

Grace Church

21 Days of Prayer & Fasting
Daily Devotional Guide 2018



Deepening our
Relationship with God

John 17

Grace Church

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Grace Church,

We have all heard that Christianity is not a religion, but a **relationship**. Christianity is not a list of do's and don'ts, but rather a real, intimate, personal relationship with God. From the very beginning, when God created humanity in His image, His greatest desire was to have an eternal, uninterrupted, personal relationship with us. And yet, for many of us, even seasoned believers, relating with God personally is a mystery. How are we to have a personal relationship with someone we cannot hear, see, or touch? How are we to relate with a God, who at times, seems so distant and unknowable? What efforts does God make to personally relate with us? Over the next 21 days, we are going to be using Jesus' High Priestly prayer in John 17 to learn how God relates with us so we can better relate with Him.

Take a moment right now to read Jesus' High Priestly prayer in John 17:1-26. As you read, see if you can identify and underline 7 specific ways that Jesus reported to His Father how He had related with His disciples. Here's a hint, pay attention to the times Jesus says, "I . . ." did this or "I . . ." did that . . .

¹When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, ²since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. ⁵And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

⁶"I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. ⁸For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. ¹²While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. ¹⁴I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵I do not

ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

²⁰“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. ²⁴Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

Did you find them? In Jesus’ prayer to His Father in John 17 He describes 7 specific ways He related, and continued to relate, with those He intentionally disciplined. Jesus prayed to His Father and reported to Him that He related with His disciples by 1) **manifesting His presence to them** (17:6), by 2) **giving them His Word** (17:6), by 3) **praying on their behalf** (17:9), by 4) **keeping them in His name** (17:12), by 5) **sending them on a mission** (17:18), by 6) **sanctifying them** (17:17, 19), and by 7) **giving them His glory** (17:22). If you did not find them all, take a few minutes and go back and underline them in the text.

These 7 specific ways that Jesus related with His disciples are the ways God desires to relate with us! Jesus’ example of how He related with His disciples is how we can expect God to make effort to relate with us. If you’ve never had a relationship with God, if you are struggling in your relationship with God, or if you just need some encouragement in your relationship with God, use this devotional over the next 21 days and **invite God to personally relate with you** in way that you’ve never experienced before.

Scripture is clear that God wants a personal relationship with you, the questions is, **do you want a personal relationship with Him?** Enjoy the next 21 days of “Relating with God”!

Pastor David Gross, Len Thebarger, Andy McLellan

Grace Church 21 Days of Corporate Fasting and Prayer

Grace Church's time of corporate fasting and prayer begins on ***Sunday, February 4*** and continues through ***Sunday, February 25***.

Corporate Event:

You are encouraged to join us:

Tuesdays Fasts

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

Corporate fast dates include . . .

Tuesday, February 6

Tuesday, February 13

Tuesday, February 20

Chili Bowl

Sunday, February 25

5-7pm

In the Activity Center

Fasting on each of these Tuesdays 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 Tuesdays, you are welcome to choose another day of the week to seek God through fasting and prayer.

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 deepening our relationship with Him.

Fasting encourages a deeper relationship with God by demonstrating our HUMILITY before Him. (Ezra 8:21; Psalm 69:10)

Fasting encourages a deeper relationship with God through our REPENTENCE and CONFESSION of sin. (1 Samuel 7:6; 1 Kings 21:27)

Fasting encourages a deeper relationship with God by acknowledging our sole DEPENDENCE on Him. (Deuteronomy 8:2-3; Matthew 4:1-4)

Fasting encourages a deeper relationship with God by helping us to discern His WILL and DIRECTION in our lives. (Judges 20:26-28; Acts 13:1-3)

Fasting encourages a deeper relationship with God by increasing our appetite to PRAY. (Mark 1:35)

Fasting encourages a deeper relationship with God by increasing our appetite for Him and His WORD. (Matthew 4:1-4; John 4:31-35)

What are some different ways to fast?

These pages contain some suggestions from Dr. Elmer Towns's book *The Daniel Fast for Spiritual Breakthrough*. (Used by permission)

Fasting Suggestions

Eliminate one meal a day and pray during that mealtime.

Eliminate two meals a day, and pray during their times.

Eliminate all desserts.

Eliminate all rich, superfluous foods eaten only for pleasure.

Eat only necessities, and only during mealtime (no snacks).

Eliminate all drinks except water (no coffee, tea, soda or purchased drinks).

Contemporary Interpretations

No text messaging or Facebook or Twitter communications that take your thoughts away from God.

No secular music; only praise and worship music.

No newspaper or pleasure reading; give that time to prayer.

No television; give that time to prayer.

No recreational sports; give that time to prayer.

No sex. "Both husband and wife to refrain from sexual intimacy for a limited time, so they can give themselves completely to prayer." (1 Cor. 7:5, NLT)

Some 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.

My Time to Pray

*Lord, I will deny myself enjoyment during my Fast
so that I can seek Your will in my life.*

*I count it a privilege to give up my “pleasant food”
for Your glory and as a commitment of my prayer.*

*Lord, I have made a spiritual vow to You that I will
faithfully fast and pray for 21 days.*

*Lord, give me strong outer discipline to keep my outer vow
to You, and give me strong inner commitment
to pray faithfully for the answer I seek.*

Amen.

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: What I am asking God to do?

My Fast: What will I withhold?

My Prayer: When will I 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 commit to fulfill these small expressions of my love to You.
Amen.

Signed _____

Date: _____

Deepening our Relationship with God

Day 1

"I have MANIFESTED your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world." John 17:6

Key Thought: God manifests HIMSELF to us

Most of us growing up enjoyed playing the game of hide and seek. One person closes their eyes and counts to 100 while the others find a place to hide. Much of the fun was trying to stay hidden and unfindable for as long as possible. It was especially exciting (and kind of cruel), to be hiding in the room where the seeker was looking and not be found. And every once in a while, we accidentally gave away our location if we giggled when the seeker was in the room.

There are many who think that evidence does not support the existence of God at all. Or at best, He exists, but is playing a cruel game of hide and seek. He might exist, but if He does, He has hidden Himself way off in the far distant universe somewhere. Uninvolved. Unfindable. Unknowable. In reality, the exact opposite is true . . .

How has God manifested Himself to us? According to Romans 1:19, ***"what can be known about God*** is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been ***clearly perceived*** ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse." God intends for what can be seen and experienced in the universe to shout His existence loud and clear. From the intricate detail of DNA to the infinite size of the universe, there is undeniable evidence of an intelligent designer in our observable world.

According to Jesus, in John 17:6, in His high priestly prayer to the Father, He ***"manifested*** God's name to the people whom (He) gave (Him) out of the world." The word manifested means to "reveal" something clearly or "make known" to the senses. If God was too hidden in His creation, He pulled back the curtain and fully revealed Himself through the person of Jesus Christ! Hebrews 1:2-3 says, "in these last days ***(God) has spoken to us by His Son . . .*** He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature." Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us to personally make Himself known. He unveiled Himself completely to us so that we could know Him intimately and personally.

The apostle John, who was an eye-witness of Jesus Christ wrote in 1 John 1:1-3, “that (Jesus Christ) which was from the beginning, which we have **heard**, which we have **seen** with our eyes, which we look upon and have **touched** with our hands, concerning the word of life—the **life was made manifest**, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was **made manifest to us**—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you.” We are without excuse, humanity has heard, seen, and touched God Himself in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was born as a baby, He lived a sinless life, He performed miraculous signs, He was crucified and died on the cross, He was buried in a tomb for 3 days, He resurrected back to life, and He ascended into heaven. These are all historical things that were seen and experienced and all those who witnessed them were willing to die proclaiming that they were true.

1 Peter 1:20 says Jesus Christ, “was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was **made MANIFEST in the last times for the sake of YOU!!!**” Read the next sentence slowly and carefully: You are the reason that God manifested Himself in the person of Jesus Christ!

Make no mistake, God is not hiding. The question is, have you found him?

