SERMON OUTLINE

[40 TOPICS]
40 Powerful Sermon Outline That we Preach From the Holy Word Of God.
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Noah’s ark: A picture of salvation (Part 1)

Genesis 6:9-22

The story of Noah and the ark is more popular than ever. Even people who don’t know the Bible and never come to church know about Noah, his big boat, and all those animals coming in two by two. And most people know about the great flood. But as we read these verses, we need to learn the right lessons.

There are basically two ways to approach this very familiar story. The first is to focus on the controversial issues: What was the extent of the flood? Did it really cover the entire earth? How large was the ark? How did Noah get those animals into the ark?

But if we concentrate only on the controversial elements, we risk missing the real message. Even though it is important to ask, “How did a flood cover the entire earth?” if we stop there, we will miss the main spiritual lessons the Lord intends for us to learn. It is worthwhile to inquire about the civilization that perished, but the emphasis of the text is not on those who died but on the one family that survived.

I. The man who built the ark

Our text reveals a number of important facts about Noah. If we consider these things, we will understand why he and his family survived the flood while the rest of the human race perished.

A. Noah was a godly man (Gen. 6:9).

Noah believed in God and took His Word seriously. He was not a doubter or a skeptic. Noah believed God, and his faith was counted as righteousness. His faith produced in him a lifestyle that was so categorically different from his contemporaries that he seemed blameless by comparison.

Noah was a man who walked with God and knew Him intimately. Noah didn’t merely know about God; he knew God and walked with Him on a daily basis. This is a high honor since Noah and Enoch (Gen. 5:24) are the only two men in the Bible who are specifically said to have walked with God.

B. Noah was a family man (Gen. 6:10).

We know that Noah was married, that he and his wife had three sons, and that each son was also married. Noah was the head of his household and the spiritual leader to his wife, sons, and daughters-in-law.
C. Noah was a unique man (Gen. 6:11, 12). These verses are placed here to emphasize the contrast between Noah and his generation. The word “corrupt” means rotten, put rid, or utterly foul. It describes a world in the final stages of moral decomposition. Having rejected the Lord, the men and women of the world had fallen into a deep pit of violence, hatred, abuse, murder, dishonesty, and every ugly expression of the depravity of the human heart. And in the darkness of those days, one man stood out from the crowd.

Noah was a bright, shining light in the prevailing moral darkness. In an impure world, he was pure. In an unrighteous world, he was righteous. In a world that dismissed God, he walked with God. He stood alone, believing God, building the ark (no doubt receiving much abuse from his peers), always confident that God could be trusted and that the flood would someday come to the world.

D. Noah was an obedient man (Gen. 6:22). This verse comes immediately after God’s specific instructions for building the ark. Note the two things said in this verse:
1. Noah’s obedience was complete: He did everything the Lord commanded.
2. Noah’s obedience was absolute: He did everything just as the Lord commanded. In other words, Noah didn’t do anything halfway.

E. Noah was a bold man (2 Peter 2:5). This fact is implied in Genesis 6 and stated explicitly in 2 Peter 2:5, where Noah is called a “preacher of righteousness.” He wasn’t just a builder who knew how to construct an enormous boat. And he wasn’t just a godly man who let his life speak for him. During the 120 years before the flood, Noah built the ark and preached righteousness to his own generation. I’m sure he warned them of the judgment to come and invited them to join him in the ark. But no one seemed to listen.

Perhaps they were too busy to pay attention. After all, no one had ever seen rain before. Certainly no one had ever seen a worldwide flood before. Why should they take Noah seriously? To his contemporaries, he was like those people who preach on the street corners; it’s always easier just to walk on by than to stop and listen. Jesus compared the days of Noah to the days preceding His return to the earth (Matt. 24:37-39). As it was then, so it shall be again. The past is the key to the future.
F. Noah saved his own family. How did Noah manage to save himself and his family from such a negative environment? We are not left to wonder about the answer because it is spelled out for us in Hebrews 11:7. This is a powerful verse that I recommend you read, memorize, and teach to your own family. We can break this verse down into four smaller statements that help us see what Noah did:

1. He believed what God said.
2. He built an ark to save his family.
3. He rejected the corruption of the world.
4. He and his family were delivered from destruction.

Here is a message for all of us. Noah was a righteous man who had great faith in God. His faith saved his entire family. But note this: Not one word is ever said about Noah’s wife’s faith or the faith of Noah’s sons and daughters-in-law. But they must have had some faith. Why? Because when Noah entered the ark, his wife went with him. Their sons followed them. And their sons’ wives followed them. I don’t know how much faith they had, but they had enough to follow the head of their family. And Noah had enough faith to inspire all of them to follow his example. That’s the power of a godly leader.

