to Baruch through the prophet Jeremiah, "Should you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not" (Jeremiah 45:5). God did speak to Baruch and he told him that difficult times were ahead for him and his people. But the trouble that was coming for them was ultimately about the glory of God. Sometimes what God says to us might not be what we want to hear. But we must learn to want to hear what he wants to say, because what God wants is ultimately good because it is about his glory. If you want to position yourself to hear from God, be sure that you understand life is not about you. It is about God. Your life is not to be about you. It is to be about his glory. When he speaks - and he will speak to you about things in your life - ultimately what he says to you is about his greatness revealed in and through your life. Close the gap on a conversational relationship with God. Conversation with God is called prayer and this conversation with God is always about relationship with God.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

Closing the Gap 8.2.18

Week 30 Day 4

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

1 Kings 19:2-14 So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them." Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

Reflect:

Elijah's experience with God was unique. Some might envy his direct conversations with God as well as the fantastic experiences of God's power which he witnessed. However, I doubt anyone would envy the cost of his experiences. Elijah lived a very difficult and lonely life. He suffered times of dark despair and doubts. He did not doubt whether God was alive and involved, but he had doubts as to whether his own efforts and sacrifices were worth it. In the passage for this week there is a line that is easy to miss if you are not paying attention: "He traveled forty days and nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God." Forty days and nights would be a long journey on a train with a sleeping car, but this journey was by foot. Why did God have him make this difficult journey? Could he not have spoken to Elijah where he

was? Perhaps he was still trying to escape the wrath of the murderous queen. Perhaps he needed that time to prepare to hear from God. He had no electronic devices to keep him occupied or distracted along the way. Hearing from God requires time and attention. We cannot give God a 5-minute slot on our schedule and demand he "get to the point." It takes God time to speak mostly because it takes us time to be ready to listen. I suspect that for much of the 40-day journey Elijah didn't need an electronic device to distract him. His own thoughts were probably enough. He really did believe some things that were not true and so he could not wait to tell God what was on his mind. When he finally arrived God asked him, "Why are you here?" Elijah answered the question with a complaint. He believed he was the only one living faithfully and the "reward" for his efforts was that people were trying to kill him. God's answer to Elijah's complaint was to instruct him to step out of the cave so he would experience God's presence. What happened next must have been terrifying. A hurricane force wind attacked the mountain, shattering rocks as they were swept along. Then an earthquake shook the mountain followed by a fire. Perhaps massive boulders were loosened by the wind and fell to the foot of the mountain causing the earth to shake. Maybe the storm produced lightning that struck the brush and set the mountain on fire. Whatever the effects, God was the cause. But he did not appear to Elijah in all of this awesome display. In the stillness after the storm, Elijah heard a gentle whisper. Maybe it was the same whisper he had heard as a child when he was first learning to hear from God. God was in the whisper. As God seems to do at times, he repeated his question. Elijah answered the exact same way as before but now, it seems, he was ready to hear God's mind on his situation. God spoke in the gentle whisper and gave him a correct perspective as well as a course of action to take. Are you in a hurry? Have you left no space in your mind for God to speak? How will you be ready to hear the gentle whisper of God if your own mind and life is all wind, and quake, and fire? Be still. Find a way to make a space for God to speak.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

Closing the Gap 8.3.18

Week 30 Day 5

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

1 Kings 19:2-14 So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them." Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

Reflect:

What was the whole point of the wind, the quake, and the fire? What was God trying to show Elijah - and us - about himself? What do we learn about a conversational relationship with God from this experience? It's not a parable. It is a historical account of a real event. But the event was designed by God to teach us about him, so we must try to pay careful attention and learn. There are certainly many things that can be learned, but let's try to isolate a few. First, it is easy to see, hear, and feel a great wind, the earth quaking, and a blazing fire. It is much harder to pay attention to a gentle whisper. This explains why it may be getting harder and harder for people to hear from God because the noise around us is constant. We do not live in an age where hearing from God is going to be easy. Not because God is slow to speak, but because

our lifestyles make it hard to hear. What will you do to break from the spirit of these times and hear from the timeless God? Second, when we only hear and pay attention to the noise, we will likely mistake the wind, quake, and fire for the voice of God. When we cannot hear the whisper, we will think we are hearing God in the noise. What we will hear is the voice of the current culture telling us what we want to hear. It will not challenge our thinking or our way of living; it will confirm them. It will tell us that times have changed and so has God. The noise of contemporary culture will speak a loud lie if we are not still long enough to hear quiet truth. Finally, when our physical ears have been bombarded by too many decibels, they lose their ability to hear the more quiet sounds. The noise can train our ears to only hear that which is loud. The same is true for our spiritual ears. When we live in the continual din of the loud, the proud, and the busy, we will lose our ability to hear the quiet voice of God. Thankfully, though at times it is impossible to regain lost physical hearing, there is a way to regain spiritual hearing. This way is through repentance of self-trust and a return to trusting in God. "This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength" (Isaiah 30:15). God, forgive us for living loud and proud and quiet our hearts so we may trust in your strength.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

Closing the Gap 8.6.18

Week 31 Day 1

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Mark 10:13-16 People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

Reflect:

These children were very small. In fact, Luke's account calls some of them babies. They were small enough that he was able to "take them in his arms." The disciples did not dislike children, but they were probably trying to protect Jesus from interruptions. He was busy with "important" stuff and could not be bothered by small children. It shows how much they did not yet understand. Jesus was a master of turning the events of life into teaching moments. Clearly, this incident made an impression on the disciples because it was included in the gospel account. John wrote that "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (John 21:25). Since Jesus did many more things and said many more things than are included in the gospels, it should make us very attuned to what is included. The disciples were impacted by this event and God wants us to be impacted as well. There are many things to learn about God and us in this passage. Jesus very clearly said that if we do not receive the kingdom like a child, we would not receive it all. The Kingdom of God in this context is the reign of Christ in our hearts. Entering his Kingdom brings the peace, presence, power, and purposes of God into our lives now in part and one day in full. We are to come to the King and receive his Kingdom as a child would. A child is not self-conscious when it comes to his needs. Adults may be coy, reserved, or just too proud to admit to a need or desire. But small children, when they have a need, are sure to make that need known. A proud adult would sometimes rather go without than admit weakness or need. This would be inconceivable for a small child. We are not to become childish, but childlike. Childish would make us demanding and petulant (moody, touchy). Childlike means we have some qualities of a child. We must be childlike in regard to our need for God. We have learned as adults to be self-sufficient. This is good and important in order that we do not become childish adults. But as childlike adults, we must know that our self-sufficiency does not apply to our relationship with God. When we enter the world as adults, we must do all we can to care for our own needs and the needs of others. But as we move through the world as "physical adults," we must remember to do so as "spiritual children." Not children in that we are not growing in our faith, but children in that we never outgrow our desperate need for God. As you talk with