Questions to Ponder

1. Do you struggle with the existence of God? Do you ever find yourself wanting more “proof” for the existence of God?
2. What areas of your life are you most frustrated with God’s “hiddenness”?
3. What aspects of creation make it hard to deny the existence of God?
4. What characteristics of Jesus Christ are most attractive to you? Why?
5. How has God manifested Himself in your life personally?

Possible Prayer Points

1. Thank God for His creation and how it reveals Him to you.
2. Ask God that He would manifest Himself to you through Jesus Christ.
3. Ask God to help you see His existence in creation as well as through the person of Jesus Christ.

How do you think you should relate with God as a result of Him trying to relate to you in this way?

Deepening our Relationship with God

Day 2

"I have manifested your NAME to the people whom you gave me out of the world . . . I made known to them your NAME, and I will continue to make it known." John 17:6

Key Thought: God manifests His NAME to us!

People are very particular about names. And for good reason. Naming a newborn child is important because we want it to have special meaning and significance. A name carries with it a specific reputation, whether good or bad. A name represents who we are, our nature, our character, and our identity as a person.

Each and every one of God's names are important because they reveal unique things about who He is, His nature, and His character. In the Old Testament God goes by a number of names. For example, Elohim which is translated "God" means "all-powerful one." And Yahweh which is translated "LORD" means "self-existent one." These names reveal God as the eternal creator and sustainer of everything that exists.

How does Jesus manifest God's name to us? In John 17:6 Jesus said that He "manifested God's name to the people whom (He) gave (Him) out of the world." Again, in John 17:26 Jesus said, **"I made known to them your name,** and I will continue to make it known." By Jesus revealing Himself to us, He revealed God's name to us. It is through Jesus Christ that we get to know who God is, His nature, and His character.

What are some of the names of God that Jesus Christ manifested when He came as a man? Before Jesus was born an angel of the Lord said to His father Joseph in Matthew 1:21, "She will bear a son, and **you shall call His name Jesus,** for He will save His people from their sins." Joseph and Mary were instructed to name their newborn son Jesus for a very specific purpose. The name Jesus is derived from the Old Testament name Joshua which means "Savior". Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection were for the purpose of saving us from the punishment we deserve for our sin. God didn't send His son to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. What an important name! That's why we need to know God by His name, Jesus!

Matthew 1:22 goes on to say, “all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and **they shall call His name Immanuel**’ (which means, God with us.)” Jesus was more than a human being, He was God Himself. Jesus was not just a good man or a great teacher, He was God Himself in the flesh.

It is this Jesus that Romans 10:9-13 says, “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved . . . the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing riches on all who call on Him. For **‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’**”. If we don’t know God’s saving name, we cannot be saved. If we don’t call on God through Jesus Christ we cannot be saved.

In fact, Acts 4:12 says, “there is salvation in no one else, for **there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.**” It’s pretty straight forward, God has manifested Himself to us as a God who saves through Jesus and Jesus alone. The only way to have a relationship with God is through Jesus! God gave His Son the name Jesus for a very specific purpose, that He might save you from your sins!

What does the name Jesus mean to you personally?

Questions to Ponder

1. When you hear the name JESUS what comes to mind?
2. What other names do people trust in to be saved?
Does the Bible say it is possible to gain salvation through these names?
3. Do you have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ?

Possible Prayer Points

1. Thank God for making His name known to you through Jesus Christ
2. Ask God that He would manifest Himself to you through Jesus Christ
3. If you want to be saved from your sin, pray and confess that Jesus is Lord and call the name of Jesus right now

How do you think you should relate with God as a result of Him trying to relate to you in this way?

Deepening our Relationship with God

Day 3

“I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the LOVE with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them” John 17:26 (ESV)

Key Thought: God manifests His LOVE to us!

I (P David) can remember a few childish incidents in elementary school when I tested whether I was loved or not. In one particular instance during recess I remember sitting on the ground, legs crossed, and my head down (acting sad or upset) “inviting” someone to come and ask me what was wrong or if I was okay. With my heart and my posture I was seeking someone who cared about me. Sounds kind of psycho doesn’t it!?!

There is no greater personal relationship word in human language than LOVE! A core need at the center of every human heart is the need to be loved. To be loved is to be unconditionally wanted, accepted, and cherished by another. For every human being, the single most important question we desperately want an answer to in life is “am I loved?”

If there is one characteristic that defines God it is love. According to 1 John 4:8 and 16, “God IS love.” These three words communicate that love is who God is. Love is His character. Love is His nature. God can do nothing other than love. God’s love is His unconditional acceptance and His faithful commitment to us. God’s love is not conditional, it’s not based on our performance, it is always accessible and always available.

How does Jesus manifest God’s love to us? In John 17:26 Jesus said, “I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, **that the love with which you loved me may be in them.**” God put His love for us on full display through the person of Jesus Christ. John 3:16 is the most widely known verse in the Bible because it communicates how much God loves us, “for **God so loved the world**, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” God was willing to send His one and only Son because He loves us.

1 John 4:9-10 goes deeper in explaining why God sent His Son Jesus Christ, “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. **In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the**

propitiation for our sins.” Jesus manifesting God’s love was much more than a kind visit. God sent Jesus to satisfy God’s wrath and pay our penalty of death for sin so that we might live and have a personal relationship with Him.

In Ephesians 3:14-19 the apostle Paul prayed, “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory . . . that you, being **rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge**”. More than anything else, God wants us to know beyond a shadow of a doubt the immensity of His personal love for us. There is nothing we can do that will cause God to love us more and there is nothing we can do that will cause God to love us any less.

Sadly, many of us look to satisfy our need to be loved by others . . . a father, a mother, a husband, a wife, a friend, a boyfriend, a girlfriend. In reality, God is the only one who can satisfy the deep need we have to be loved.

Today, be reminded, or be fully convinced for the first time that God loves you!

Questions to Ponder

1. What are some ways you have tried to answer the question, “am I loved” outside of God’s love for you?
Did/does it satisfy?
2. Do you believe beyond a shadow of a doubt that God loves you personally?

Possible Prayer Points

1. Thank God for being love and manifesting His love to you personally through Jesus Christ
2. Ask God for the strength to comprehend the breadth, length, height, and depth of the love of Christ

How do you think you should relate with God as a result of Him trying to relate to you in this way?

Deepening our Relationship with God

Day 4

“For I have given them the words that you gave me” John 17:8 (ESV)

Key Thought: God has given us His SPOKEN Word!

Speaking is a fundamental part of life. Speaking is an important part of life. Speaking is the primary way that humans communicate and relate with one another. We spend years of our lives speaking to others about ourselves and listening to others speak about themselves. Without speaking humanity would be extremely handicapped in their ability to relate with one another.

Can you imagine what it would be like to hear God speak? No, not the silent, mysterious voice we hear in our head, but God’s actual voice and words! I’m pretty sure it would be an unforgettable experience. It should not be a surprise that God does speak, He does have a voice, and He wants to use His spoken Word to relate with us . . .

In John 17:8 Jesus makes known that God is a speaking God. God gave “words” to Jesus Christ. God related with Jesus by speaking words to Him. He wasn’t silent. He communicated. We are given innumerable examples through the Bible of God speaking, but Genesis chapters 1 and 2 give us the clearest example of the power of God’s audible spoken words. What do we learn about God’s spoken word from Genesis 1 and 2?

When God speaks, IT HAPPENS (Gen 1:1, 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26). God speaks 10 times in the first chapter and whatever He says . . . happens! Before God spoke there was nothing and after God spoke there was something. Something came in the form of light, sky, water, land, plants, planets, living creatures, and finally humanity, man and woman. God’s ability to speak and create are evidence of His unlimited power.

When God speaks, it is GOOD (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Whatever God speaks into existence with His unlimited knowledge and power is without mistake, perfect, and therefore good. When God created the universe, He said Himself it was “good.” When God spoke man and woman into existence He said they were “very good.” Everything God has spoken into existence is good. In all of life, if God says it, it is the very best option out of an infinite number of possibilities.

