

One Accord

*"All these
with one accord
were devoting themselves
to prayer..."*



Prayer & Fasting 2022 Devotion Guide
- Grace Church -
1311 W Hovey Ave, Normal, IL 61761



1311 W Hovey Ave, Normal, IL
www.gracenormal.org

One Accord Prayer & Fasting 2022

Contributors:

Senior Pastor
Niall Philyaw

Senior Associate Pastor
Len Thebarger

Associate Pastor of Student & Family Ministries
David Gross

Associate Pastor of Music & Worship Arts
Jordan Cunningham

Director of Children's Ministry
Kelly Graeber

*Children's materials can be found
at the Ministry Spotlight Front Porch*

Contents

Section 1

Fasting

| | |
|-----------------------------|----|
| A Word from Pastor Niall | 6 |
| What is Biblical Fasting? | 8 |
| Physical Aspects of Fasting | 8 |
| A Corporate Invitation | 9 |
| My Commitment | 10 |

Section 2

Daily Readings

Week One: Boldness

| | |
|---|----|
| Day 1: Prayer: Our First Response | 11 |
| Day 2: Confident in God's Sovereignty | 15 |
| Day 3: Boldly Pray Scripture | 19 |
| Day 4: Seek & Yield to the Power of the Holy Spirit | 23 |
| Day 5: Worship in Boldness | 27 |

Week Two: Leaders

| | |
|--|----|
| Day 8: Above Reproach | 31 |
| Day 9: Pray for One Another | 35 |
| Day 10: Freedom, Peace, and the Gospel | 39 |
| Day 11: In the Light of God's Wisdom | 43 |
| Day 12: Lead by Worship | 47 |

Week Three: Freedom

| | |
|--|----|
| Day 15: The Giver of Freedom | 51 |
| Day 16: Freedom from Punishment | 55 |
| Day 17: The Choice of Freedom | 59 |
| Day 18: The Purpose of Freedom | 63 |
| Day 19: The Response to Freedom is Worship | 67 |

WHAT'S NEXT?

CHILI BOWL & GAME NIGHT

A Grace Church Friends and Family Event

Sunday, February 6 at 5pm

Who in your life are you praying for?

Ask God to reveal anyone you might
be able to invite to this event.

Start making a list of people you can invite.

Write down your people, and be faithful to pray for them.

Dear Grace Family,

“All these with **one accord** were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.” Acts 1:14 (emphasis added)

Happy New Year! This month, we are coming together to pray under the banner of UNITY in Christ Jesus! We are praying in **ONE ACCORD!** In the book of Acts, we have many great examples of the early church gathering together to lift their voices in prayer. And time after time, the Lord moved in powerful ways in response to their requests. Let's follow their example! Let's gather corporately and individually, and together praise the Lord, asking Him to glorify His name in the church and in the world!

May the Lord bless you as you “pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests...”

Pastor Niall

Blessings!

Pastor Niall

Get involved this year by sharing a visual representation of your prayer time! Everyone who prays individually during the week will submit a leaf on Sunday morning. Every Grace Group that prays will submit a blossom. All of our separate leaves and blossoms will be placed on one tree in the Sanctuary to represent our time in prayer. And hopefully, it will be a great encouragement to keep on praying throughout the 21 days!

(Leaves and blossoms will be available at Grace Church on Sundays)



What is Biblical Fasting?

Fasting is a **spiritual discipline** in which believers abstain from food for the spiritual purpose of intensifying our hunger for God and aligning our hearts with His!

Fasting aligns our hearts with God by demonstrating our HUMILITY before Him (Ezra 8:21; Psalm 69:10).

Fasting aligns our hearts with God through our REPENTENCE and CONFESSION of sin (1 Samuel 7:6; 1 Kings 21:27).

Fasting aligns our hearts with God by acknowledging our sole DEPENDENCE on Him (Deuteronomy 8:2-3; Matthew 4:1-4).

Fasting aligns our hearts with God by discerning His WILL and DIRECTION in our lives (Judges 20:26-28; Acts 13:1-3).

Fasting aligns our hearts with God by increasing our appetite to PRAY (Mark 1:35).

Fasting aligns our hearts with God, increasing our appetite for Him and His WORD (Matthew 4:1-4; John 4:31-35).

Physical Aspects of Fasting

- ✧ If you have specific health issues related to diet, check with a doctor before beginning a fast.
- ✧ No matter what way you choose to fast, make sure and drink fluids including water and fruit juices.
- ✧ You may need to restrict some of your physical activity during a fast, especially rigorous exercise.
- ✧ Sudden movements, especially standing up quickly, may cause dizziness or light-headedness.
- ✧ Expect some physical, mental, and perhaps even some emotional discomfort during a fast. Headaches, sleeplessness, and irritability often accompany a fast, but don't allow the fast to become an excuse for improper actions or attitudes.

Ways To Be Involved

Grace Church's time of corporate fasting and prayer begins on ***Sunday, January 9***. Within this booklet are 5 daily devotions for each week to enrich your time with God each day.

Commitment Sunday will be ***Sunday, January 9***. Please spend time preparing and filling out your commitment card located on the following page. You will have the opportunity to place your commitment on the altar during the service.

During our ***Sunday, January 30*** worship service, we will close our time of praying and fasting together by praising and celebrating what God did in our hearts and lives.

You are invited to come..

to the special One Accord prayer event on

Wednesday, January 19th at 6pm in the Sanctuary

You are encouraged to join us...

for weekly fasting on Wednesdays

January 12

January 19

January 26

During these 3 weeks, the elders are asking that we devote each Wednesday to fasting and prayer as a corporate effort to seek God.

Fasting on each of these Wednesdays will involve ***abstaining from food for breakfast and lunch. During the time we would normally spend in preparation or eating the meal, it is important to use that time to pray and to read God's Word.*** For example, if you normally spend 20 minutes preparing and eating breakfast, use that 20 minutes to pray and read Scripture instead.

If you are unable to participate in the corporate fast on Wednesdays, you are welcome to choose another day of the week to align your heart with God through fasting and prayer.

My Commitment to Fast and Pray

As a way of bringing focus to your time of fasting and praying,
answer the following questions.

My Goal: I am asking God to

My Fast: What I will withhold

My Prayer: When and where I will pray

My Vow: God being my strength, and grace being my basis, I commit myself to this period of fasting so that God will answer my prayer and give the thing for which I trust Him. Not my will Oh God, but Yours be done.