God today, remember to be childlike without being childish. Do not demand from him and do not forget your utter dependence on him.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 8.7.18

Week 31 Day 2

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Mark 10:13-16 People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

Reflect:

A child has both a simple and a simplistic view of the world. "Simple" means without complexity. "Simplistic" means unrealistic. Some children are forced to grow up too quickly. Because of the absence of mature adults or the presence of immature adults in their lives, they must jettison childhood simplicity much too soon. When this happens it may make them more streetwise and heart-hardened, but it does not make them healthy or more mature. There is a healthy order in human development. Children in ideal circumstances do not lie down at night and worry about whether they will eat tomorrow or whether mom and dad will stay together. They lie down to sleep in a world that is warm, safe, and sure. As they grow up, they learn mom and dad are not able to protect them from everything and that the world is not safe. But because of the foundations that were built by mature adults into their childhood, they can live in a world that is not safe without living in fear. A simplistic view is: "The world is safe, so I do not have to fear." A mature view is: "The world is not safe, but I do not have to live in fear." We are to approach the King and the Kingdom with the simplicity of a child. We do not throw away the perspective of an adult that understands the nature of the world, but rather we add to an adult perspective the perspective of childhood. We live as "grown children" by understanding the world is not safe, but knowing we do not have to fear. God, unlike a human parent, is all-knowing and all-powerful and cannot fail or die. We do not live as fools unaware of the realities of life and we do not live in fear because we are aware of the reality of God our Father and his promises. Your Father will never leave you nor forsake you. Now as you approach your Father in heaven in prayer about the many things that concern you, do so as a child. Leave your fear with him and then you can go out into a dangerous world and live by faith and not in fear.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth

of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 8.8.18

Week 31 Day 3

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Mark 10:13-16 People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

Reflect:

Small children are "stream of consciousness" talkers. What is in their minds is coming out of their mouths. This is not good practice for adults, but it is endearing in a child. Adults should learn to filter their thoughts before they put them into words. If they do not, they are foolish and can cause great damage. There is an exception to this. In prayer, adults should relearn the childlike practice of "mind to mouth" communication. It's not that we shouldn't be thoughtful in prayer. We should. It's not that everything we think is good to say. It's not. It is more about remembering that God knows what is on our minds before we can speak it anyway. It can be very helpful to be honest with what is really going on in our heads. If a complaint is in our minds, then it can be good to talk to God about it. Not that our complaints are always valid, but rather it is good to talk with God about them. If doubt is in our minds, then talk to God about your doubts. Just because it is in our minds and our mouths, it does not mean we are considering it valid. But when we come to God like a child, telling him everything (even though he knows it already) the conversation can change. It can become less routine and more real. It can become more heartfelt and honest. It can open us up to what is actually true about God and our current situation, not just what we are currently thinking and feeling is true. If you have trained yourself to be careful with your words, you have done well. Now, in prayer train yourself to be honest with your words. It's never good or right to slander or accuse God of wrong. But if you are struggling to understand why he allowed or caused something, it is good to talk with him about that struggle. A child will talk with anyone they trust about virtually anything. A mature and loving adult does not despise the child for this, they love them for it. In your conversational relationship with God do you need to become more childlike? Start now. Talk to God about what is really on your mind. Perhaps you will be positioned to hear what is really on his.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 8.9.18

Week 31 Day 4

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Mark 10:13-16 People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them

Reflect:

"Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world." The well-known children's song is well-grounded in Scripture. Jesus demonstrated his love for children in practical ways. But there is a sense in which all people are children before God, no matter their age. In Hosea, God spoke of the nation of Israel as his child: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" (Hosea 11:1). Of course, there is a greater degree of accountability before God as we age, but we never stop being children in relationship to God. This perspective should lead to humility. Small children are not naturally humble as in the character quality of humility. They do, however, live in "positional" humility. They have little power, skill, or ability. They mostly have needs. They live in a humble place. As adults, humility is something we must choose to grow in. Humility understands that in spite of any increase in power, knowledge, wealth, or prestige, we remain like children with utter dependence on God for life and ultimate salvation. No matter what your age, you live before God in positional humility. You are not truly strong, smart, or good. You are a child before him and always will be. Reflect on your position of humility so that you might move farther into the character of a humble person. Reflect on the fact that God is your Father and you will always be a child. Then go interact with the people in your life with a humility-empowered perspective.

The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. (Psalm 103:8-14)

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 8.10.18

Week 31 Day 5

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Mark 10:13-16 People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

Reflect:

Older people often look in the mirror and wonder how they became old. They look at the years gone by and wonder how they arrived where they are. Fifty, seventy, one hundred... these are many years and these are also very few years. Perhaps you are still "young" and don't see life this way. However, even in our twenties and thirties the experience of time can be startling and strange. The hours and days can sometimes drag on while the months and years can fly by. Children tend to live in the present. They don't spend much time on the past or the future. They are at a stage of life where virtually all time is now. Sure they look forward to things that are yet to come and this becomes truer as they age. But the very young live mostly in the right now. Perhaps this is a factor in Kingdom living that correlates to being childlike. We are to be like children in that we are to relearn how to engage the "now" without being overly diverted by the past and the future. Of course, it is childish to not remember the past or to fail to prepare for the future. But is it "childlike" to learn to live more fully in the "now"? The past is beyond our control apart from making amends for our mistakes. The future is outside the realm of our control as well, apart from making necessary preparations for possibilities. The only time we have is now. We can worry about the past, yet it is unchangeable. We can worry about the future, yet it is not ours to control. We can trust in the present by giving God the past and the future. We can learn to walk more closely with God by engaging what he has for us today. Jesus asked, "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" (Matthew 6:27). He said that he feeds the birds and clothes the flowers, so stop worrying because you are much more valuable to him than they are. To live in a conversational relationship with God, you must live in the right now of where God has you. Is it challenging? Is it confusing? Is it boring? Okay, but it is where God has you and it is where God wants to meet you. Come to him as a child, today.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 8.13.18