When God speaks to humanity, it is a BLESSING (Gen 1:28). God did not simply create all things and distance Himself from them, He desires to actively communicate and relate with His creation. God's first word directed toward humanity is a blessing. God speaks blessing over humanity with the unique privilege of multiplying, inhabiting the earth, and ruling over everything else He created. God's blessing of humanity communicates that we are the pinnacle of God's creation.

When God speaks to humanity, we must OBEY (Gen 2:16-17). Although humanity is the pinnacle of God's creation, we do not have the freedom to do whatever we want. God communicated to Adam and Eve a **boundary** to their freedom and **consequences** when those boundaries were crossed. God communicated the boundary to provide us with blessings for obedience and to protect us from consequences of disobedience. We will experience the greatest amount of good that God created us for when we obediently stay within His spoken design for all things!

God's spoken words are powerful! More powerful than we might ever think or imagine. God's spoken words make something out of nothing. God's spoken words put galaxies into orbit and atoms into motion. God's words define what is right and wrong. God's words bring life and death. Do you get the point? Here's the miracle, the same God who spoke all things into existence wants to speak to you . . . are you listening?

Questions to Ponder

1. Do you believe that God wants to speak to you personally?
2. If God were to sit down with you face to face, what do you think He would speak to you?

Possible Prayer Points

1. Thank God for wanting to speak, to communicate, and to relate with you through spoken word
2. Pray and ask God to speak personally to you

How do you think you should relate with God as a result of Him trying to relate to you in this way?

Deepening our Relationship with God

Day 5

“For I have given them the words that you gave me” John 17:8 (ESV)

Key Thought: God has given us His WRITTEN Word!

When was the last time you received a personal hand-written letter from someone? It’s probably been a while. Unlike the instant communication that takes place today with smart phones and social media, communicating through letter writing took much more time, effort, and thoughtfulness. You were purposeful and deliberate when you wrote a letter and reading a letter had special meaning and significance because it was personal!

Whether we realize it or not, a letter exists that has been sent to each and every one of us personally . . . **God’s written Word**, the Bible! The written Word is God’s effort to communicate to us personally who He is, how He created the world and humanity, His standard of right and wrong, and ultimately how He sent His Son Jesus Christ to save us from the penalty of sin. God’s written Word contains 66 individual letters (39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament) written over a period of 1,500 years, by approximately 40 different human authors, on 3 different continents, in 3 languages, in 5 distinct genres. God’s written Word is a miraculously unique and purposeful letter . . . intended to be delivered to you.

The written word ORIGINATES from God (2 Timothy 3:16) – The phrase “breathed out by God” is a compound word in Greek from the words θεος which means, “God” and πνευ which means, “wind” or “breath.” Literally translated all Scripture is, “God-breathed.” Do you remember in Genesis what God did to bring life to Adam? Gen. 2:7 says that God, “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” In a similar manner, all the words written that make up the written Word were “breathed out” or “given life” by God. God breathing all Scripture means that He is the original source and author of the letter. The God who spoke all things into existence breathed life into the written Word! Now wait, weren’t the books of the Bible written by men?

The written word is not an INVENTION of men (2 Peter 1:16-21) – Human beings are pretty good at making up some pretty crazy stories, right (Star Wars, Avengers)? Isn’t it possible that the Bible is simply the result of some

great fictitious writing? Peter says in this book in verses 16-18 that he was writing as a result of an eyewitness experience and not some, “cleverly devised myth.” Peter goes on to say that there is something even MORE SURE than His own personal eyewitness experience . . . the “prophetic word” or the “prophesy of Scripture.” These phrases communicate that the written words contained in the Old Testament were not conceived in the human writer’s imagination or invented as a result of their creativity, but rather what is contained in the written Word is FROM GOD! How did God do that?

The written word is authored by men GUIDED by the HOLY SPIRIT (2 Pet. 1:21) – Just like a ship is blown along by the wind or animals are carefully herded in the specific direction by a shepherd, the men who wrote the words of the Bible were “carried along” by the Holy Spirit. The men who wrote each of the 66 books of the Bible used their own words/language, with their level of intelligence, grammar skills, in the context of what was going on in their lives and the lives of those around them, from their personal perspective and experience, AND YET every single word was given to them by God through the Holy Spirit. Now that’s a special letter!

The written Word is God’s Word! Everything that God wants to communicate to us about Himself, how much He loves us, and how to have a relationship with Him, is written down within the pages of the written Word! This is not a letter you want to ignore. Open it, read it, read it often, and most importantly, read it knowing the One who sent it to you!

Questions to Ponder

1. Have you ever thought about God’s written Word, the Bible, as a personal letter written to you?
2. How well do you know God through the letter that He has written?

Possible Prayer Points

1. Thank God for His Word and His effort to send you a personal letter
2. Pray and ask God to relate with you personally through His written Word

How do you think you should relate with God as a result of Him trying to relate to you in this way?

Deepening our Relationship with God

Day 6

“This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” John 17:3 (ESV)

Key Thought: God has given us His INCARNATE Word!

A few summers ago I (P David) put together a grill and the written instructions honestly were a bit confusing. Throughout the process I was wondering, “what do these instructions mean?”, “Is this where this bolt is supposed to go?” or, “is the propane tank going to explode when I turn this on?” Written instructions are great, but having the creator and designer of the grill to show me how to put it together would have been IDEAL!

In the Old Testament, God communicated His design for humanity through the people of Israel. Israel was given the law written on tablets of stone instructing them how to love him and love others. These written instructions were pretty clear and yet the people of Israel never seemed to quite understand them or live according to them.

In Matthew 5:17 Jesus said, “do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” In this verse the word “fulfill” means to provide “true meaning.” Jesus Christ, God Himself, came to live out and show all humanity the real intent of God’s written law. According to John 17:3 the Word INCARNATE (which in Latin means “in the flesh”), Jesus Christ, was sent by God to SHOW US who He is, how much He loves us, and ultimately that we might have eternal life!

Jesus Christ shows us LIFE (John 1:1-5) – What if the creator and designer of life not only told us how to live but He actually lived among us and showed us how? That is exactly what Jesus Christ came to do! Verses 1-3 tell us three very important things about Jesus Christ, 1) He existed in the beginning with God, 2) He was (and therefore is) God, and 3) He made all things. What does this mean? Who is this Word? Jesus Christ is 100% God, the Word Himself! The creator and communicator of life came in person to earth to shine the light of what true life looks like.

Jesus Christ shows us God in the FLESH (John 1:14) – Verse 14 tells us that the all-powerful, all-knowing spoken Word (God) who created all things that exist came to the earth, put on human flesh, and dwelt among us. Jesus Christ is 100% human man with flesh and bone! God did not merely give us

an audible or written Word, but His very self to reveal who He is and how to live according to His design.

Jesus Christ shows us God's GLORY and His NATURE (Heb 1:1-3) – Throughout history, God has spoken to humanity at “many times” and in “many ways”. But it is only through Jesus Christ that God has “spoken” to us directly, face to face. Who is God? What is He like? These questions are answered for us in the earthly life of God's Son Jesus Christ. God's radiant glory is on full display. Jesus Christ shows us God's nature perfectly! What we read about Jesus Christ in the written Word, from eyewitnesses who wrote it down, is the embodiment of God Himself. There is no more clear way that God could have revealed Himself to us than to become one of us.

Jesus Christ shows us God's POWER (Heb 1:3) – The same power that God possessed to create all things, Jesus Christ currently possesses to uphold the universe. Jesus is maintaining the intricately designed clockwork of the entire universe by His spoken Word (Colossians 1:15-23). The life that Jesus lived 2,000 years ago contained the same unlimited power that God used to speak all things into existence. Therefore, Jesus Christ's life has all the power necessary to show us who God is and how to relate with Him.

Philippians 2:8 says that, “being found in human form,” Jesus Christ, “humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Jesus Christ, the God-man, the incarnate Word, related with us most powerfully when He died on the cross. God came in the flesh to show you how much He wants to relate with you by dying on the cross. Do you want to relate with Him in return?

