

River Community Church

Closing the Gap Devotional Week 1

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Introduction to Closing the Gap on Faith and Love

There is a gap between where we are in our faith in God and our love for others and where we can and should be. We need to close the gap. Closing the gap is not about perfection in every action; it is about a perfect direction. We must live our lives continually reorienting to God. We can and we must live day-by-day closing the gap on our faith and love. God has given us what we need to be transformed more and more into the image of Christ. We must believe change is possible, or it is unlikely we will take the steps necessary to see it become an increasing reality. You can see God's commands as ongoing evidence of your failure, or you can see them as they are: invitations to join him in his joy. The gap that exists can depress and immobilize you, but it need not. There will always be a gap, but every day is an opportunity to close the gap. If you set out to move towards God in faith and towards others in love, then you will see the gap close more and more; in the process itself you will experience the faithfulness of God, and your life will make his glory known to others.

Devotional Week 1 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 Thessalonians 1:3 We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.

Reflect:

What I "ought" to do is often not what I actually do. How many "oughts" have you neglected this past week? We are used to seeing "oughts" as oppressive reminders of our constant failing. "Oughts" are a relentless pressure to do better, be better, do more, and be more. I ought always to thank God for you, but I don't always. I may judge or critique or ignore or need or want you. I don't "always" thank God for you, but I ought to. Is this an oppressive, "shame on me" *ought to*? Or is this an invitational, "you really ought to get in on this!"? This *ought* is an invitation to grow in love for God and others. It is an opportunity to enjoy and to appreciate and to love others well. It is my opportunity to experience God more fully and more consistently. God's "oughts" are an invitation to his joy. What God says "ought" to be true for me is the same as what I would want to be true for me if I only saw my life as clearly as he does. Oh, to always want to do what I always ought to do! God please make it more fully so in me...help me close the gap 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 1.9.18

Devotional Week 1 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 Thessalonians 1:3 We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.

Reflect:

Who is the "you" that we ought to always give thanks for? It is our brothers. In the New Testament the plural form of "brothers" regularly refers to both men and women. We ought to give thanks for all of those in our family of faith. Not just the ones I like, respect, prefer. Not just the ones who don't annoy me or don't disagree with me. Not just the ones who think like me, vote like me, and "like" me. We ought to always thank God for all of the ones he has put in our family. You choose your friends, but you don't choose your family. God chooses who will be your biological and spiritual brothers and sisters...your choice is to love them and always thank God for them. Give thanks for those who annoy you. Give thanks for those who have spoken ill of you or have been unkind to you. Give thanks...get a thankful heart...become a thankful person. Close the gap today in love and gratitude for all the ones God has put in your family.

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 1.10.18

Week 1 Day 3 Devotional

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 Thessalonians 1:3 We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.

Reflect:

Faith is confidence. Who do I trust? Do I have faith in my government, my friends, my job, my intellect, my talents? Relatively speaking it's good to be able to have some confidence, some faith in these things. But in an absolute sense, only God is worthy of our final and complete confidence. He alone is incapable of failure. He alone is able to "hold" our complete faith because no one and nothing can stop him from being faithful. Faith is like a plant: it is a growing thing, or it is a dying thing. It cannot be a static thing. How do I learn to put my ultimate confidence in God? The key words are "growing" and "more and more." Movement, decisions, choices, time, repentance, time...these are the descriptions of "growing." "More and more" is a description of closing the gap day-by-day. If I have arrived, then there is no "more." But in this life we will always be arriving, so our focus must be "more and more." When you feel anxious, look for misplaced confidence. Putting your faith in God will not always remove anxious feelings, but it will help you get at what is often the root cause. Don't worry that progress seems slow; plants grow slowly, but they do grow. If you want to grow in faith, you will. You and God are the only ones who can stop it. He is all for it, so he won't stop it. That leaves only you...what will you choose? Close the gap today by continually transferring trust from self (or anyone or anything else) to 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 1.11.18

Devotional Week 1 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 Thessalonians 1:3 We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.

Reflect:

Do you really think that every single one of the believers in the church Paul was addressing felt love for each other? Not likely. As best we can tell, it was a good church and love was evident there, but it was not perfect there. What is likely is that they were acting in love for one another even when (especially when?) they did not feel loving or the other was not acting in a lovable way. If you are a Christian, then God dwells in you through the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit dwells in you, then you have the ability to love others and the "desire" to love others on "tap." However, you must truly and continually "tap" into that love source that is available to you. You have at your disposal not just the ability to love people, but the opportunity to grow in your desire to love people. You can actually grow in your Christlike "wanting." Your desires can more and more match his. This is an exciting possibility...to love what I ought! This love Paul is speaking of here is part vision-casting: he sees the seeds budding and is calling the buds to become full-grown trees. Do you love everyone God has put in your sphere of influence? If the Holy Spirit indwells you, then you are at least moving that direction. Do not mistake "like" for "love." You can love someone and be annoyed by them at the same time. But you cannot "act" with love towards someone and continually "act" like they are annoying you. How can you learn to not act and also not be annoyed by others? How can you learn to feel and express love to others? Christ in you is your hope, your opportunity, your power. This is possible, this is necessary...what will you do today to close the gap?

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 1.12.18

Devotional Week 1 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 Thessalonians 1:3 We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.

Reflect:

Here we see that their love was not yet perfect. It is "increasing," so it had room to grow. God does not grow. He does not increase or improve. Why not? Because he is perfect. He does not change because any change would be a step down from perfection. He does not need to get better at love; his love is perfect. He does not need to understand me better. His understanding of me and everything else is complete. Some have implied that God is petty to number every hair on my head and track sparrows when there are so many other big issues to which he could be paying attention. This is a misunderstanding of the nature of God. His knowledge is immediate and complete. Immediate means he does not have to go get it, read, learn, or collect data; he has all knowledge. Complete means that there is no knowledge that he does not have. So he doesn't "count" hairs on heads or "track sparrows falling"...he knows it all, it is simple to him. We, on the other hand, need to grow in every way possible. We need to always be "increasing." In knowledge, in spiritual fervor, in faith, and, of course, in love. We need to settle this fact in our minds...we are growing in faith and love, or our faith and love are dying, drying up. You are not now and never will be a static being. You are moving in a direction. Move in the direction of faith in your interactions with God and love in your interactions with 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.