Week 32 Day 1

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Ex. 33:1-20 The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent. Moses said to the LORD, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people." The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" And the LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name." Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

Reflect:

Moses had a unique relationship with God. He was singled out as a man to whom God spoke "face to face," as friends do. "Face to face" is a figure of speech. It means "in person" communication, in contrast to more impersonal ways of communicating. Friends don't work through third parties to discuss important matters, because trust is high. When trust is low, face-to-face communication is impossible and so is relationship. The trust relationship Moses had with God included intimate and direct communication. However, later in this same passage God told Moses that no one could see his face and live. There is no contradiction here. In the first instance, "face to face" is a figure of speech indicating personal relationship. In the second instance, "no one may see me and live" is an actual experience. Stop and think about this situation. Moses, who was arguably as close to God as any man has been, could not look directly at God and survive the encounter. It was not because God would kill him, but because the experience would be beyond his physical limits. What would this look like? It is impossible to say. Would his heart stop? Would his brain overload? Would he "fly apart" into basic elements? What is possible to say is that God is awesome, spectacular, and beyond human understanding. Many times in Scripture when people encountered God, they were nearly "undone." Most notably Isaiah: "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple...Woe to me! I cried. I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of

unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty” (Isaiah 6:1, 5). Isaiah wrote that he "saw the Lord," but he only got a glimpse or a vision of him. This was enough to "wreck" him. Here we get a clue as to what might actually be the real threat to our existence if we were to see God in all his glory. Isaiah became so acutely aware of his own sin and the sins of all humans that he could not bear it. Perhaps the reason we cannot see God and live is because the great distance between his holiness and our sinfulness would be beyond our ability to endure. How different is this vision of God than the one commonly held today where humans take God to task and question his integrity because they don't like the ways he gets things done? Job tried to issue God a subpoena and take him to court, but in the end Job was on his face before God much like Isaiah. If we are to understand the good news of the gospel, we must continually reflect on the bad news of our sin. Our sin does not create a "bit of problem" for us. Rather, it creates an impossible, devastating, and deadly situation for us. The good news is that we, too, can have a "face to face" relationship with God. The bad news is that, apart from the gospel, our sin leaves us "undone" in the presence of God. Remember the bad news so you will rejoice more fully in the good news.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

Closing the Gap 8.14.18

Week 32 Day 2

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Ex. 33:1-20 The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent. Moses said to the LORD, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people." The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" And the LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name." Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

Reflect:

Does God speak to people? If so, which people? Special ones, such as Moses, or normal ones like you and me? Some believe that God speaks to them about everything and they will wait on him before making virtually any decision. This is not healthy or balanced. Some believe God never speaks to them and, consequently, even if he were to do so they would discount it as other than a message from God. The Bible assumes that God speaks to his people. The primary way he speaks is through the Bible. But he speaks in other ways as well - through other people, through circumstances, and at times directly to us in our "hearts." We say "heart" because we are not quite sure where it is on the "inside" of us that we hear him speak. "Heart" in the Bible is the "thinking, choosing, willing" part of us. It is the center of our being as human beings. So we are to love God with all of our "hearts" and we are to "guard our hearts" above all else. Our hearts are to be wrapped around God in a way that what we most want is what he wants. God spoke to Moses face to face as a man speaks to a friend. Of course, Moses was not perfect so perfection is not a condition for this kind of relationship with God. However, Moses was humble. His humility was a part of his awareness of his great need. His great need made him dependent on God. His dependence on God led him to obey God, even when it was hard and seemed beyond him. Do you want God to speak to you? You must have a heart that is fully is. Not perfection in every action, but perfection in its overall direction. You must continually surrender to his will and ways. This is your part. When you have a heart

that is oriented around him, you will have a heart that is prepared to hear him speak. You are prepared to hear God speak when you are prepared to respond to what he might say. In your "heart" what are you saying to God? "Tell me what I want to hear" or "tell me what you want to say and I will hear it"?

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 8.15.18

Week 32 Day 3

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Ex. 33:1-20 The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent. Moses said to the LORD, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people." The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." Then Moses said I know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" And the LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name." Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

Reflect:

God spoke to Moses "as a man speaks with his friend." This does not mean God and Moses were "buddies." In this same passage, God told Moses that he could not see his face and live. The way in which God communicated with Moses was similar to how friends talk to one another, even though it was not a relationship of equals. How does one speak to a friend and how might this apply to a conversational relationship with God? Friends speak about what is on their hearts and minds. God told Moses what he intended to do. God let Moses in on what was important to him and how Moses would be a part of his plans. God told Moses what was most valuable to him and how he wanted Moses to hold to and communicate those values to others. Friends speak honestly about their relationships and even their disappointments, but they do so in a redemptive way. God was direct with Moses in regard to his periodic lack of faith and his overt disobedience. Even so, God did not cast Moses off because, in spite of Moses' shortcomings, he was a "friend of God." Friends deal with each other directly. They do not need an arbitrator or middleman. Moses often served as the spokesman for God to the people, but God spoke directly to him. Of course we are not Moses, but what opportunities do we have to experience God like he did? Because of Jesus, the final mediator, we can go directly to God ourselves. We can communicate with God as friends do, directly, one to one. Because we have the written word of God, we can know what God values and wants done in the world. We do not have to guess. We can read, understand, and join him in what he is doing in and around us. God's way of dealing with each of us in going to be unique in some

ways, but in other ways it will be the same. He will not speak to us in a way that is out of sync with what is clearly written in Scripture. If you want to know the will and ways of God, then know the Bible. Do not look for some "mystical, emotional" direction as you read it. Read it in order to understand and apply it to your life. Read it to see who God is, how he works, and what he wants. You have what even Moses did not have - the completed Word of God. Friends do the "work" to understand each other. God has spoken to you already. Now do the work to understand what he has said. Know his word for yourself.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 8.16.18

Week 32 Day 4

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Ex. 33:1-20 The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent. Moses said to the LORD, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people." The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" And the LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name." Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