Lord, I dedicate small things to express the greatness of Your supremacy in all of life.

Lord, I will be faithful in little expressions of my faith for great answers to prayer.

Lord, I vow to fulfill these small expressions of my love to You.
Amen.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Day 1

Making Prayer our First Response

one accord

BOLDNESS

When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them,

Acts 4:23-24

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,

Acts 16:25

I have always admired and been thankful for First Responders. They are trained to run towards dangerous and challenging situations so most others can run away! Putting their lives on the line, they rescue the hurt, put out fires and make our communities safer.

As believers, we have a lot in common with First Responders. We are also looking to rescue people... spiritually... by being reflections of Jesus Christ and sharing the good news of the Gospel. Jesus Christ called this 'Making Disciples' and commissioned us to go throughout the world with His presence and authority with us. (Matthew 28:18-20)

First Responders go through hours and hours of training before they go on duty. This preparation is essential for their safety and effectiveness. As Followers of Jesus Christ, we too should be prepared for our Great Mission to go and Make Disciples. Our first Response should be to pray! The early church in Acts gives us this example numerous times. One of those examples is found in Acts 4:23-31. If you have not already read this passage, please take a few moments to do so now.

Earlier in Acts 4, Peter and John had been brought before the Jewish Sanhedrin and ordered to stop teaching and preaching about Jesus. Their boldness before them reminded these Jewish leaders of Jesus Himself, when He had stood before them just a few months earlier. The Sanhedrin issued threats in an attempt to intimidate Peter and John into silence and then let them go. But instead of being intimidated, they and the rest of the church will grow in boldness in the days ahead.

As we come to Acts 4:23-24, the two Apostles meet with a group of Believers and tell them what had happened at their appearance before the Sanhedrin. Their First Response is to immediately start a prayer meeting. I must confess, immediate prayer is not always my first response to a challenging situation like this! However, the early church had learned from the example Jesus had set in His life and ministry – and made prayer their First Response. We will take a closer look at their prayer meeting over the next few days.

Another example of prayer as a First Response is found in Acts 16:25. Paul and Silas had found themselves arrested by a mob, falsely accused before the Roman authorities, scourged, and placed in stocks in the deepest part of

the Philippian jail. They had no idea whether they would ever see daylight and freedom again. I can think of several reactions one might have if they were treated like this! However, Paul and Silas' First Response is similar to the Believers in Acts 4: "About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them". (Acts 16:25)

Imagine the impact Paul and Silas' worship and prayer service had on the other men! Their focus was not on their immediate situation. Their focus was on the greatness of God, and so they prayed with boldness to Him. This faith and boldness were not lost on the other prisoners. Many of them may have later responded to the Gospel with Saving Faith. We know the Philippian Jailor and his family will later that morning.

Our boldness as Followers of Jesus Christ is not a matter of being assertive or demanding. Our boldness is a deep-seated confidence in Who God is and who we are in Christ. Our boldness is living the truth in love and sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ – with graciousness and humility. We grow in this boldness when we take time to worship God and pray... as our First Response.

Questions

1. Take a moment to reflect on this question:
Is prayer my first response to the situations I face in life?

To the growing opposition to God and His truth in our culture?
2. What are some of the challenging situations you are facing in life right now?
3. What are some of your 'First Responses' to these situations?
4. How can you develop a deeper sense of God's presence and power in your life and situations?

Prayers

1. Take a few minutes to praise and worship God for Who He is as your Heavenly Father.
2. Ask Him for the grace and desire to grow in making prayer your First Response in life.
3. Take some of those challenging situations in your life to God, asking for the wisdom and grace to respond to them as He wants.

Day 2

Placing our Confidence
in God's Sovereignty

one accord

BOLDNESS

And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them,

Acts 4:24

While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."

Acts 21:10-14

Few things will stimulate the fears and imagination of child like a late-night thunderstorm! The flashes of lightening create shadows of mysterious creatures on the wall as crashes of thunder sound like cannons going off in their room. The howling winds shake the house to its foundations and great danger seems imminent. With a cry of fear the child bolts out of their room and heads for their parent's bedroom. As soon as they enter it, their perspective of their situation begins to change. The bedroom light being turned on dispels the shadows. As the child dives onto the bed their dad's strong arms take hold of them as their mom's soothing voice starts to calm their heart. Yes, the storm is still raging, but the presence of their parents changes their perspective from fear to confidence.

Let's go back to the prayer meeting in Acts 4:23-31. Having made prayer their First Response, this group of Believers now make God's sovereignty their first focus. "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them" (Acts 4:24). It is very interesting to me that they do not start with their situation, but with the greatness and sovereignty of God. He is both creator of and Lord over all creation and everyone in it. A number of years ago an older, experienced pastor told me, 'Len, always see your situation through the lens of Who God is – do not see God through the lens of your situation. 'It was very sound and biblical counsel.

As we continue to read their prayer in verses 25-28, the theme continues to be God's sovereignty in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Jewish leaders and Pilate might have thought they were in control, but in reality, they were fulfilling God's plan of redemption. "To do whatever Your hand and Your plan had predestined to take place.' (Acts 4:28). The small group of Believers in that prayer meeting trusted God with their lives, just as Jesus had His.

The Father has a plan for our lives and His hand directs it. It is easy, like that young child, to feel that the storms around us are in control and they threaten to overwhelm us. And like that child, we need to run, in prayer, into our heavenly Father's presence. When we do, our perspective of life changes dramatically. 'Our Father IN HEAVEN, Holy be Your name'.

As Paul was finishing his Third Missionary in Acts 21, he is determined to go to Jerusalem. Several brothers and sisters in Christ had received a Word from the Lord that imprisonment and worse awaited Paul there. They

assumed that this meant Paul should be warned not to go – and many told him just that.

Take a moment to read Acts 21:10-14 to see Paul's response to these warning. Paul's perspective is different than his companions. This drive to get to Jerusalem had been placed there by God, and by God's grace Paul was determined to go. Arrest and imprisonment were not something to be avoided but the will of God to be embraced.

And we know the rest of the story. God uses Paul's arrest in Jerusalem as the first step in getting him to Rome. While there Paul will share the Gospel with soldiers, members of the royal household and Nero himself.

When the storms rage around us and we run to God as our Father, it is important that we focus on His sovereignty over our lives and situations. When Paul stepped out towards Jerusalem in Acts 21, he did not see all that would happen to get him to Rome – he hadn't seen the rest of his story. When we boldly step into God's will, trusting His sovereignty, we don't see the end of ours either. However, we trust the One Who is writing the story!