Questions to Ponder

1. Do you believe that Jesus Christ was God or was He just a mere man?
2. Does God becoming man make it any easier to relate with Him?
Why?

Possible Prayer Points

1. Thank God for relating with you through the person of Jesus Christ
2. Pray and express to God what it means to you that He came in the flesh and died on the cross in order to relate with you

How do you think you should relate with God as a result of Him trying to relate to you in this way?

Deepening our Relationship with God

Day 7

“ . . . they have kept your word” John 17:6 (ESV)

Key Thought: God has given us Words that we are to KEEP!

Do you know what your love language is? A love language is the means by which we feel valuable, cherished, and appreciated in relationship. According to Gary Chapman, author of the book “The 5 Love Languages”, most people have one or a combination of 5 different love languages including words of affirmation, quality time, physical touch, receiving a gift, and acts of service. The giving and receiving of these love languages is essential in any healthy relationship.

God has a unique love language . . . Do you know what it is? Obedience. In our relationship with God, He receives love when we do what He commands. At the top of God’s list of how He receives love in return from us is our willingness to obey what He wants us to think, say, and do.

In John 17:6 in talking about His disciples to His Father Jesus said, “they have kept your word.” The word “keep” means to “observe”, to “conform”, or to “put into practice.” As a result of God manifesting Himself to us through Jesus Christ, and therefore making His Word(s) known to us, we are to respond by observing, conforming, and putting all that we know about God and His standards of right and wrong into practice.

It should come as no surprise that Jesus Christ, the incarnate God-man was perfectly obedient to God the Father. According to John 5:19, 30 and 8:28 Jesus did “nothing” independent of God. Jesus said in John 8:29 that He “always” did things that were “pleasing” to God. Again, in John 14:31 Jesus said, “I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.” Jesus Christ loved His Father and He lived a life of perfect obedience. Jesus was a perfect example for us of what it looks like to love God through obedience.

Jesus communicated the expectation of loving obedience to His disciples in John 14:15 saying, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” Later, in John 14:23-24 Jesus said, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my Word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words.” Our obedience

to God's Word is what invites His presence close to us. Our obedience to God's Word is what allows us to dwell with Him in close intimate relationship. Whereas our disobedience distances and separates us from God.

1 John 2:3–6 says, “And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.” Ultimately, loving obedience is living life in the same way that Jesus Christ lived His life.

There is not doubt that God loves us. God is love and He showed us He loved us by sending his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 5:10). He showed He loved us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). The question is not whether God loves you. The question is do you love God? And you express your love for God not just in your thoughts but with your loving obedience!

Questions to Ponder

1. Do you know what your love language is?
How do you feel when your love language is not met?
How do you feel when your love language is met?
2. Do you know and believe that God loves you?
How do you show your love for God in return?
3. What are some commands that you are aware of the God has made known to you through His Word (e.g. Matthew 28:19-20)? Are you being obedient to these commands?

Possible Prayer Points

1. Pray and ask God to help you keep His commands.
2. Pray and ask God to help you express your love for Him through obedience.

How do you think you should relate with God as a result of Him trying to relate to you in this way?

Deepening our Relationship with God

Day 8

“And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God” John 17:3

“For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me” John 17:8

“Sanctify them in the truth, your Word is truth” John 17:17

Key Thought: God has given us TRUE words!

Our culture and much of the world has embraced a very unsettling belief system that has been growing and maturing for several decades. It's the belief that truth is not an objective reality outside of ourselves that applies to all people, at all times, and in all places, but rather a subjective reality created by each person based on our own personal experience and preference. What is true and right has no real substance beyond ourselves, and for anyone to try and convince you to change to another truth is an act of hatred, prejudice, and intolerance. This belief system is creating quite an environment of chaos and confusion.

The existence of God and His spoken, written, and incarnate Word do not allow for such an ambiguous belief system. In fact, a belief system that denies truth outside of ourselves is the lie of all lies. According to Jesus in John 17:3, eternal life is knowing that God is the one and “only **true God.**” In John 17:8 Jesus says that His disciples had, “come to **know in truth** that (He) came from (God).” Finally, Jesus said in John 17:17 that God would sanctify **His disciples, “in the truth”** and that, “**(God’s) Word is truth.**” Jesus seemed to think that truth existed outside of ourselves and could be known. And most astonishingly (and today . . . most controversially), **truth could be found in Him!**

Jesus' words clearly do not support a belief that truth is what we make it or something we can mold or shape into an image that we have invented. Rather, truth is a permanent unchanging reality established by God that is true for all people, in all times, and in all places. Jesus said in John 8:31-32, “if you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, **and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.**” By believing and conforming our lives to the truth of Jesus Christ and His words we are set free. If we don't, we are believing a lie and we will remain slaves to our sin.

Jesus goes even further in John 14:6 saying, “I am the way, ***the truth***, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Relating with God requires going through the person of Jesus Christ. No one enters into a relationship with God unless they believe the truth about who Jesus is and what He has done. While the world makes every effort to try and deny the truth about Jesus Christ, those who genuinely seek a relationship with God will find it in Him.

In John 18:37-38 in a conversation with Pilate about whether He was the King of the Jews, Jesus said, “for this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—***to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.***” Pilate’s response to Jesus’ statement was, “what is truth?”

Based on Pilate’s response, he seems interested . . . but unconvinced. How about you? Are you seeking the truth but aren’t satisfied with the answer you find within yourself? Maybe it’s time you became convinced that God and His Word are true and that you can have a relationship with Him through Jesus Christ!

Questions to Ponder

1. Why do you think the world has such a hard time believing that God and His Word are the standard of truth?
2. How would you answer Pilate’s question, “what is true?”
3. What does it mean to have a true relationship with God?

Possible Prayer Points

1. Thank God for establishing truth for all people, at all times, and in all places.
2. Pray and ask God to help you become more and more convinced of the truth about who He is and what He has done .

How do you think you should relate with God as a result of Him trying to relate to you in this way?

Deepening our Relationship with God

Day 9

“For I have given them the words that you gave me, . . .and they have believed that you sent me” John 17:8

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me Through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” John 17:20-21

Key Thought: God has given us Words we are to BELIEVE in!

Our beliefs have a dramatic impact on our lives. We hold a belief when we are convinced that something is true or right. Our beliefs determine how we interact with and experience reality. For example, what we believe about gravity dramatically impacts whether we are willing to walk off the edge of a cliff or not. This example reveals that our beliefs, whether true and right or false and wrong, have very different consequences and outcomes. Therefore, it is important that all, or as many of our beliefs as possible, align with what is true and right in reality.

The word BELIEVE is arguably the most important word in the Bible. The Greek word πιστις, translated as a verb “believe” and as a noun “faith” means to “accept”, to be “assured”, or to “trust” completely that something is “true.” According to John 17:20-21 Jesus Christ asked the Father, “that the whole world may believe that (He) had sent (Him).” To Jesus, what people in the world believed about Him was imperative. Why?

Our ability to have a relationship with God is based solely on what we believe. God lives in perfect righteousness in relationship toward us. In order for us to be in relationship with God we must be righteous as well. The bad news is, none of us is righteous. So, how does unrighteous humanity obtain righteousness? The exact same way Abraham did! Genesis 15:6 says that “(Abraham) **believed the Lord**, and He counted it to him as righteousness.” The foundation of Abraham’s relationship with God was his belief, his acceptance, his assurance, his complete trust in God.

In most areas of life we receive what is due for our work. We are due a paycheck based on the hours of work we do at a job. We are due a grade based on the work we put into studying for a test. In contrast, according to Romans 4:5, in our relationship with God we “do NOT work but **believe in**

Him who justifies the ungodly” in order to be counted as “righteous.” Righteousness can only be obtained from God as a gift as a result of our belief in Jesus’ work on the cross. Romans 3:22 says, “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.” Jesus Christ has done all the work necessary for us to be in relationship with God! And just like Abraham, at the moment we believe, righteousness is “counted” to us (Romans 4:22-25).