Reflect:

You can have many kinds of relationships such as business, family, volunteer organizations, military, teammates, and others. You can have relationships without having friendships. You can be a biological brother or sister without being a friend. You can share an office or a locker room and have the same goals, but not be friends. A friendship is a special category of relationship. There are many levels of friendship, but in general a friend is someone you trust. If you do not trust them, they are not your friends. God spoke to Moses as a friend. Moses trusted God, but more importantly God trusted Moses. God knew Moses' limitations and was very aware of his failings...past, present and future. But God trusted Moses. He trusted Moses to lead his people. God trusted Moses with his very word. He trusted Moses to represent him. Of course, the selection of Moses was due to God's sovereignty, but at the same time it is not always helpful to just end there in our thinking. If we only look at the role of God's sovereignty in the lives of people he uses, it can lead to passivity in our own lives. Of course, God's sovereignty is of vital importance and should lead us to act and think with humility. At the same time, Moses' response to God is important as well. We must not believe we can wait for God's sovereignty to "fall on us" before we proactively move towards him in faith and towards others in love. God wants to use us in the world. A part of him using us is our "usefulness." That usefulness is not primarily about skill or gifting, but humility. Humility is a character quality. It is a result of making a series of choices over time, choices that

reflect both mental attitudes and physical actions. Look at what God's word says about Moses: "Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3). Was God sovereign in the selection of Moses? Of course he was. Did the choices Moses make, particularly in regard to his humility, matter in how God used him? Of course they did. Do you want to be a friend of God? Walk humbly with God. He can trust those who trust him. Humility is the foundational quality for a trust relationship with God. "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

Closing the Gap 8.17.18

Week 32 Day 5

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Ex. 33:1-20 The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent. Moses said to the LORD, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people." The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" And the LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name." Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

Reflect:

Reflect on Moses waking up drowsy and discouraged one morning. Think of his actual back feeling sore and his mind dreading the day in front of him. See him in your mind's eye bending over to put on his footwear and brushing back his "bed head". Think of him sitting and eating breakfast and spending time talking to God. It is important that you think about Moses and other biblical figures as actual people who lived real lives. It is important because we can turn all kinds of famous people into more than, or other than, human. When we do this, we miss the opportunity to really learn from their lives. When you read of Moses having a "face to face" conversation with God, consider what it might have looked like. Certainly God could have caused Moses' eardrums to vibrate and create signals to his brain that sounded like a person talking. But God doesn't have physical lips or lungs, so it wasn't "talking" like we think of it. Perhaps God skipped Moses' eardrums and just created the words directly in his mind. All communication ends up there anyway and God can skip the other parts of the process quite easily. Go back and read the passage that you have been reading all week and read it like it happened to a real person. Read it like you would if you read it in a newspaper and it was validated as a factual event. What questions would you have in your mind? Train yourself to read Scripture this way. Train yourself to move through life thinking of God in this way. He is the same God now that he was then. He has the same goals and desires now as then. Of course his work in human history is a part of a long plan, so it changes in terms of his processes.

But God himself does not change. Clearly he desires friendship with you. Do you desire this kind of friendship with him? If so, what might it look like in your life as you move into today? As you brush your hair and your teeth, as you deal with drowsiness and discouragement...consider the possibility and the reality of friendship with God.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 8.20.18

Week 33 Day 1

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Eph. 6:10-18 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Reflect:

A life of faith is a friendship and it is also a war. It is important to keep both realities in mind. Soldiers cannot live in a constant state of battle. There comes a point when, if they remain in combat conditions for too long, they are unable to continue the fight. We cannot live in an ongoing state of "fight or flight." That is why God has given the command for a Sabbath and has offered us his peace and rest in the midst of the war. All that being said, we must not lose sight of the reality of the war in and around us. Even if a soldier is withdrawn from the front lines for a time, that soldier has not left the war. In times of respite and in times of direct spiritual combat, there is a phrase in this passage that is critical to remember. "Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power." This is a not a call to passivity, but rather to active faith. You must move into the battles and you must endure the conflicts that will come, but you must do so by putting your fullest confidence in the Lord and relying on his power, not your own. This should not lead to a diminished personal effort, but rather it should invigorate your efforts because success does not finally depend on your strength but on the Lord's. Again, we find this mystery of God's sovereignty and our responsibility. As you move into the various battles that rage in your life, you must remember that God ultimately will prevail and that you must choose to be strong in his power, not your own. You must give all of yourself to the battle - heart, soul, mind, and strength. There is no part of you that you can hold back in fear or laziness. But, then, you must remember that in this battle you give yourself in love to God - heart, soul, mind, and strength. And in giving yourself to him in love, you will find him to be all you need in order to win the battles as they come. Here is where the friendship and the combat come together. Love God with every part of your being and then you will see God, who is your friend, reveal his mighty

power in your life.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 8.21.18

Week 33 Day 2

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Eph. 6:10-18 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Reflect:

Some people are under the impression that "putting on the armor of God" is merely verbalizing the process. They might say, "I buckle truth around my waist and I take up the shield of faith right now." This may be fine if they are actually doing those things and not just saying words. In a real battle, soldiers don't talk about their armor and weapons, they use them. They don't prepare for battle by saying they are putting on their body armor; they prepare by actually putting it on. Do not turn this into a magic incantation. The battle is real and so are the protections and weapons that we use in the battle. You put on the full armor of God by the lifestyle choices you make. You must know and apply the truth of God to your circumstances. You must live in the realm of God's righteousness in the actual decisions of your day. You must be prepared to share the good news with others and you must live fully in the gospel yourself. This is not spiritual "mumbo jumbo." This is reality. The protections are real, the weapon is real, and the battle is real. Do not go through the motions of preparation for your day. Prepare! Don't merely "say your prayers and have your quiet time." Prepare in real ways for a real war. If you heard bullets and bombs outside your home right now, you would have a heightened sense of awareness. In fact, many do hear those sounds right now and they do not casually and sleepily prepare for another "yawn" day. They are in a real fight and they know it. You are as well, but do you know it? Rouse yourself. Sit up. Be prepared. Put on the full armor of God. How? Are you surrendered to him? Is there any part of your life you are holding back for yourself? Surrender is primary. Are you in a position of a "ready yes"? Soldiers thrive and survive in combat conditions by obeying the orders of those in authority over them. In a battle there is no discussion with your commander, because victory requires ready submission. It is likely you won't

hear the sounds of war in your day, but nevertheless you will be in a war today. It is very important that are you prepared. Surrender. Say to God right now: "The answer is 'yes', whatever you ask from me." Don't play at this. If your heart is not actually there, cry out to God to help you get there. Close the gap today between your perception of the battle and the reality of the battle. Put on the full armor of God.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 8.22.18