Questions

1. How does seeing how God the Father was sovereign over the events and timing of Jesus' life help you see Him as sovereign over yours?
2. When have you thought, 'I am not sure I want God's plan for my life or situation'? How does God's character help you move to trusting Him and His plan?
3. What relationships, situations and future decisions do you need to give over to God?

Prayers

1. Let the words of Psalm 31:1-5 guide you in placing yourself in God's sovereign hands: "In you, O Lord, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me! Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily! Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me! For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name's sake you lead me and guide me; you take me out of the net they have hidden for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God."
2. Ask God to give you His perspective of the situations, relationships, and future decisions you are facing.
3. Take a moment to thank God for His loving faithfulness to you.

Day 3
Boldly Praying Scripture

one accord

BOLDNESS

And now, Lord, look upon
their threats and grant to
your servants to continue to
speak your word with
all boldness,

Acts 4:29

No one can come to me
unless the Father who sent
me draws him. And I will
raise him up on the last day.

John 6:44

but in your hearts honor
Christ the Lord as
holy, always being prepared
to make a defense to anyone
who asks you for a reason
for the hope that is in you;
yet do it with gentleness
and respect,

1 Peter 3:15

"I used to look out this kitchen window and watch you working in the field bringing in hay." Betty Huntington and her husband Bill were dairy farmers I had worked for as a teenager. *"I knew you were having some struggles, and so I prayed for you to find Jesus Christ and accept Him as your Savior."* As she was talking Denise and I, along with our three children (Nathan and Hannah would come along a few years later) were sitting at the kitchen table sipping homemade iced tea. I had just finished my studies at Lancaster Bible College, and we were excited to see where and how God would use us. *"I am very thankful that God answered those prayers! I had no doubt He would."*

"I had no doubt He would" showed that Betty had a deep trust in God that gave her boldness in her praying. This story also reminds me that prayer is not only the First Response of a Believer – it is also the first step and foundation of sharing the Gospel and Making Disciples. When you add the prayers of my grandmother, there was no doubt Jesus would come into my life as Savior!

As we come back to the prayer meeting in Acts 4:23-31, the Believers there pray: And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with boldness" (verse 29). It should be noted that they do not pray for God to change their situation or judge those in opposition to the Gospel. They pray for the boldness to share the Gospel in the midst of the situation they find themselves in. As we find ourselves in a culture that is becoming more and more secular, we need to pray for this same boldness for our witness and proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Believers in Acts 4 are praying for the enabling grace to obey the last words of Jesus in Acts 1:8. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Note that the power to fulfill this charge to be witnesses for Jesus Christ will come from the Holy Spirit. The channel for this enabling grace from the Holy Spirit is prayer.

What do you hear God saying to you so far this week?

One way we can know how to pray for our witness to those who do not yet know Jesus as Savior is to pray Scripture. Here are a few verses you and I can pray:

- *“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.” John 6:44*
We start by asking God to draw the person we are praying for to His Son, Jesus Christ. Also pray for that person to be responsive.
- *“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” 2 Cor. 4:3-4*
No one can respond to the Gospel on their own, for Satan has blinded them to spiritual truth. We should pray for the Lord to remove those blinders and give the person the grace to understand and respond to the Gospel.
- *“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” 2 Peter 3:9*
Sometimes we can find ourselves doubting whether a person will ever respond to the Gospel. We know God wants them to and is being patient with them. Let’s pray for that same patience as we continue to pray for them and share the Gospel as we are given the opportunity.
- *“But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” 1 Peter 3:15*
Now it is time to pray for ourselves. Pray that your life will be a reflection of Christ and that your life will also reflect the hope Jesus gives in all moments and situations. Pray that when given the opportunity, you will share the Gospel with clarity with a spirit of gentleness and respect.
- *“And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness”*
And we come full circle as we pray for boldness in our witness and sharing.

Remember, when we pray Scripture, we know we are praying within the will of God!

Do you need more boldness in being a witness for Jesus Christ?
Your first step to gaining that boldness takes place on your knees.

Questions

1. Who are some of the people God has used to help you come to and grow in your relationship with Jesus Christ?
How did God use them?
2. Who are some of the people in your life who need the Gospel?
How are you engaged in their lives? Are you praying for them?
3. What are some of things that cause you to hesitate to share the Gospel? How could you pray for God's help?

Prayers

1. Take a moment to thank God for your salvation, and the people He used to draw you to Jesus.
2. Take a moment to list some of the people you know who need to come to Jesus as Savior.
3. Using the Scriptures listed in the devotional, pray for them now.
4. Ask God to provide the opportunity to share the Gospel with them. This includes opportunities to engage with them; to display the love of Jesus to them; share the Gospel with them.
5. Ask God for discernment, clarity and boldness in your witness to these people.

Day 4

Seeking and Yielding
to the Holy Spirit's Power

one accord

BOLDNESS

while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

Acts 4:30-31

But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

Acts 5:29-32

One of the greatest experiences we can have as Believers is to be present when the Holy Spirit ‘fills’ a room! When a prayer gathering, or ministry endeavor becomes extraordinary and the Holy Spirit’s presence and power is manifested in a unique way. I have been privileged to have had a few of these moments in my walk with God. They are truly life changing! And each time this has happened, prayer has been in the center of that moment. It cannot be programed or planned for.

The Believers attending the prayer meeting in Acts 4:23-31 experience this moment, as the Holy Spirit fills the room – and them – with His presence and power! Take a moment to read this story one more time, and as you do, try to place yourself in that room. What would you be thinking and feeling in that moment?

Yesterday, we saw these Believers asking God for boldness in sharing the Gospel. However, they know that this boldness will not come from themselves, but from God Himself. So, in verse 30 we see them ask, *“While You stretch out Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.”* In these early days of the church, God was choosing to use outward miracles to display His presence and power in and through Believers. God still manifests His presence and power through us today, even if He chooses not to do so through outward miracles, but through our transformed lives and love for each other. The point of this prayer is this – any real boldness and effectiveness in our witness for Jesus Christ will come from the enabling grace of God in our lives. We receive that grace through prayer.

God answers this prayer for grace enabled boldness immediately: *“And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.”* That boldness lasted beyond that moment.