One of the most popular uses of the word BELIEVE is found in John 3:16 where Jesus said, “For God so love the world, that He gave His only Son, that ***whoever believes in Him*** should not perish but have eternal life.” This verse is profound because it so simply communicates what is required to have a right relationship with God. What “truth” do we need to believe? To accept? To be assured of? To trust completely? We must . . . 1) Believe that God EXISTS, LOVES us, and wants a RELATIONSHIP with us, 2) Believe that our SIN destroys our relationship with Him, 3) Believe that Jesus Christ was born as a man, lived a sinless (righteous) life, was crucified and died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, was buried in a tomb for 3 days, resurrected back to life, and ascended into heaven, 4) Believe that Jesus death provides FORGIVENESS for our sin and restores RIGHT RELATIONSHIP with Him.

By sending Jesus Christ, God has done all that is necessary for you to be in a relationship with Him, now it’s up to you to BELIEVE!

Questions to Ponder

1. What are some obstacles that prevent you from believing in Jesus?
2. What are some ways people try to earn a right relationship with God rather than simply believe?

Possible Prayer Points

1. Thank God for sending Jesus Christ to do all the work necessary for you to have a relationship with Him.
2. Express to God your belief in who Jesus Christ is and what He has done for you.

How do you think you should relate with God as a result of Him trying to relate to you in this way?

Deepening our Relationship with God

Day 10

Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be ONE, even as we are one. John 17:11

Key Thought: Jesus prays that we would be ONE

As the dad of five children, few things grabbed my attention faster than when two or more of them got into a 'spat.' As their voices rose in volume and agitation, I would give them a few moments to work things out, and then I would intervene. Family unity and harmony were important values I wanted my children to learn and live by. I didn't expect them to always agree with each other. In fact, misunderstandings and just plain rubbing each other the wrong way was going to happen. What was important was learning to how to handle and resolve these issues when they did occur.

Family unity and harmony are important values to Jesus as well! As he prayed for all of us who are Fully Devoted Followers, he asks the Father to make us One. This does not mean we are always in agreement with each other, but are connected to each other through spiritually healthy relationships. As he prays, Jesus puts the bar up very high. The unity we are to have as a church is to reflect the perfect unity experienced by the Trinity!

This was not the first time the Disciples heard Jesus talk about the importance of unity among his followers. Earlier that evening, he had told them:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:34-35

Later in his prayer, Jesus continues to speak of this unity. We see this in verses 20-23. Note this theme of the power of unity as he prays, "so the world may believe that you have sent me." One of the ways God uses unity among us as believers is as a testimony to the world around us. When we are unified, this shows the power of God in transforming our lives to be like Jesus.

So, what does this unity or oneness look like? It begins with the common faith we have in Jesus Christ as we acknowledge him as Savior and Lord of our lives. Then we share a common love for the Lord that encompasses our

whole being. We share a commitment to and love for the Word of God. We share a determination to live lives that are worthy of Christ, putting off sin and putting on righteousness. All of this takes place through the enabling grace of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Above all of these is the love we have for one another. This love is described in 1 Cor. 13. It is also shared through the 20+ 'One Another's' listed in the New Testament. This includes loving, forgiving, accepting, praying for and encouraging one another. When we are living these out, we will experience the 'Oneness' Jesus was praying for.

Finally, look again at John 17:20. Jesus prayed for us as well as the 11 Disciples in the room with him on that night. "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word." I trust you are encouraged and blessed to know Jesus was praying for you the night before his crucifixion... and that you will commit yourself to growing in Oneness with your brothers and sisters in Christ!

Questions to Ponder

1. Read Ephesians 4:1-6, and note the ways we are to treat and speak to each other. Which of these come more natural to you?
Which are more challenging?
2. What are some of the ways you have been encouraged by other believers?
3. When have you encouraged or comforted another believer?
4. Is there anyone you need to forgive or reconcile with? When will you reach out to them?

Possible Prayer Points

1. Using 1 Cor. 13:4-13 as a prayer guide, ask God to grow each of these qualities of love in your life.
2. Ask God to give you the grace to grow in your fellowship with other believers.

How do you think you should relate with God as a result of Him trying to relate to you in this way?

Deepening our Relationship with God

Day 11

I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. John 17:9

Key Thought: Jesus prays for us who are BELIEVERS in Him

Our youngest daughter Hannah was born with three congenital heart defects and required heart surgery when she was just three months old. As she was prepped for her surgery, people started to arrive at Grace Baptist Church of Lancaster, PA where I served on staff as Pastor of Student Ministries. They came to pray for her, signing a card to offer encouragement as well. Over 100 people came that day, and even today I am deeply grateful for this expression of true Fellowship. One of the greatest gifts we can give to each other is the gift of intercessory prayer!

As we read John 17:9, Jesus tells the Father that He is committed to this same gift—the gift of intercessory prayer—for those of us who have believed in Him as Savior. What a awesome gift that is! When I think about the fact that each day, Jesus prays for me I am humbled, encouraged and filled with His abiding love for me.

The prayer we are looking at together in John 17 gives us insight into the requests Jesus makes on our behalf. He asks the Father to keep us secure in Him. He asks that we will be united in fellowship as the Trinity is united in fellowship. He prays for us to have His joy and love to the full. He prays for the Father to sanctify us, that is transform us by the power of His Word. Finally, Jesus prays that we be with Him for eternity.

In the book of Hebrews, Jesus is pictured as our Great High Priest, who brings us to the Father. Hebrews 7:25 tells us that Jesus lives to make intercession for us, claiming us as His own: *“Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”* Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus is able to pray for us effectively because He lived life as a man, though without actual sin. Then in verse 16 we are told to come to Jesus with confidence, for the mercy and grace we need.

As Jesus prays in John 17:8, He identifies us as the ones who, *“received them (the words of Jesus) and have come to know in truth that I came from you;*

and they have believed that you sent me.” This is the Gospel, that the Father sent His Son to speak the Words of Truth that set us free; that salvation has been provided through the Cross, and received through Saving Faith in Jesus Christ. If you have indeed trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, then you can be confident in His promise to pray for you today!

Questions to Ponder

1. If Jesus asked you for your Prayer List so He could pray for you, what would be on that list?
2. Look at the requests of Jesus in John 17. How often do you pray for these things for yourself? How about for others?
3. How will confidence in the prayers of Jesus for you affect you and your approach to the day?

Possible Prayer Points

1. Think about your answer to question #1 above. Now use that list to pray for yourself and others.
2. Now think about the requests of Jesus in John 17. Use these requests as you pray for the other people on your prayer list.

How do you think you should relate with God as a result of Him trying to relate to you in this way?

Deepening our Relationship with God

Day 12

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am... John 17:24

Key Thought: *Jesus prays that we would be WITH Him where He is*

A few years ago I (Pastor Len) had the opportunity to go on a missions trip to India. While there I was part of a team that taught at a Pastor's Conference and then at a Bible College. There were two things that stood out to me about my brothers and sisters in Christ. The first was their deep love and passion for Jesus Christ. They talked about Him all the time! The second was their joyous anticipation for being with Christ in eternity. Obviously, these two things go together! I was blessed and challenged by the joy and peace I saw in their lives and the courage they showed in the face of persecution and danger.

As I read John 17:24, I am struck by the fact that Jesus has this same kind of desire and passion for us! As He reaches towards the end of His prayer, and having prayed for us in this life we live in the here and now, Jesus looks forward and prays for what lies beyond this life. As He does, He expresses how much He is looking forward to us being with Him.

Jesus says that He 'desires' us to be with Him. This word communicates a deep longing; wish for; to want something. Jesus has a deep desire for you and me to be with Him in eternity. If I pause and really let His words sink in, I am deeply humbled that He feels this way towards me!

Not only does Jesus want me to be with Him, but He sees me as a gift from the Father. He refers to us as the ones "whom you (the Father) have given me." I am not sure I see myself as much of a gift to the living Son of God, but He does! My value is not in who or what I am in and of myself. My value comes from who I am in Christ, and the value He chooses to place on me.