Week 33 Day 3

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Eph. 6:10-18 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Reflect:

Once again, this passage demonstrates the balance of both full reliance on God's power and, also, full personal effort and discipline. God's grace need not be at odds with human effort. It is his grace that empowers our efforts to follow him. We are to "be strong in the Lord and in his power." We are to "put on his armor." We are to "stand firm." We are to "take up the shield of faith" and the "helmet of salvation" and the "sword of the Spirit." We are to pray all kinds of prayers and stay alert. All of these instructions indicate activity, not passivity. It shows that a relationship with God, like other relationships, requires proactivity from both parties. God is ever-active in his pursuit of us and we must be the same in our pursuit of him. In anything that requires balance, there are two ways to "fall off the wall." In this spiritual battle we are engaged in, we can fail through believing God's operational power in our lives doesn't require anything from us. It is true that justification is all God's work in us, but it is not true that growth in Christlikeness and engagement in the battle requires nothing from us. If we fail to understand the need for full engagement with God and the battle using all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, then we will fail in the battle. On the other hand, if we come to believe ongoing victory depends on our efforts and fail to rely fully on God's power, then we will also fail in the battle. Our strength will never be enough. Do not try to make this into a math problem. It does not and will not work that way. It is 100 percent the grace and power of God. It is 100 percent full effort and engagement on our part. What doesn't work on paper does work in the real world. You must learn to lean into the wind that blows in your life. Do you find yourself overreliant on your own efforts? Reflect deeply on his grace and power and put your full confidence in him. Do you find yourself living passively, waiting for God to do for you

what he has told you to do? Rouse yourself! Be strong in his mighty power and stand firm.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 8.23.18

Week 33 Day 4

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Eph. 6:10-18 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Reflect:

How can he say that our struggle is not against flesh and blood? It is real people who want to destroy people's lives in physical warfare. It is real people who make your life difficult at work, school, and home. It is real flesh and blood people that we struggle to forgive and love and relate to. For that matter, you are real flesh and blood and your largest struggle is most often within yourself. He is not saying that these physical struggles are illusion or irrelevant. He is telling us that behind the struggles we can see, there are also struggles that we do not see. Do not turn this into something weird. Do not overspeculate on what this might mean. Take it at face value. There is a spiritual war that is supernatural in nature and it is real, not weird. It is weird, though, to look at what has happened and is happening in the world and fail to understand there is much more going on than what we can see with our physical eyes. In this fight, like any real fight, words are not enough. There must be real faith and real follow-through behind any words that we try to use in the battle. You might read a verse where Paul or Jesus merely spoke words and demons had to flee. But those words had power because of much more than just vocal chords vibrating air and sending sounds out. Look at what happened when some people who did not have relationship with Jesus tried to use his name in the spiritual battle.

Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. [One day] the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" Then the man who had the evil

spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding. (Acts 19:13-16)

You see, it's not the words that bring power, it is relationship with Jesus and in that relationship we are able to act on his authority. Your time in prayer, your time in God's word, your choice to continually surrender your heart, and your life of obedience...these are all essential to your ability to effectively engage the real war you are in today. The demons should know **who** you are because they know **whose** you are. "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power" (1 Corinthians 4:20).

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

Closing the Gap 8.24.18

Week 33 Day 5

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Eph. 6:10-18 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Reflect:

Now you can understand what it means to "pray in the Spirit." It is not mere words. It is not some emotional state you work yourself into you. It is to pray in the realm of the Holy Spirit's power and will. This is a function of being "within" the realm of his power and his will in your life. The realm of God's power in and through your life is the realm of his will for your life. A life of ongoing surrender is essential to a life of praying in the Spirit. Every prayer should originate from a heart that is oriented fully to God. Not that our hearts are ever going to be fully surrendered or fully in sync with him, but our hearts can and should be oriented his direction. A life of perfection in direction, not perfection in every action is the life of conversational relationship with God. This is not merely clever words, it is intentional actions that flow from a life of faith. When we "mess up," we must learn to quickly "fess up" and then move on. We must not deny our sins or avoid facing them. Neither can we allow our sins to compound by staying on the ground after we have fallen. God has said that if you will confess your sins, he is faithful and will forgive you and cleanse you from them (1 John 1:9). It is essential that you take him up on his offer: "if you confess." And you must believe him when he says you "will be cleansed." Do you have important things in your life that you are pouring out to God in prayer? Have you considered your heart? Is it surrendered to him? Are you harboring unconfessed sin? Do you understand that our sin can hinder our prayers? It's not because God is petty; it is because he is great. How would we expect such a God to continually support and empower our lives if they are going in a direction away from him? How could he possibly be good and do such a thing? This is imminently practical; it shows up in the most basic of relationships, like a marriage. "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives,

and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers" (1 Peter 3:7). Do you know that if a husband is inconsiderate to his spouse, it can hinder his prayers? This is but one example, there are many more. God desires to empower a life lived in his direction. He loves us too much to do otherwise. "Pray in the spirit on all occasions" by living in the realm of the Spirit's power and will on all occasions. Close the gap, continually. Mess up, fess up, and then move on.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 8.27.18

Week 34 "The next generation" Day 1

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

2 Tim. 2:1-7 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer. Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

Reflect:

It is common for people as they near the end of their working careers to begin to look for a way to "play" for a living. The end of a life of working and learning and producing is thought to begin a life of playing and resting and self-indulgence. It is not wrong to rest or to retire. It is wrong for an adult to play for a living. A young child's life is largely about play. To see a child playing is sweet, natural, and beautiful. When a child does not have the opportunity to play, but is forced to "grow up" too fast it can stunt their development. An adult's life need not be devoid of play and fun. In fact, a healthy life must have some times of enjoyment and play. But an adult's life is not designed to be mostly about play and fun. As you grow into adulthood there are many investments that have been made into your life. For most people, other adults have given time, encouragement, training, and teaching to help them along the way. Adults have paid for your food, lodging, and other needs as you grew up because you were unable to do so yourself. Behind all of this investment in your life by other people, God was investing in you. Even if your childhood was difficult, the fact that you are reading this and are interested in spiritual things at all indicates that God has continued to pursue you and invest in you. The longer you live, the more God has invested in your life. The more he has invested the more he wants you to pass that investment on to others. "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2). In 1 Timothy, Paul is speaking to his "son in the faith", Timothy. He is investing in Timothy's life and challenging Timothy to pass the investment on to others. Are you young? Be invested in. Seek it out from older Christ followers. Begin now to develop a lifelong perspective as a learner and as a mentor. You are the currently the "next" generation. If you live long enough, you will be required to help prepare the "next after next" generation. Embrace this opportunity and challenge. Are you "older"? Are you looking for a place to "sit down" or a way to serve yourself in your last years? No! You can rest some and you can play some, but you must not see your life as being about rest and play. You must invest in the next generation. If you are unprepared for that task, then you must become prepared. If you are unconnected from others

who need your help, you must connect. If you believe the next generation does not want your investment, it is not because they are unwilling. It may be because you are unapproachable. If so, change. Learn to listen and understand so you can invest. Do what it takes to be faithful in your stewardship. Start today. See yourself as one whose life is to be about investing in others. Invest for the good of others, for the glory of God, and for the joy of being found faithful.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 8.28.18

Week 34 "The next generation" Day 2

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

2 Tim. 2:1-7 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer. Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

Reflect:

The first thing to be passed on to the next generation is the primacy of grace. Youth is strength. Strong bodies. Strong wills. Strong desires. Strong opinions. Age teaches weakness. Bodies begin to fail. Experience has demonstrated time and again that strong opinions and desires do not guarantee outcomes. The lessons of youth can lead to foolish and unwarranted self-trust. The lessons of age can lead to cynicism or to grace. The Word of God is leading us to Jesus. Away from both self-trust and cynicism. "Be strong my son, my daughter...in the grace of Christ." Be strong, but in his unmerited favor in your life and not in all you can do and earn and become and obtain. Be strong in his power in your life. Do not think that you can shape your life by the force of your will alone. Be strong in his grace. This is the opposite of passivism and cynicism. To be strong in the grace of Jesus Christ is to endure anything and everything that comes our way with confidence, with faith. It is to remain an ultimate optimist. All things will, in the end, work together for my good since I love him. This is what must be experienced by every generation and then passed down to each "next" generation. The "normal" way of understanding strength is wrong; this is the right way to understand what it means to be strong. There is strength to survive and to thrive. It is the strength that flows from the grace of Christ. Nothing lasts, except the grace of God by which you are saved in Christ Jesus. All that is weak and passing will fail you, but he will never fail. You are weak and passing, so do not put your final confidence in yourself. Do not pass the folly of full confidence in yourself to the next generation. If you are old, you ought to know better by now. You know you do not have what it takes, so don't pretend that you do. If you are young, you can skip some of the lessons taught by experience and learn directly from God himself. He is telling you now that your strength, your confidence, your arrogance will fail you. Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. By all means venture boldly into the life God has for you, but do so putting your final confidence in Christ and not in self.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 8.29.18

Week 34 "The next generation" Day 3

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

2 Tim. 2:1-7 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer. Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

Reflect:

You were made for multi-generational impact. It is not for a select few; it is for all who claim the name of Jesus. In this passage, Paul is telling Timothy to pass on what he has learned to men who will then teach other men. Of course, the same principle holds true for women teaching other women. The things that are to be passed on are specifically related to the gospel, but the gospel has implications for all of life. The truth of the message that is passed on is independent of the messenger. You do not have to live the message perfectly in order to pass it on faithfully. However, you can make the message more accessible to the next generation if you live it more faithfully. They are listening and they are watching. If what they are seeing does not match what they are hearing, it will be difficult for them to believe what they are hearing. The fact that you are made for multi-generational impact is both a privilege and a responsibility. It is a privilege in that God has included you in his activity in the world. You do not have to wonder if you have purpose or if your life can count. You do have purpose and your life must count. It is a privilege because the fact that you have a stewardship can and should be a built-in incentive for holy living. It is not a curse that others are watching your life; it is a blessing. To have accountability for living the best possible life is a good thing, so embrace it as such. It is a responsibility in that your life is not to be about you. It is to be about the glory of God and the good of others. This responsibility is also not merely a burden, but also a great opportunity. When you live for the glory of God and the good of others, you will in turn maximize your own joy in life. You were made for multi-generational impact and, when you live in line with your design, then clearly life is going to be much more fulfilling and meaningful. "This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). Indeed, his commands are not a burden, rather they are an opportunity. His commands for our lives demonstrate his design for our lives. Live your design and invest in the next generation. Perhaps you do not feel up to the task. Maybe your life does not match the gospel message. Nevertheless, the task is on you. Because if not you, then who? Take up the challenge and close the gap on aligning your life with the gospel message.

Then, in spite of your imperfections, give yourself to investing in others.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 8.30.18

Week 34 "The next generation" Day 4

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

2 Tim. 2:1-7 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer. Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

Reflect:

There are three analogies here that help us understand what a life of investment in others looks like: a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer. A soldier avoids civilian entanglements because his controlling ambition is to please his commanding officer. The soldier does what civilians do. He eats, sleeps, washes clothes, and enjoys when possible some entertainment. However, unlike his civilian counterparts, he doesn't live for any of these. He lives with a singleness of mind and purpose to please his commander. The athlete also has a controlling goal, which is to win the race. However, no matter how much he trains if he does not stay within the boundaries of the rules of the race, he will be disqualified and fail in his ultimate quest. Therefore, he does not run to obey rules, but he cannot run if he does not stay within the rules of the race. Finally, the farmer whose ultimate goal is a harvest. The few seeds that are sown will hopefully become many seeds in the harvest. The farmer cannot make the seeds grow. Only God in his providence does that. Then does the farmer just pray for seeds to grow and leave it at that? No, he prepares the soil, plants the seed, waters and weeds, and then watches and waits. He has machinery to keep in working condition and multiple other things to attend to that do not directly look like they are a part of the harvest, but they are. So you must be part soldier, part athlete, and part farmer. You must live with a singleness of purpose that can be described in different ways. You live to please God and not for secondary things. You live your life towards a final goal. You train for that purpose. You also desire and expect a harvest, a multiplied return on your investment. You have been given the opportunity to have a multi-generational impact. This doesn't mean your goal is to "change the world." It is not. Your goal is to be found faithful. Your ambition is to please God, to run faithfully the race he has marked out for you, and to do whatever you do with all of your might because you are working for the Lord and, thus, your labor is never in vain. To impact others towards the King and the Kingdom, begin with your own life by making it your ambition to be found faithful. Make this your controlling goal. When you do, others will be drawn to your life. Then through your life they will be drawn to Jesus.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 8.31.18