Over the next several weeks the Apostles and others continued to preach the Gospel and God continued to empower them. So as we come to Acts 5: 12-14 we learn, *“Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon’s Portico. None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women”*. As a result, the Sanhedrin have them arrested and

imprisoned. But that night, an angel of the Lord opens the doors and bring them out. The next morning finds them in the Temple sharing the Gospel. The Apostles are brought before the Sanhedrin and reprimanded for disobeying their order to cease sharing about Jesus. They reply, *"We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him"* (Acts 5:29-32). The Jewish leaders have the men beaten and then released. Acts 5:41-42 tells us: *"Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus."* That is Holy Spirit given boldness!

It is good to remember that these are the same men who had denied Jesus (Peter) and deserted Him as He was being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. This fearfulness continued through Resurrection Sunday. The difference? It starts with seeing the Resurrected Jesus Christ and knowing He is alive! But Jesus Himself had told them to prayerfully wait for promised Holy Spirit to enter them before starting their mission to Make Disciples as His Witnesses (Acts 1:4-5, 8). Prayerfully seeking and yielding to the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit brings the boldness we need to fulfill our mission to Make Disciples as we are His Witnesses. If these men were transformed and empowered by prayerfully seeking the power of God through the Holy Spirit, so can we.

As we have seen this week, we can prayerfully seek and receive the boldness we need to share the Gospel.

- Making Prayer our First Response
- Placing our Confidence in God's Sovereignty
- Boldly Praying Scripture
- Seeking and Yielding to the Holy Spirit's Power

Questions

1. When you place yourself in the prayer meeting in Acts 4:23-31, how are you responding to this moment?
What are you thinking and feeling?
2. When have you experienced the presence and power of God in a unique, life changing way?
3. How and when have you experienced God's boldness in your witness for Jesus Christ?
What happened?
4. How might you pray for this God-given boldness to increase in your life?

Prayers

1. Place yourself in Acts 4:23-31 and pray verses 29-30.
2. Pray for the things you listed in response to question #4 above.
3. Pray for the same people you did yesterday – those who need to come to Jesus Christ as Savior. Ask God to show you how He wants to empower and use you as a witness to them.
4. Ask God to use you and the entire Grace Church Family to experience this kind of Holy Spirit empowered boldness and effectiveness in reaching our community with the Gospel.

Day 5

one accord

Worship

As we finish up our week, some of us may be a little tired. Some may be ready for the weekend to enjoy some rest and relaxation. While some of us may have been in different circumstances that required us to be bold. Our hope this week is that you have prayed earnestly for boldness and now as we look to gather as a body of believers on Sunday morning, we are going to be worshiping together in boldness.

In Acts 16:16-40, we find Paul and Silas being stripped and beaten and thrown in jail. The jailer was ordered to make sure that they did not escape, so he put Paul and Silas' feet in stocks. What landed them in jail was the act of healing a demon-possessed slave girl. So, here is Paul and Silas placed in the inner dungeon, locked up tight and not able to move freely. This place and punishment was reserved for the most dangerous prisoners. Despite the dismal situation that they found themselves in, Paul and Silas still were praying and praising God boldly.

While they were praying and praising God boldly, there was a massive earthquake that immediately caused all the doors to fly open and all the chains to fall off every prisoner. Now THAT is worshipping in boldness. Despite where they found themselves and the awfulness of the situation, Paul and Silas still boldly praised God and prayed to Him because they knew that only God could deliver them.

A definition of boldness according to dictionary.com is as follows: a refusal to be held back by the opinion or judgment of others. When Paul and Silas were confronted and eventually thrown into prison they could have very easily admitted that they were wrong and renounced what they had done. Instead, they boldly accepted their fate and worshipped in boldness. When the prison doors flew open and the chains fell, they could have very easily fled without regard of what happened to everyone else in the prison but they stayed even when everyone wanted them in prison or kicked out of town.

Hebrews 10:19-22a says, "And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can **boldly** enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. By His death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting Him."

Because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross and His resurrection, we can now enter Heaven's Most Holy Place with boldness! God loves us so much, that He sent His son to die the most gruesome death in order that we might be saved! Hallelujah!

The only response that we should have to that news is to worship in boldness. Not caring what others think of us when we boldly worship but instead caring that we are worshiping God fully and that He alone receives our worship!

What does boldness in worship look like? you may be asking yourself. Well, it may look like this:

- 1) Singing loudly while not caring what others think of your singing voice
- 2) Raising your hands in surrender to our Savior while singing
- 3) Praying out loud in public
- 4) Giving sacrificially of your time and money
- 5) Serving humbly those that in no way, shape, or form can repay you

The Saturday ✓ Checkup

How did you see God work in your heart, your life, or in the world around you this week?

Questions

1. How would you have responded if you were in Paul and Silas's place?
2. When have you worshiped in boldness in the midst of suffering and strife?
3. Have you ever witnessed someone worshiping in boldness? How did that impact you personally?

Prayers

1. Pray for God to increase your boldness as you worship.
2. Ask God to show you how you can worship in boldness even in the midst of trials.
3. Ask God to use your boldness to encourage and edify other believers when we gather as a spiritual family.

Day 8

**Some spiritual men should aspire to the office
of overseer if they are above reproach**

one accord

Leaders

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil

1 Timothy 3:1-7

A penny saved is a penny earned. Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise. The early bird gets the worm. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. These are all proverbial sayings. And they contain nuggets of wisdom passed down through the years. It seems that as the Apostle Paul neared the end of his life, he liked to share “trustworthy sayings.” These are short statements that communicate powerful truths. There are 5 of these trustworthy sayings in the Pastoral Epistles (1& 2 Timothy, Titus).

This particular saying in verse 1 tells us that it is good to have a desire to be an overseer. Today, we would call these men Elders in the church. There should be an inner calling to this role. The Holy Spirit will provide that leading. Then the church either affirms the calling or not. But it is not good for someone to serve in this office under compulsion as Peter tells us. (1Peter 5:2)

Of course, even those who do not think much of themselves may be called to take on a leadership role among the people of God. Do you recall that Moses was reluctant to go back to Egypt and lead God’s people out of slavery? And yet clearly God was calling him to do that. And God was also the one who equipped him to carry out that task. “Then the LORD said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.” (Exodus 4:11-12) And even with God’s equipping, Moses wanted someone else to do the job!

Paul also points out that this office is a noble task. This is about shepherding the flock of God. It is a role underneath the Chief Shepherd Jesus. So of course it is a noble role! And because of seriousness of the role, an overseer must be “above reproach.” Everything that follows is a description of what being above reproach looks like.