One of the things Jesus is looking forward to is us seeing Him in His glory, the glory the Father has given to Him since eternity past. We have no way of knowing what this moment will be like—the moment we enter Jesus' presence and not only see His face, but see His glory! In Matthew 17:1-8, three of the Disciples get a glimpse of Jesus in His glory at the Transfiguration. This experience stayed with them for the rest of their lives.

Some 60 years later, the Apostle John wrote, “and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Undoubtedly, one moment he was remembering was that day when he saw Jesus in His glory.

My friend, if you have placed Saving Faith in Jesus, He was praying for you by name in these verses! Take a moment and reflect on the fact Jesus is looking forward to spending eternity with you. Jesus sees you as a precious gift from the Father. When you walk through the doorway of death into His presence, or see Him at His coming, you will not only see His face, but will stand in awe before Him as you see Him in all of His glory!

Questions to Ponder

1. Think back to when you first became a follower of Jesus. Do you still feel the same excitement for Him and your salvation?
2. How can knowing Jesus’ desire for you to be with Him encourage you in your daily life?
During times of challenge or discouragement?
Today?
3. How often do you think about being in the presence of Jesus Christ for eternity?

Possible Prayer Points

1. Ask God to give you a fresh view of eternity, and what it will be like to be with Christ.
2. Then ask God to renew your ‘first love’ passion for Jesus Christ.
3. Are you experiencing a unique challenge right now?
Discouragement? Is God feeling a bit distant?
Ask the Lord to make the truths of this verse real to you at the heart level. You are loved; you are a gift to Christ from the Father; you are wanted by Christ Himself, Who is looking forward to you being with Him in eternity!

How do you think you should relate with God as a result of Him trying to relate to you in this way?

Deepening our Relationship with God

Day 13

And I am not longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you... John 17:11a

Key Thought: God keeps us from the WORLD

In 2005, three US soldiers found themselves in the hills of Afghanistan. They were given orders to go and experiment with a small drone equipped with a camera, familiarizing themselves with its operation. It had been several weeks since they had encountered any of the Taliban, and their guard was down a bit. For a moment, they were just three guys having fun with a new 'toy', and they began to do various maneuvers and loops in the sky above them. Suddenly, a rocket flew a few feet over their heads, landed on the other side of a sand pile, and exploded. Had it landed on their side of the sand pile, all three would have been killed. For just a few minutes, they had forgotten they were in enemy territory, and that lack of awareness almost cost them their lives!

As Jesus prays for us in John 17:11, He reminds us that while He was going back to be with the Father, we are still in this world. As Fully Devoted Followers of Christ, we need to remember we are in enemy territory. I want to be very clear that the people around us ARE NOT the enemy! 1 John 5:19 tells us that the enemy is Satan, and the people of this world are under his influence and power.

We are in this world and we have a mission—to be the salt and light of Jesus Christ to the glory of God (Matthew 5:13-16). In Matthew 28:16-20 Jesus brings more focus to the mission, telling us to have a lifestyle of making disciples. The people around us are to be the focus of our love, compassion and witness as ones who need to know Jesus Christ as Savior.

If we are not careful and intentional in our walk with Christ, we can become easily distracted by life. The Apostle John warns us about this in 1 John 2:15-17. Verse 16 reads, "For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eye and the pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world." The 'desires of the flesh' are those inner desires and urges that tempt us to live outside of the boundaries designed by God. The desires of the eye are the many things in the world around us that can entice us towards sin and away from God. The pride of possessions is the

temptation to be materialistic, storing up earthly treasure instead of spiritual treasure in our lives. Since these three things are not from God, they will cause us to drift away from God and this mission He has given to us.

Jesus gives us clear instructions on how to live in this world but not be of this world in Matthew 6:33; “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (food, clothing, shelter and all other physical needs). Like Jesus, we are to seek God, walk with God, serve God and share the Gospel as we live life, trusting our Heavenly Father to provide what we need.

Questions to Ponder

1. What are the things that tempt you to be distracted from walking with God and sharing Christ?
2. Are you having daily time with God in the Bible and prayer? Do you need to be more regular in having this time? How might you deepen this time?
3. Who are the people in your life who need to place Saving Faith in Jesus? Are you praying for them? Are you intentionally engaging them? Are you praying for the opportunity to share the Gospel with them?
4. If you have a list of Family, Friends and Associates who need to be saved, be sure to pray for them at least weekly. If you do not have a list take a few minutes and make one.

Possible Prayer Points

1. Ask God to show you any distractions that are keeping you from fully walking with Him. Then ask for the grace to put these out of your life.
2. Pray for the insight to see the people you can be reaching out to with the Gospel. If you have a list of people who need to put saving faith in Jesus, pray for them to place Saving Faith in Christ.

How do you think you should relate with God as a result of Him trying to relate to you in this way

Deepening our Relationship with God

Day 14

Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. John 17:11b

Key Thought: God keeps us in His NAME

A number of years ago our family was visiting my dad and mom in Maine. One day we went to a local lake, where I walked one of our children, a toddler at the time, out on to a dock. At the end, the water was at least 6 feet deep. So, the further out on the dock we walked, the tighter I held their hand. Not liking this much, my energetic and adventurous child began to pull hard against my hand, seeking their freedom. Not wanting to fish them out of the lake, I leaned down and picked them up, locking both of my arms securely around them.

I have to admit that when it comes to being a child of God, I have often been like my toddler, pulling hard against my Heavenly Father's hand in an attempt to go my own way. Praise God He never lets me go! That truth is displayed in this part of Jesus' prayer in John 17:11b. Jesus prays for the Father to keep us and hold us close.

This is the first actual request in His prayer. Up to now, Jesus has been expressing the reasons He is praying for us. Now, He begins to actually make requests on our behalf. It is truly a blessing that the first request is for us to be held securely by the Father.

When Jesus asks for the Father to 'keep' us, He is asking that God keep us secure in all aspects of our lives.

- Keep us secure in our salvation/relationship with Him
- Keep us from evil
- Keep us from being overwhelmed by sorrow or trials
- Keep us secure in the storms of life

Then Jesus asks that the Father Himself be the One who keeps us. "In your name" refers to everything God is. This includes all of His attributes like His holiness, love, grace, mercy, power and strength. This also refers to all of His names, like Shepherd, The Almighty, God my Strength, God my Refuge, God my Salvation and Yahweh, the One who makes and keeps promises.

The picture Jesus paints in this verse is of The Father holding us close to Himself, held securely in His arms. As Jesus makes this request, He says, “That they may be one.” This is the first time the Lord prays for unity among His people. He will repeat this request three more times, in verses 21-23. This repetition reveals the importance Jesus places on us being united as His Body! In one way, each of us are held individually by God. In another way, we are being held together, joined by the presence of His arms securely around us, holding us close.

So, as Fully Devoted Followers of God, let’s learn to rest in the Father’s arms, and not try to pull away! Then, as His arms draw around to pull us secure and close, we will also be brought close to each other.

Questions to Ponder

1. Do you sometimes have doubts about your salvation? How does knowing God holds you close help you to rest in your relationship with God?
2. Take a moment to think how the various names of God relate to your daily life?
3. What attributes of God stand out to you? How do they offer security to you and your life?

Possible Prayer Points

1. Think about the challenges and needs you have in your life right now, and ask God to show you how He is holding you securely through them.
2. Pray for unity among the members of Grace Church.
3. Ask God to show you if there is anyone you need to forgive or reconcile with. Then ask for the grace to follow through.

How do you think you should relate with God as a result of Him trying to relate to you in this way?

Deepening our Relationship with God

Day 15

I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. John 17:15

Key Thought: God keeps us from the EVIL ONE

For many of us, the events of September 11, 2001 caused us to have a deeper appreciation for the bravery of the men and women who serve us as First Responders. Hundreds of firefighters along with police officers gave their lives in the attempt to save the lives of others. As thousands poured out of the Twin Towers, they ran in, for they had a mission to accomplish, regardless of the difficulty and danger.