Week 34 "The next generation" Day 5

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

2 Tim. 2:1-7 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer. Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

Reflect:

"Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this." Cursory is a word that means, "hurried, superficial." A cursory reading of Scripture will lead to a cursory life, a life marked by hurry and superficiality. The antidote to this is the discipline of reflection. To reflect means to think deeply and personally about something. If we want the Lord to give insight into his word and our lives, then we must do the hard work of reflection. The challenge of reflection is to see what is actually there and not impose what is in our minds back on the passage. To reflect on Scripture is to "read out" what is there, not to "read in" what is not there. We tend to have undue confidence in ourselves and in our own humility. So, of course, we would never "read in to" Scripture. We believe that we sincerely want to know what is true about our lives and how we can close the gap in key areas. While this is no doubt true to a point, it is also true that we are all prone to self-protective ideas and a self-serving bias. Do not think yourself beyond seeing in Scripture and in your own life what you want to see there, rather than what you need to see there. If you are to be a mentor for the next generation, you must be an honest one. If you serve as a "trail guide" for those who are following, you must guide with integrity. You can know what is behind you and pass on that vital experience. You can use that experience guided by wisdom to understand what might be in front of you. But you must never become too busy or too proud for reflection, regardless of how much experience you have gained. Reflect deeply and consistently on what God has said and whether your life is aligning with the truth. You have time for reflection because you are already reflecting all day, every day. Even when your mind is occupied with the work you are doing, there is still "space" in your mind for various kinds of reflections. It is important that, as you live your life, you learn to reflect on truth as it applies to both what you are doing at the moment and what you are doing on the whole. As you live as a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer, reflect. Think deeply and the Lord will give you insight. That insight is not just for you; it is also for you to pass on to others. Not in a proud way or domineering way, but in a humble, helpful way. Be a reflective trail guide, for the glory of God

and for the good of others.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 9.3.18

Week 35 "Labor in the Lord" Day 1

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Gen. 3:17-19 To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' 'Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.'"

Reflect:

Work became toil when mankind rebelled against God. The gospel reverses the effect of the curse in our lives, including the effects of our rebellion on our work. However, this reversal, is "already, not yet." We experience some of the fruit of the "curse reversal" now, but the fullness of that experience will not occur in this life. What does that mean for our work? It means that as we walk with Jesus and as we embrace a theology of "faithful presence" in our homes and work places, we will experience in growing fashion a sense of calling and purpose in all aspects of our lives. This sense of calling doesn't require that you "make a difference" at work. It doesn't mean you have to start Bible studies or share the gospel at work in order for work to be significant. That utilitarian approach to life and ministry misses the mark on the larger purpose of life. Your purpose is not to "change the world" or "make a difference," but rather to be found faithful. You exist for the glory of God. Of course, the person who is committed to being faithful and who has a growing passion for the glory of God will make a difference wherever they go, but that is a result of pursuing the larger goal of the glory of God. If you seek to do good work in your vocation, whether it is outside the home or not, you are positioned to bring glory to God. You may or may not "enjoy" your work, but you can find joy in your work if you will see it as part of a life of faithfulness. If we can learn to rejoice in our sufferings (Romans 5:3), surely we can learn to rejoice in our vocations. Even if they do not always feel as satisfying as we would prefer. You may hope for a sense of purpose, impact, and meaning in your vocation and you may very well have it. But your final sense of purpose and meaning is grounded on your relationship with God and a theology of faithfulness. If you look for and find your purpose in your work, what will you do if you lose the ability to do that work? What will you do if you "out live" your vocation and are faced with years with no such work to give your life meaning? Whether you live or die, work at a job in which you find meaning or not, you live for the Lord. When you labor in him, nothing you do is ever in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). However, if you do not do what you do "in the Lord," then all you do is in vain. "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain" (Ps. 127:1). It's not wrong to enjoy or to want to enjoy what you do vocationally. However, it is important that you seek to find your joy in the Lord, no matter what you do vocationally. This is a heart issue and as it

takes root on the inside of you, it will bear fruit on the outside.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 9.4.18

Week 35 "Labor in the Lord" Day 2

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

1 Cor. 15:58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Reflect:

Just prior to this verse, Paul writes of the surety of the resurrection from the dead and the final victory of Christ over death. It is the context for the "therefore." Therefore, since as a follower of Christ your death will not destroy the works of your life, stand firm! Be immovable! Give yourself fully to the work God has for you to do. You can be confident that this work will not be in vain. Solomon feared that all he did would be left to a foolish heir who would squander his work. His fears proved to be valid, because that is exactly what happened. The problem with Solomon's fear is that it did not lead him to labor in the Lord, but rather it led him to cynicism about the ultimate value of a life's work. As an old man, Solomon did come to see that what matters most at the end is what matters most all along the day. By that time, he had squandered a good bit of his life and labors. You do not have to fear that your life's work will vanish into the dust of death, not if you "labor in the Lord." What exactly does that mean anyway? Does it only mean "evangelism, preaching, missions"? Paul writes elsewhere what this means: "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3:17). It means that all we do and all we say is to be done and said in the "name of" Jesus. Which means that we do and say these things under the great family name of Jesus, as his children, as his representatives, and for his glory. This is single story living. There is no "spiritual, eternal" work that belongs "upstairs" and "physical, temporal" work that belongs "downstairs." The two story approach to life believes that upstairs living is meaningful because it is praying, preaching, going to church, and giving to missions. Meanwhile, downstairs is viewed as not meaningful in the end because it involves a job, cleaning house, changing diapers, and mowing grass. Your life is to be a single story dwelling. All you do is to be done as a member of the family of Jesus. The implication for this is that you must "close the gap" on doing whatever you are doing with full assurance that it does have lasting value and impact. If you feel like your day "mattered" because you helped someone in a way that seems significant to you, then rejoice. If you do not feel like your day had any lasting significance because it was quite ordinary, devoid of any obvious "eternal" impact, then perhaps you need to change your perspective. Every day, no matter what the content of that day, is to be lived for the glory of God and for the good others. It is possible to live a day of vanity. It is possible that we live entirely for self and waste our day or days living apart from the will and ways of God. But this need not be true and the difference between a day lived in vain and a day lived for Christ begins in the heart, not in what activities are on the