No one is sinless, except for Jesus. Even Paul considering himself the “chief of sinners” which is stated in another trustworthy saying in 1 Timothy 1:15. We are not sinless, but we should sin less. And we should not be dominated by nor determined to sin. Elders must be “above reproach.”

Now I just wish I understood what “a stitch in time saves nine” means!

Questions

1. What are the other 4 trustworthy sayings in the Pastoral Epistles?
2. Why is it important for an overseer to feel called to this position?
3. What is the difference between desiring the role and being called to the role?

Prayers

1. Pray that the Lord would call men to serve him faithfully as Elders and that those men would be willing to serve.
2. Pray for our Pastors and Elders, that they would be men who are “above reproach.”
3. Pray that the Lord would provide guidance and wisdom to the Elders as they consider pastoral staffing at Grace Church.

Day 9

**Wise spiritual leaders know they need prayer,
and they ask for it!**

one accord

Leaders

Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

Hebrews 13:18-19

Whenever I have had my cars worked on, the mechanic usually asks me if I want a genuine part or an after market part. Those genuine parts come directly from the car manufacture. And they cost more. But presumably, the quality is also higher. So I typically get talked right into it! After all, I tell myself, I would hate to have the same problem a year later because I went cheap! Genuine is best!

Just a few verses earlier, the write of Hebrews says “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.” Leaders must have a genuine faith worth imitating or else they should not lead. They are on display in order to be “considered.”

And yet, they face the same temptations and trials that other Christians face. They have to fight the flesh with its sinful desires. They are the targets of Satan. It is not uncommon for me to hear about Christians taking up ministry roles or leadership roles in the church only to find that spiritual attack follows them into it. And so, good leaders know that they are stronger in faith through the prayers of those who lift them up to the Lord. None of us is sufficient in ourselves.

In Hebrews 13:18-19, the writer declares a clear conscience and a desire to act honorably. We have been disappointed so often with leaders who hide secret sins that would disqualify them from serving. I am sometimes surprised how often Paul had to lay out his credentials as a genuine Apostle of Jesus Christ. “For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.” 1 Timothy 2:7. And this is what followers need to know: that their leaders have integrity and moral authority.

The writer asks for prayer in order to see this church soon. Presumably, there is fruitful ministry that needs to be accomplished. But on a personal level it is good to be with the family of the church. We all need friends!

Verse 19 is a reminder that leaders frequently feel distant from the church. That includes both physical and emotional distance. “It can be lonely in leadership” is a common refrain. No leader is immune from loneliness, and fortunately, the church is a family. Leaders and followers are being transformed together into the image of Christ. And yet, we must pray for them to have healthy relationships in the church. They need friends and mentors and accountability partners. Pray for these things. Pray for a strong relationship of love between leaders and followers.

Questions

1. Why did the Apostle Paul sometimes insist on his credentials and clear conscience?
2. Why is it important for church leaders to lead lives of integrity and morality?

Prayers

1. Pray for church leaders, that they would be men and women of integrity and moral uprightness.
2. Pray that our church leaders would have healthy, vibrant relationships that protect them from isolation.

Day 10

**Wise political leaders make important decisions
that contribute to a peaceful society**

one accord

Leaders

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

1 Timothy 2:1-4

Most of us have experienced an out of control classroom. This happens when a teacher doesn't discipline the students, and/or students refuse to obey their teacher. I remember in fourth grade, a student could crawl to the other side of the classroom and have a conversation with another student, unnoticed by the teacher who was at her desk. I was shocked that the teacher was oblivious and that the student was disrespectful. On the other hand, I had a biology teacher that played classical music before and sometime during tests so that we might relax and focus.

Leaders play a large role in the shaping of a society. Their decisions have large scale consequences. Paul makes it clear in our text that we are to pray for our leaders, which includes the ones we do not like or agree with. We do this for two reasons.

The first reason to pray is so that we might live a peaceful and quiet life. Christ is the "Prince of Peace" and promotes it not only in our hearts, but even on the societal level. Although there is much tumult in the world today, we all know that it is best for adults and children to be able to live in peace. Some of the most shocking and distressing photography includes the effects of war on children. And it is governmental leaders who make choices that impact people of all ages.

The other reason to pray for our leaders is because God desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. All people. Like our President and Governor. Like the members of Congress. How good it would be to be governed by genuine Christ followers who apply biblical wisdom that leads to peace.

But there is yet another implication here: a peaceful society makes the spread of the Gospel easier. For the persecuted church in various parts of the world, their Gospel witness must be careful lest they suffer at the hands of the government or violent citizens. I remember hearing the story of an Egyptian woman who was scarred when someone threw acid on her face while she was riding a bus. This happened because she is a Christian. In a peaceful society, that would not (or should not) happen.

And so having freedom of religion contributes to the spread of the Gospel. That does not mean that the Gospel is bound for it can spread in the unlikelyest of place in the unlikelyest of people. So we pray for our leaders so that freedom and peace may continue and so that the Gospel might spread uninhibited.

What do you hear God saying to you so far this week?

Questions

1. What does a peaceful and quiet life look like?
2. How does a peaceful and quiet life contribute to the spread of the Gospel?

Prayers

1. Pray for our political leaders, that they would govern with wisdom and come to a knowledge of the truth of the Gospel.
2. Pray that our society would be increasingly peace filled and Gospel filled.

Day 11

Be encouraged!

God is the ruler over all earthly rulers!

one accord

Leaders

Daniel answered and said:
“Blessed be the name of God
forever and ever, to whom
belong wisdom and might.
He changes times and
seasons; he removes kings
and sets up kings; he gives
wisdom to the wise and
knowledge to those who
have understanding; he
reveals deep and hidden
things; he knows what is in
the darkness, and the light
dwells with him. To you, O
God of my fathers, I give
thanks and praise, for you
have given me wisdom and
might, and have now made
known to me what we asked
of you, for you have made
known to us the king's
matter.” while

Daniel 2:20-23

I admit that I am more tempted to pray for the demise of political leaders than for their success. (Unless I voted for them) Yes, I am influenced by our current political climate. I am sure you are as well in various ways. It is so easy to become spiteful when leaders do not lead in the ways that we prefer. Or in the ways of true justice and wisdom.

But then I remember Daniel who was placed in incredibly challenging political positions by King Nebuchadnezzar, who was not a nice guy to say the least! In this case, the king had a troubling dream and demanded to know the details of the dream and its interpretation or else the wise men would be executed. None of them could do that. Nobody had the answers...except the God whom Daniel worshipped! And this passage declares the superiority of God over all earthly rulers and kings. It declares the wisdom that comes from God through prayer.