As we read John 17:15, the first words of Jesus remind us that He has left us in this world to accomplish a mission...one that is often difficult and for some, dangerous. Jesus very intentionally leaves us in this world to be the Salt that seasons the relationships and situations around us with the presence of Christ and the Light that reveals Christ in the spiritual darkness around us. We looked at this mission in Day 13. Rather than running away from the world, we are to be the presence and voice of Jesus in the world.

But the world around us is not our greatest challenge, neither the people nor the culture. The greatest challenge we face is the one presented by our fierce enemy, Satan. Jesus refers to him as 'the evil one.' Peter warns us of the threat Satan presents in 1 Peter 5:8-9. He refers to Satan as an adversary who acts like a prowling lion, looking for the opportunity to pounce and kill. With this in mind, we are to be sober-minded (self-disciplined, cool-headed) and watchful so he cannot catch us by surprise. Satan will often wear us down and tempt us at our points of weakness. More of us are caught up in sin through the slow 'frog in a kettle' approach than a sudden moment of temptation. Many believers have seen their lives shattered and witness for Christ destroyed through a slow slide into a major sin and moral defeat.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus instructs us to ask the Father to, "deliver us from evil (lit. Evil One.)" Here in John 17:15 we see Jesus praying that for us as He asks the Father to 'keep them from the evil one.' James 4:7 tells us that we are to humbly submit ourselves to God and then resist the devil, who will flee from us. Perhaps the most extensive passage on dealing with Satan is Ephesians 6:10-18, and Paul's teaching on the Armor of God. By prayerfully

putting on God's truth, God's righteousness, a commitment to fulfilling the Great Commission, trusting faith at all times, a mind renewed by the Gospel and carrying the Word as a sword we will be able to stand against the attacks Satan sends our way. All of this starts in our prayer closet, as we ask the Father to 'deliver us from evil' and to 'keep us from the evil one.'

We have a mission to accomplish... running into this world with the love and compassion of Jesus Christ, sharing the life giving Gospel through our lives and testimony. By the grace of God, even Satan is unable to stop us!

Questions to Ponder

1. How are you fulfilling your mission to be the salt and light of Jesus Christ? How does this play out at work? At home? In the community?
2. Where is Satan most likely to tempt you? How has he done this in the past? Where do you need to improve your defenses against him?
3. How are you at using the Armor of God in your daily life? How can you grow in using it?
4. Do you ask the Father to deliver you from 'the Evil One' during your daily prayer time?
Do you ask God to put His armor on you one piece at a time?

Possible Prayer Points

1. Ask God to enable you to live out 1 Peter 5:8-9, being alert and prepared for Satan and his attacks.
2. Pray through Ephesians 6:10-18, asking God to put each piece of armor on you.
3. Ask God to show you how to be a witness for Christ in all areas of your life.

How do you think you should relate with God as a result of Him trying to relate to you in this way?

Deepening our Relationship with God

Day 16

“And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have SENT....As you SENT me into the world, so I have sent them into the world....O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have SENT me.”

John 17:3, 18, 25

Key Thought: God sent Jesus Christ into the World

It seems that almost everyone loves the Christmas story from the Bible. The characters; the Virgin Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and the wise men, the Inn with no room and of course the little baby Jesus in swaddling cloths laying in a manger. But the narrative has an even bigger implication. God himself becoming man. We call this the incarnation which literally means the “act of being made flesh” and in Christian theology this means that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to earth and took on human form. John 1:14 says, “The Word (Christ) became flesh and dwelt among us.”

This was not just a happenstance occurrence. It was intentional by God himself. Jesus, the Christ-man, was sent by God. 1 John 4:9 says, “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God SENT his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.” This sending was a conscious act of love to a world that desperately needed a savior. God was the initiator and we the receivers “so that we might live through him.” In fact, Jesus Himself prays in John 17:3 that “they may know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have SENT.” He knew where He came from.

The sending of Jesus Christ into the world anticipated a response. John 1:12 says, “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” We must receive and believe him by faith. God sent Jesus to earth as a gift (John 3:16) and we have been invited to accept it.

Finally, Jesus Christ was sent on a rescue mission. Him coming to earth was not done to punish sinners but to redeem them. John 3:17 says, “For God did not SEND his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” Oh, that we may continue to look to Jesus as the one who came to love us and give himself for us.

Questions to Ponder

1. Do you look at the Christmas narrative as just a nice story with cute characters or do you see Jesus as the Son of God coming to rescue sinners?
2. Have you personally received and believed in Jesus Christ and accepted His free gift of salvation by faith?

Possible Prayer Points

1. Thank God for sending His Son into the world to save you.
2. Ask God to shine the light of grace in your life that you may see and love this Savior.

How do you think you should relate with God as a result of Him trying to relate to you in this way?

Deepening our Relationship with God

Day 17

"As You sent me into the world, so I have SENT them into the world"

John 17:18

Key Thought: God sends US into the world

While I (P. Andy) was in college I auditioned for a Christian musical group called the Continental Singers based out of California. I made the group and soon traveled to California for a week of rehearsals. Upon arrival I learned very quickly that the reason the Continental Singers existed was not to stay in California and do concerts but to go throughout the United States and the world sharing the love of Jesus through music. In fact, everything we did at the rehearsals was preparing us to be sent out. We were musical missionaries.

Our scripture passage for today reminds us that as Jesus was praying for His disciples He was preparing them to be sent out as well. "As You sent me into the world, so I have SENT them into the world." Jesus knew He had been sent by the Father and now was acknowledging the same for His followers.

After Jesus was resurrected, He gathered his disciples once again and charged them to, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:19-20)

What does this mean for Jesus followers today? God has an eternal purpose for us in the world. His purpose for us is that we make disciples and be a witness to what He has done in our lives. Like the training I received at the Continental Singer camp, our life in church and in Christian service is training for us to take the gospel across the street and around the world.

Listen to Jesus' words from John 20:21. "Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." It could not be more clear. If we are one of Christ's disciples we are to be missionaries of the one True God. Telling, sharing, and showing Jesus to a world that needs to hear and see Him.

The best part of His plan is that God doesn't leave us to save anybody by ourselves. He has given the Holy Spirit to enable power in our lives. From Acts 1:8 we read Jesus' final words before He ascended into heaven, "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." What a great promise we have from the Lord, He Himself will be with us as we go and tell!

Questions to Ponder

1. What does it mean for you right where you are to be a missionary for God?
2. Where has God called you to be a light in the darkness?

Possible Prayer Points

1. Thank God that He has chosen you to be His ambassador to the world around you.
2. Ask God to teach you how to share your faith with those who do not know Him yet.

How do you think you should relate with God as a result of Him trying to relate to you in this way?

Deepening our Relationship with God

Day 18

“For their sake I CONSECRATE myself, that they also may be sanctified in the truth” John 17:19

Key Thought: Jesus CONSECRATED Himself for our sake.

The highlighted word in the passage for today is CONSECRATE. This means to make holy or to dedicate to a higher purpose

In the Old Testament the high priest was the only one who could enter the inmost part of the temple called the Holy of Holies. It was there once a year that he would begin his ritual in the outer court, consecrating himself by the washing of his whole body, and then moving to the inner courts, where he would sprinkle the blood of the spotless lamb on the mercy seat and ask the Lord to once again forgive his sins and the sins of the people.

In Joshua 3:5, Joshua tells the people to, “...Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.” Upon consecrating themselves by washing, the children of Israel were assured of God’s promises. The Lord promised that He would do amazing things among them. Just as He parted the Red Sea to deliver them from their Egyptian bondage, He would open the Jordan River and take them into the Promised Land.

In John 17:19, Jesus prays, “for their sake I consecrate myself...” He was setting himself apart for the coming crucifixion on the cross. As the high priest would take the sacrifice into the temple, Jesus, himself would become the perfect holy sacrifice. The blood that Jesus spilled at Calvary would be the blood necessary to redeem all of humanity. Unlike the Israelites, Jesus did not need to be cleansed of sin because he had no sin. Jesus’ life of perfect obedience and service, even to the point of death sets the pattern for His followers to be holy as well.