calendar. Start your day and end your day by remembering and reflecting on what matters most at the end. Then remember that what matters most then is what matters most now. What will matter most then will be the glory of Christ and the good of others. Keep that perspective close by. Pull it out and consider it frequently, as you navigate your days. Stand firm, let nothing move you. Do not let this day, or any day, be a day lived in vain.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 9.5.18

Week 35 "Labor in the Lord" Day 3

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Col. 3:17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Reflect:

"Whatever you do, word or action" is absolutely comprehensive. But is it a realistic expectation? Realistic or not, it is the command, the objective, the target for our lives. On the one hand it may be an unreasonable goal, but on the other hand it is the only reasonable thing for a believer to aim for. How can it not be? You were purchased at the price of the Cross and so you belong to Christ. "You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1 Cor. 6:20). Since you belong to Christ you are to honor him with your body. Body? What about mind, Spirit, and heart? This is practical and actionable. Your body is where your "soul" interacts with the world. Your hands do things, your feet take you places, your eyes absorb photons that form images that shape you, and your ears do the same with sound waves. Your lips form words in collaboration with your vocal chords. Your body is like a little "planet" where everything is to give glory to the God who has made it. The rest of the physical world cannot help but praise God. Animals, oceans, rocks, and stars do not and cannot rebel against his glory, they can only manifest it. Humans alone in the physical creation have the capacity to rebel against their design purpose. But you, if you are believer, have been purchased for Christ. Now then, whatever you do, every action and every word, do it all in the great family name of Jesus. You are his son, you are his daughter...reflect him and show the family resemblance. No part of your life is to be empty of purpose and meaning. All that you give your life to doing - whether at home, at work or at play - do it as one who has been purchased and redeemed. Not purchased into slavery, but purchased from it. And the cost was not silver and gold. It was blood. "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Peter 1:18-19). Whatever you do, do it for his glory.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask

Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 9.6.18

Week 35 "Labor in the Lord" Day 4

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

1 Thess. 4:11-12 Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

Reflect:

Does this admonition sound compelling or boring to you? If your life is hectic and the pace is beyond what you feel you can compete with or if you are a natural introvert and love to "mind your own business," then this may sound wonderful. If you long for adventure and more activity and action or you are an extrovert, it might sound painful. The context of these statements involved a church that was focused on the Lord's return. Their focus was leading them in exactly the wrong direction. Instead of their perspective on the "end" leading to increased faithfulness in the "now," it led them to be restless and inattentive to their day-to-day duties. They became idle and "meddlers." They were not fully engaged with life themselves, so they spent their time illegitimately worrying about the lives of others. The result was that those outside the church did not find their lives compelling. Who would find restless, idle, and meddlesome people's lives compelling? Throughout the history of the church the eschatological vision (return of Christ in the future) has led to decreased faithfulness in the present. This is a tragedy of epic proportions. An eternal vision should empower a temporal vision. The fact that your health, your life, your job, your possessions, and your status will all come to an end someday should lead to a passion to be found faithful with all of it. We should not become cynical and agree with what Solomon foolishly thought: "All is vanity!" Instead, we should be people who understand that, in Christ, "Nothing is vanity!" Don't see this as "make it your ambition to have no ambition." Rather, this is "make it your ambition to be faithful." Have a compelling and controlling passion for faithfulness. In every sphere of influence where God places you, be found faithful there.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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Closing the Gap 9.7.18

Week 35 "Labor in the Lord" Day 5

Pray:

Ask God to reorient you to Himself. Confess any known sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Be still and reflect on Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to God's Word. Pray for others in your life that they, too, would know and love God today.

Read:

Ps. 127:1 Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain.

Reflect:

All of your work matters. None of your work matters. Which is true? It depends on how and why the work was done. The Psalmist said that unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Isn't this a nonsensical saying? Is the Lord building the house or are the builders building the house? This is a picture of the balance or lack of balance that is evident in every human life. Every human being endeavors to "build a life." Some do so by entirely relying on their own ideas of what is real and valuable to build a life with. They labor in vain because, in the end, all they built in their life has no final value. When they die, what they gave their lives for is gone and their labor was in vain. Others build their lives based on what God has revealed as being finally real and valuable. Their labor is not vain, because in reality it was the Lord who built the life. The balanced approach to "life building" is to labor in the Lord. This may sound mystical and even hard to know how to apply in real life, but it really means to live life the Lord's way. His way is to believe what he says is real and ultimately valuable and then choose to build those values and behaviors into your life. "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58). The imbalanced approach to "life building" is to give your life (time, talents, and treasures) for things that ultimately do not matter in the end. Does your current "labor" feel full of meaning to you? Perhaps your vocational and relational efforts are "paying off" nicely right now. That could be very good or it could be deceiving you. Your current "success" could be hiding a potentially disastrous crack in your life foundation. Many people have seen all they built in the lives crumble in a terrible crash as the foundation gave way because it could not hold. You need not live in fear, but you must live in wisdom. Examine your life now. If you are not living in line with God's will and ways, then you are building on a fault line. In that case, it is not a matter of if but, rather, when the foundation will fail. Reflect today on whether it is truly the Lord who is building your life. Your life is not something on which you want to labor in vain. You are literally betting your life on this.

Pray:

(Personalize this prayer today; make it specific to the circumstances that face you.)

Ask God to lead you through His Spirit as you go through your day. Ask Him to bring to mind the truth of the gospel and its implications for what you will encounter today. Tell Him "Yes" to His will and ask Him for His power and protection to live this "yes." Ask God to create and reveal opportunities to proclaim the good news today.

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