It is God's wisdom that our leaders desperately need. There is a measure of darkness that all leaders walk through, and it is only the light of God's wisdom and knowledge that can change the course of our world. And so we will pray that our leaders would turn to that wisdom. And we also share it like Daniel as the Lord gives us opportunity.

We are very aware that there is another kind of wisdom at work in the world: earthly wisdom. James 3:15 tells us this wisdom is "earthly, unspiritual, demonic." As our culture embraces this kind of wisdom and touts it as truth, we continue to pray that blinders will be removed from our leaders and fellow citizens. That our country would turn to the Lord as never before!

We are also confident that the Lord sets up and removes our political leaders, even in a democratic society. Even in our frustration, we can believe the truth that God is sovereign over elections and votes. And so this turns our frustrations into blessings. We bless the name of the Lord forever and ever! We give thanks and praise because He has shared His wisdom and understanding with humanity. We can sleep at night because God is in charge!

All of this causes us to be humble before the Lord and respectful to people. We don't have all the political answers. God does! We didn't discover true knowledge. The fear of the Lord led us there. So let us be humbled and praise the Lord "to whom belong wisdom and might."

Questions

1. What words or phrases stood out to you in the Daniel passage?
2. How does God's power and wisdom and sovereignty help you in today's political climate?

Prayers

1. Give thanks to God and praise Him for his amazing power and wisdom and knowledge.
2. Pray that the church might display the wisdom and knowledge of God in how we speak and live.

one accord

Worship

Have you ever been in a group working on a project, whether for school or for work and no one steps up to be a leader? How hard was it when everyone was just doing what they thought should be done instead of working together to accomplish the task? Our spiritual lives are exactly the same. We can be doing what we think should be done when in reality it is leading to nothing.

As we close out our week of praying for leaders, we will be preparing ourselves to worship in a way that it leads. What I mean by this is that our worship will lead ourselves, others, and the world into viewing Christ as our loving Savior and the hope for this world. We often view worship with our own preconceived notions that it is the music of our own liking. Instead, we need to learn that worship is everything that we do. I often jokingly tell people that my Sunday afternoons are busy with taking a nap to the glory of God.

I am sure that you noticed this part of Paul's letter to the church in Colosse was all that our lives should look like as a Christ-follower. When we were apart from Christ, our worship looked more like worshiping idols of the world. Paul is telling us that now that we are in Christ, we are all new creations. So we are to put off our old selves and walk in the righteousness of Christ.

Colossians 3:12-17 says this:

*"Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful. Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. **And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.**"*

This is a great charge for the church today. We are to clothe ourselves with mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. When we do this, we are worshiping Jesus.

Finally, as we gather to worship as the Body of Christ, let us remember how our attitudes and lives model true Christian worship to ourselves, each other, and the world.

Questions

1. What part of Colossians 3:1-17 is the easiest for you?
What part is the hardest?
2. When have you felt closest to God while worshiping?
3. Have you ever noticed your worship being directed to an idol of this world/culture?

Prayers

1. Pray that God would reveal to you anything that is hindering you from fully worshiping Him in everything that you do.
2. Ask God to put people in your life that can hold you accountable and help you worship Christ in all areas of your life.
3. Pray and ask God to increase your signs of love (mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and forgiveness) for Him and for other people.

The Saturday ✓ Checkup

How did you see God work in your heart, your life, or in the world around you this week?

Day 15
God is the Giver of Freedom

one accord
Freedom

“When Peter came to himself, he said, ‘Now I am sure **that the Lord has sent His angel and rescued me** from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting’”

Acts 12:11

In 1962 Frank Morris and siblings John and Clarence Anglin escaped from the infamous island prison Alcatraz in San Francisco Bay. With the help of sharpened spoons, old saw blades, and an improvised electric drill they widened the ventilation hole in their cells enough to squeeze through. To deceive the guards, they made “doll heads”, using locks of real hair stolen from the barber shop, to place in their beds. Through the vent, they made it to the roof of the building, to the ground using the bakery chimney, bypassing the night patrols and climbed over the fence. On the northeastern part of the island, they launched rafts made out of piles of raincoats inflated with a concertina (a small accordion) and disappeared. They either escaped, living out their lives under an assumed name, or they drowned in the sea . . . or maybe became shark food.

READ: Acts 12:1-17

Escaping from a prison cell is no simple task. In Acts 12, the Apostle Peter is imprisoned in Jerusalem by King Herod as a result of a violent raid on the church during which James, the brother of John, was killed. Peter was delivered over to four squads of soldiers, 2 of which slept beside him, bound with two chains, and sentries guarding the prison door. If that’s not locked up tight, I don’t know what is. Peter was being kept in this “maximum security” prison overnight, to be brought out to the people in the morning, more than likely to be killed.

Although Peter was in an *inescapable situation*, God intervened. During the night, Peter was awoken by an angel who struck him on the side, the chains that bound his hands fell off, he took time to put clothes and sandals on, he was led by the angel past the guards and through an iron gate (that opened on its own), where he walked freely on the streets of the Jerusalem!!!! Peter’s escape was so unimaginable that he wasn’t sure whether what he had experienced was real of a dream or vision.

In Acts 12:11 Peter gives an explanation for his miraculous escape saying, “I am sure that ***the Lord has sent His angel and rescued me***” (cf Acts 12:17)! It was the Lord who sent an angel. It was the Lord who caused the chains to fall of Peter’s hands. It was the Lord who allowed Peter to walk, unseen and unheard, past a host of guards. It was the Lord who opened the gate that allowed him to return back to the streets of Jerusalem. Truly a miraculous escape!!!

There was something else going on during Peter's miraculous escape. The account of Peter's escape is sandwiched between members of the church praying. The night of Peter's arrest Acts 12:5 says that, "earnest prayer for him was being made to God by the church". In Acts 12:12, after Peter's escape, he went to Mary's house, "where many were gathered together and were praying". Based on these passages, it is evident that from the moment Paul was imprisoned, until he was set free, the church was praying fervently for him and his escape.

No matter what prison we might be in, no matter what chains we might be experiencing life, ***God alone is the One who is able to rescue us***, give us the ability to escape, and set us free. Is there anything in life that you feel like you are locked up tight in a prison with no escape? A sin that has you bound in its chains? God is the one who can set you free . . . it is our job to pray and ask Him to rescue us, to help us escape, and to give us the freedom that we so desperately want and need.