1st Peter 1:14-16 encourages all believers, “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

God is a holy, sinless, perfect God. Jesus lived a sinless life and therefore He alone was qualified to pay the penalty for our sins and give us His righteousness. May we respond in holy obedience to our Savior.

Questions to Ponder

1. Do you struggle with dedicating your life to holiness and purity?
2. What areas of your life do you need to submit to the Lord?

Possible Prayer Points

1. Thank God for the example of Jesus Christ to show us how to live lives of holiness.
2. Ask God to examine your heart to show you the places of your life that need to be consecrated to Him.

How do you think you should relate with God as a result of Him trying to relate to you in this way?

Deepening our Relationship with God

Day 19

“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth...And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth” John 17:17,19

Key Thought: God SANCTIFIES us according to the truth.

The word sanctify is much like the word consecrate. Both mean to set apart for special use.

In Romans 12:1-2, Paul encourages believers, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” In other words, as true believers in Christ, the act of sanctification involves our lives being a living sacrifice to Him; we are totally separating ourselves from the sin of the world.

Today’s passage indicates this separation is also linked to biblical truth. We are to set ourselves apart by the teaching and training of the Word of God. Psalm 119:11 says, “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.” David continues to pray to God in verse 43, “And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for my hope is in your rules. I will keep your law continually, forever and ever, and I shall walk in a wide place, for I have sought your precepts.”

In our world today, the Bible does not mean very much. If you try to answer questions about Christianity with words from Scripture most people just say they don’t believe in the Bible. But if the Bible isn’t true where does one go to search for truth? Followers of Jesus, however, have held to the truth of biblical claims for centuries and changed hearts and lives as well as the inerrant words themselves are a testimony to the authenticity of Scripture. Hebrews 4:12 reminds us, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of the spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

Let us continue to be sanctified by the true words of life found in Scripture.

Questions to Ponder

1. Do you believe the entire Bible is true?
2. How have you been set apart by the truths of Scripture?

Possible Prayer Points

1. Thank God that He has spoken through His holy word.
2. Ask God to reveal Himself to you through the pages of the Bible.

How do you think you should relate with God as a result of Him trying to relate to you in this way?

Deepening our Relationship with God

Day 20

The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one. John 17:22

Key Thought: God gives us His glory.

Denise and I (Pastor Len) both love the ocean. We were blessed to take a three month sabbatical in 2010. The first week in June we were in Oregon, and were able to enjoy a beautiful sunset over the Pacific Ocean. Three weeks later we were in Maine, and enjoyed several sunrises over the Atlantic Ocean. We each felt closer to God as we experienced these reflections of His glory in His creation.

However nothing on this earth or in the heavens is beautiful or awesome enough to prepare us to see the glory of God Himself. That was the experience of Isaiah in Isaiah 6:1-7, as he sees the glory of God in a vision. What a moment that will be when we enter the presence of God as His sons and daughters to spend eternity with Him!

The glory Jesus refers to in John 17:22 was His for eternity past, for He is the eternal second person of the God-head, God the Son. However, when Jesus took on humanity at the Incarnation, He laid His visible glory aside as He became a man. But He did reveal God the Father and His glory to us through the life He lived. He revealed that glory through His perfect and sinless life. He revealed it through the miracles He performed. It was revealed at the Transfiguration in Matthew 17. Ultimately the glory of God was revealed through the resurrection of Christ, as Satan, death and sin were defeated and God's glory stood triumphant! Reflecting back on all of this, the Apostle John wrote, "we have seen his glory, as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14b)

As Jesus prays here in John 17:22, He declares a wonderful truth—the glory that the Father had given to Him, He was now giving to us. What a marvelous gift! A 'deposit' of the glory we will receive and experience in eternity has been given to us for the life we live here now. We have experienced forgiveness of our sin that has brought us into a right relationship with God. The perfect righteousness of Christ has been given to us so we now stand in Him. We have been placed into the Body of Christ, the church. The Holy Spirit dwells within us now and for eternity. God is at work in our hearts to

transform us to be more and more like Christ. We have the promise that one day this body we now occupy will be exchanged for a glorified body that will be like the Lord's resurrection body. All of these things are a touch of God's grace and glory that we will fully realize when we come into His presence!

This touch of God's glory is the foundation of the unity we are to experience, which Jesus refers to as 'being one even as we are one.' First, because it is Christ and the Holy Spirit who bind us together into the Body of Christ. Then, as we live out this unity by loving one another as Christ loves us, the world sees the glory of God in us and will be drawn to Jesus.

Questions to Ponder

1. How does this request of Jesus reflect His words in John 13:34-35, where He states that the world will know we are His disciples by the way we love each other?
2. How often do you reflect on the moment you enter eternity and see the full glory of God? How would doing this affect the way you live this life?
3. How does knowing God's glory is seen in your transformed life and your relationship with other Believers impact you?

Possible Prayer Points

1. Ask God to give you glimpses of His glory in His creation and His Word.
2. Ask God to show you ways your life can reflect His glory and be seen by the people around you.
3. Ask God to show you the parts of your life that do not yet reflect Him and His glory, and by His grace change them to do so.

How do you think you should relate with God as a result of Him trying to relate to you in this way?

Deepening our Relationship with God

Day 21

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory... John 17:24a

Key Thought: God wants us to see His GLORY

We have come to the last day of this devotional, and it has been our prayer that you have grown deeper in your relationship with God over the past 21 days. We also hope reading and reflecting on this prayer of Jesus has encouraged you as His love and desires for you are seen in the way He prays for you.

Jesus has prayed for the Father to keep us in His name; to experience His joy; keep us from the evil one; sanctify us with His truth; to be brought together in unity and to be effective in our mission in this world, which is to reveal the presence of God through our transformed lives. All of these requests relate to this life we live on earth. As we come to this request in John 17:24, Jesus looks forward into eternity, and asks that we be with Him and see Him in His glory.

Paul refers to this as our ‘Blessed Hope’ - the hope that when this life is over, death simply becomes the doorway into the presence of Christ. Having closed our eyes in death, we open them and see the face of Jesus! (Titus 2:13)

This was not the first time that evening Jesus had pointed their attention to the future, and the promise of eternity with Him. In the midst of the confusion caused by His talking of His death, their desertion, denials and even betrayal, He had spoken these well known words: “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me...” Having spoken these words to calm them, Jesus then proceeded to assure them of their eternity with Him.

- His Father's house has many rooms—ample space for everyone who belongs to Christ.
- Jesus has prepared one of those rooms for each of His followers, with their name on the door.
- Having prepared that place, Jesus will Himself return for us, to take us where He is.
- Jesus Himself provided the way of salvation. The Cross is the bridge we take to the Father, His resurrection provides the life which is eternal.

Jesus now prays for the Father to fulfill this promise made in John 14—to bring us where He is; and having been brought into the presence of Christ, to see Him in all of His glory! The Disciples had seen Jesus reflecting the person of God, but had not seen Him in His full glory as God. However, as each of the Apostles finished their life here on earth and entered the presence of Christ, they saw His full, majestic glory!

And so will we, who have placed Saving Faith in Jesus Christ! We live this life by the grace of God, as the salt and light of Jesus, making disciples as we go. We are kept by the Father, display His reality through the love and unity we show each other and testify to the power of the Gospel. May the Hope we have in the promise of Jesus fill us with joy and passion, as we live for Him!

Questions to Ponder

1. What are the 2-3 most impactful insights you have had during the past 21 days?
2. What are the 2-3 steps God has led you to take in getting closer to Him?
3. How does the hope of Jesus, and His promise to bring you to be with Him impact your heart today?
Impact you life?
Deepen your commitment to Him?

Possible Prayer Points

1. Ask God to plant those insights and steps deep into your heart and life.
2. Ask God to remind you of your hope in Jesus each and every day, so you will know His peace, joy and love.

How do you think you should relate with God as a result of Him trying to relate to you in this way?

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

"I have **manifested your name** to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. For I have **given them the words** that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. **I am praying** for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, **keep them in your name**, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. **Sanctify them in the truth**; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so **I have sent them into the world**. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. **The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one**, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."