Questions

1. Is there anything in your own life that you feel imprisoned and need to be set free?
2. Who do you know that is currently imprisoned by sin and needs to be set free?

Prayers

1. Pray and ask God to rescue you from any sin or situation in which you feel imprisoned.
2. Pray for someone you know who needs to be set free.
3. Pray and thank God for His power and ability to set you free.

Day 16
God Frees Us From
the Penalty of Sin

one accord
Freedom

“If the Son sets you free, you
will be free indeed”

John 8:36

People in our culture today are fighting for freedom. People are fighting for the freedom to choose whether or not to wear a mask. People are fighting for the freedom to choose whether or not to be vaccinated. People are fighting for the freedom to choose whether or not to have an abortion. People are fighting for the freedom to choose what gender they want to be. People are fighting for the freedom to choose their definition of marriage. Some of the freedoms we are fighting for are more trivial than others, but one thing is clear, ***we ALL like our freedom!***

We all want freedom, but sadly there are many “freedoms” that we are fighting for that are not based on the truth of Scripture. The freedom that all humanity is guilty of fighting for is a freedom without any authority above themselves. We all wrongly desire the freedom to choose how WE want to live, completely independent of any law outside of ourselves. This freedom sounds attractive and appealing, but it has eternal consequences in a world created by a holy God. Adam and Eve were the first to “fight” for this “freedom” in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:16-17, 3:1-7). In an attempt to “escape” the “prison” Satan deceived Adam and Eve into believing they were in, they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that God had told them not to. The taste of “freedom” that Adam and Eve thought would bring happiness and satisfaction, instead ended up locking them in a real prison of guilt, shame, and ultimately death and separation from their holy Creator.

READ: John 8:31-38

Jesus’ words in John 8:24 echo what God spoke to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden when He said, ***“unless you believe that I am He you will die in your sins”***. Jesus made this statement while He was talking to a Jewish audience about His departure from this earth (8:21), His oneness with the Father (8:26-30), and His upcoming crucifixion and death on the cross (8:28). Jesus made this statement as an invitation to be released from the prison that Satan deceived Adam and Eve to live in. Satan offered to Adam and Eve a false freedom, whereas Jesus (like God had in the Garden of Eden) offered a true freedom (8:32). Satan offered a freedom that was based on a lie, whereas Jesus offered a freedom based on God’s word.

According to Jesus, it is ***sin that enslaves us*** (8:34). It is not God's words (His law) that enslave us, it is our disobedience against God's words (sin) that enslave us (Romans 6:16). By rejecting and rebelling against God's words in a pursuit of ultimate personal freedom, we destine ourselves to a life opposed to a holy God and subject ourselves to His eternal judgment. Satan wants us to believe that rejecting God is freedom, but the truth is, rejecting God actually locks us out from the joy of His presence, His goodness, and His love.

The good news is . . . ***Jesus Christ offers Himself as the key*** that can unlock the door and set us free from the prison of sin that enslaves us. By believing that Jesus Christ is God Himself, we can be SET FREE from the guilt and shame of our sin. By believing that Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sin on the cross, we can be SET FREE to be in His holy presence forever in eternity. Are you locked in a prison of sin? Are you longing to experience freedom? Believe in what is true about Jesus Christ and, . . .

“you will be (set) free indeed”!

Questions

1. Is there a “freedom” that you are fighting for that is not based on the truth of God’s Word?
2. What are some ways Satan has deceived you into believing that rejecting God’s word is “freedom”?
3. Have you ever believed in Jesus Christ and experienced the freedom that He offers?
How does it feel to be set free from sin?

Prayers

1. Ask God to reveal any sin you have in your life that is preventing you from experience the freedom He has offered.
2. Ask God to reveal the truth to you about who Jesus is and what He did to bring freedom into your life.
3. Thank God for setting you free from the penalty of sin through the crucifixion and death on the cross of His Son Jesus Christ.

Day 17
God Frees Us From
the Power of Sin

one accord
Freedom

“having been set free from
sin, (we) have become slaves
of righteousness.”

Romans 6:18

I (David) loved sports growing up, so having a dad as an elementary school gym teacher was the best. It was especially great because my dad had the keys to the gym, and so I was free to use the jump ropes, scooters, and dodge balls that my friends could not. Despite the privileges, I remember an incident when I learned the hard way that I was not above the rules. One day, my dad allowed a group of students to stay after school and play volleyball together. While we were playing, in an attempt to show off, I used my feet to pass the ball rather than my hands. To my dad, this was a volleyball “sin”, he immediately stopped the game, and told everyone to go home. On the way home, my dad reminded me of the importance of playing the game of volleyball (or any game for that matter) the way it was designed to be played.

READ: Romans 6:1-2, 12-23

God created the “game” of life and He intends for it to be “played” in the way He designed it . . . in righteousness. Although our heavenly Father possesses the keys that grant us access to grace and forgiveness, that does not give us the liberty to continue living a life of sin. As believers in Christ, who have been set free from sin, we are not to abuse or misuse the way God designed our lives to be lived. We were created to live under His loving authority and law, not free from it. Paul asks in Romans 6:1-2 that since we are saved by grace, “are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” In other words, **can we allow the power of sin to continue having control over our lives?** Paul’s blunt answer is, “ABSOLUTELY NOT”. The true freedom that God provides through Jesus Christ does not only set us free from the penalty of sin, it also sets us free from the power of sin.

Freedom from the power of sin demands us to willingly enslave ourselves to God. Sin is not to rule and reign over us (6:12). Sin is not to have dominion over us (6:14). Instead, we are to surrender, we are to wave the white flag, we are to put our hands up in defeat, we are to hand over the weapons we used to fight for our freedom, we are to turn ourselves in, and we are to walk unresisting into a jail cell of obedience to God. When we surrender ourselves to the law that God has established for life, when we submit ourselves to His gracious rule and reign, when we enslave ourselves to Him, THAT is when we experience the freedom we were created for, . . . the *freedom to obey!*

John expresses our freedom from the power of sin in 1 John 3:6-10 saying, “No one who abides in Him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.”

Romans 6:22 says, “Now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.” The fruit that Adam and Eve enjoyed in their fight for “freedom” from God led to death, whereas the fruit that believers enjoy by enslaving ourselves to God leads to eternal life. May we not play the game of life by our own law, but by the law established by God that leads result in righteousness and leads to eternal life!

What do you hear God saying to you so far this week?

Questions

1. Is there any sin that you are allowing to rule and reign in your life?
2. Have you enslaved yourself to God to the point where you are free to obey Him?
3. Do you look forward to tasting the fruit of eternal life as a result of enslaving yourself to God?

Prayers

1. Ask God to help you resist sin and not allow it to have dominion over you.
2. Ask God to help you live a life of righteousness, willingly enslaved to Him.
3. Thank God for the fruit of eternal life that He has given to you.

Day 18

God Frees Us For the Purpose of Loving Servanthood

one accord
Freedom

“You were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another”

Galatians 5:13

I (David) experienced true freedom for the first time as a teenage counselor at East Iowa Bible Camp. As a counselor, I served a cabin of 7-8 boys each week in an effort to bless them, to bring them joy, and to demonstrate the love of Christ to them. I served them by taking them to the pond to ride paddle boats and go fishing. I served them by pushing them on the tire swing. I served them by allowing them to dunk me under the water at the swimming pool. Although serving in this way was challenging and exhausting, I remember doing it willingly, ultimately motivated by gratitude for what Jesus Christ had done for me!

John Piper says it this way, “loving service is motivated by the joy of sharing our fullness, but the works of the flesh are motivated by the desire to fill our emptiness”. ***God sets us free from the penalty and the power of sin in order to give us a new eternal purpose!*** Once God unlocks the prison door of sin and selfishness in our lives, and we are truly free indeed, we are released to share our joy with others.

READ: Galatians 5:1, 13-14

Servanthood is enslaving ourselves to loving others. A slave has no rights of their own. A slave does not make choices for themselves. A slave is obligated to do their master’s will. In the context of Paul explaining that a believer in Christ is free from the law and is not to, “submit again to a yoke of slavery” he tells the Galatians to use their new found freedom for the purpose of slavery. Where does he say that? The word translated “serve” in Galatians 5:13 comes from the same Greek word δουλος, used in Galatians 5:1, which means “slave”. Sounds like a contradiction, but the Galatians were to use their freedom in Christ to “serve (enslave themselves to) one another” through love. We who are free in Christ serve others by willingly enslaving ourselves to love them.

Ironically, through this paradox of being set free from the law and by serving others with love the, “whole law is fulfilled” (Lev. 19:18; Mt. 22:36-40; Lk. 6:27-36; Rom. 13:8-10; Jms. 2:8). In any and all moments, when we are serving others through love, we are at the same time abiding by the laws and the commands of God. When Christ has set us free, obeying God’s law and commands is no longer a duty or an obligation, but a service we willingly and lovingly offer to our neighbor (5:14).

In teaching His disciples what it means to be great, Jesus said in Matthew 20:26-28, “whoever would be great among you must be your ***servant***, and whoever would be first among you must be your ***slave***, even as ***the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve***, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” According to Jesus’ words and example, greatness is achieved by serving and enslaving ourselves to others. Our motivation in serving others should not be to achieve greatness, but rather, to be like Jesus Christ who came to lovingly serving us. And when we do, we will experience all the freedom that we are looking for and that God created us to enjoy.

Questions

1. In what ways has Jesus Christ lovingly served you? What can you learn from Jesus' example of loving servanthood toward you?
2. Who are some of the people in your life that God wants you to enslave yourself to and serve through love?
3. What are some ways you try to demonstrate the love of Christ to others by serving them?

Prayers

1. Thank God for the ways He has lovingly served you through Jesus Christ.
2. Ask God to open your eyes to the ways you can lovingly serve others around you.
3. Ask God to help you see the eternal purpose of serving and enslaving yourself to others through acts of love.

one accord *Worship*

Freedom is one of those things that everyone longs to have but often finds out, the hard way, that it's the very thing that we should do without. There are two different freedoms that people can have. The first leads down a road of destruction while the other leads us into everlasting life.

Since the very beginning, we have been trying to find our own freedom apart from God. We see clearly in Genesis 3 that instead of worshiping God for everything provided to them, Adam and Eve instead followed the words of the serpent and tried to find freedom apart from God.

Adam and Eve's freedom that they were following led them down the road of destruction. What I mean by this is that they were following freedom apart from God. Apart from His perfect will. This may have been the first time that humans tried to find freedom apart from God but it would definitely not be the last time. The funny thing about "finding freedom" apart from God, we end up in bondage to sin. So, we are not truly finding freedom apart from God.

When we talk about the freedom that leads us into everlasting life, we are talking about the freedom that we find in Christ. Galatians 5:1 says this, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free..." What is this freedom that Christ has set us free for then? Christ came to set us free, not free to do whatever we want because that would lead us back into "freedom" apart from God. Instead, when we are in Christ we are now free and able to do what was impossible before, to live unselfishly.

When we are living in the freedom of Christ we have no other thing to do but to worship Him. He bought our freedom with His sacrifice on the cross. He is our mediator. A.W. Tozer said this, "We are saved to worship God. All that Christ has done in the past and all that He is doing now leads to this one end." So, the reason that we were saved and now find freedom in Christ is so that we worship God.

Remember, when we worship God, we do so with our whole lives. Worship is not just the music we sing together on Sunday mornings. Worship is everything that we do day in and day out. Another great quote by A.W. Tozer is this, "If you're not worshiping God on Monday the way you did the day before, perhaps you're not worshiping him at all." To put it simply, when we worship in freedom, we worship each and every day in everything we do with everything that we have because we have freedom in Christ. We are free from the wages of sin. We are free from the slavery we once knew and thought was personal freedom.

When we worship in the freedom that we have in Christ we are showing the world and those around us the Gospel. We are showing them the hope that we have in Christ. Our natural response to what Christ has done for us is and should be to worship Him.

The Saturday ✓ Checkup

How did you see God work in your heart, your life, or in the world around you this week?

Questions

1. How did Adam and Eve try to find their own “freedom” apart from God?
2. When did you find freedom in Christ?
Did you feel a weight lifted as you found that freedom?
3. How is your worship?
Are you worshiping God in everything you do?
4. Do you feel like your natural response is to worship God in every circumstance?

Prayers

1. Pray to find true freedom in Christ.
2. Ask God to show areas in your life where you need to put Him first.
3. Thank God for the freedom in Christ that you experience.
4. Ask God for opportunities to share the hope of Christ with those that do not know freedom in Christ.

My Notes