Conclusion
Noah was a godly man in an ungodly age, a bright light shining in the darkness. Because he had character and obeyed God when the world thought he was crazy, he ended up leading his own family to salvation. God blessed him, just as God blesses all who follow in His steps. Let there be no complaining about how hard things are and no excuses about how evil the world has become. Be a person of character. Be someone with conviction. Take a stand for the Word of God and don’t worry about what the world thinks. You'll save yourself, and by God’s grace, you may save your family and many others, too.
Noah’s ark: A picture of salvation (Part 2)

*Genesis 6:9-22*

The story of Noah portraits a sure salvation through Jesus and His church. Regarding the ark itself, there was a specific design given in Genesis 6:14-16, a specific reason stated in verse 17, a specific promise given in verse 18, and some specific passengers listed in verses 19-20, along with some specific cargo in verse 21.

Rather than go into detail, I will simply point out that there is nothing mystical here at all. The text reads like a sober historical account of what actually happened. This is not a fantasy story made up simply to teach a moral.

I. The ark Noah built

If we take Genesis 6 seriously, then we must conclude that God really did speak to Noah and tell him to build the ark because a great flood was coming. And God really did tell him to bring the land animals into the ark to keep them alive until the flood was over.

The Hebrew word translated “ark” is used in only two places in the Old Testament. In both places, the word basically means “box” or “container.” This is significant when you consider that the other occurrence of this particular Hebrew word is found in Exodus 2, where it refers to the basket in which the infant Moses was placed when his mother hid him in the bulrushes. It is not a coincidence that the “basket” of Exodus 2 is coated with “pitch,” the same resinous material used on the ark Noah built.

The point here is that Noah’s ark was not like a motorboat. It was essentially an enormous container designed to keep Noah, his family, and the animals afloat during the flood. The ark had no rudder because Noah didn’t need to steer it. He just needed a boat that would float, which is exactly what God told him to build.

II. Jesus Christ, the Ark of our salvation

After considering the nature of the ark itself, we must also recall the spiritual lessons in this story. Three obvious lessons come to mind:
A. God judges sin. From the standpoint of those who perished, this is the central message. Although God is patient even in the face of outright rebellion and repeated blasphemy, His patience must eventually come to an end. God will not always strive with men (Gen. 6:3).

B. Even in judgment, God displays grace. Though the world perished, one man and his family were saved. God never leaves Himself without a witness in the world. This truth saves us from despair when we see evil people rising to power and sin being praised openly; instead, it gives us great hope as we spread the gospel. Until the day the flood came, the ark’s door was open. Anyone could have entered.

C. Judgment will come when Jesus returns to the earth. This is the point Jesus makes in Matthew 24 when He compares the “days of Noah” to the days before His return to the earth. As Noah was building the ark, the people were totally unconcerned about even the remote possibility of divine judgment. In the last days, the world will have little concern about Jesus’ soon return and His judgment on the earth. People will be too busy eating, drinking, playing, navigating the Internet, sending e-mail, buying, selling, building, dreaming, singing—doing anything but getting ready for the Lord’s return. But make no mistake: that day is coming. Just as certainly as the flood came to Noah’s generation, the Day of Judgment will come to the entire earth. And it may come sooner than anyone thinks.

D. The ark points to Jesus. Ellen G. White says, “It was Christ who kept the ark safe amid the roaring, seething billows, because its inmates had faith in His power to preserve them” (RH March 12, 1901 as quoted in the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, volume 1, page 1091). That leads me to the all-important final point. He is the “ark of salvation” to everyone who believes in Him.

Consider these points of comparison:
1. Just as the ark was provided by God, Christ was sent from heaven as a gracious provision for our salvation.
2. There was only one ark, and it had only one door. God never said, “Make four or five arks and let the people make their choice.” He never offered more than one door to the ark. Only one ark! Only one door! Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6) See also John 10:7-9.
3. The ark saved everyone who entered. And everyone who comes to Christ is saved. No one who comes to Him in faith will be turned away (John 6:37).

4. Once God shut the door, no one else could enter. This is a sad and solemn thought. When the door was open, anyone could enter and be saved from the coming flood; once the door was shut, it would not be opened again until the flood was over. Today is the day of grace. The door of salvation is open to all who care to enter.

Consider this final thought. When the flood finally arrived, everyone inside the ark was saved while everyone outside perished in the rising waters. Perhaps some people banged on the door and cried, “Let us in!” When the floodwaters rose, the sceptics at last knew that Noah wasn’t so crazy after all. But it was too late. The same thing will happen when Christ returns to the earth. There will be a final separation between the saved and the lost.

Conclusion
Only one question remains: Are you in the ark of safety? I am not asking about your religion or your tithing or your good works or your religious background. I am not inquiring about your baptism or your church membership or even about your Sabbath School attendance. Those things are of small value when it comes to the issue of eternal destiny.

If Christ is the Ark, are you “in” Christ by faith? Or are you “outside” Christ because you have never trusted in Him? Run to the ark! Run to the ark of salvation! Put your trust in Jesus Christ. May you and your family be found safe in the ark of salvation.
The blessing no one wants

*Matthew 5:4*

“Blessed are those who mourn,” said Jesus. This is one of the strangest statements in the Bible. It is a paradox and a mystery. Happy are the sad! What do these strange words mean? Who are the mourners, why are they sad, and how are they comforted?

I. The mystery of human suffering
No matter how long we ponder this idea, the questions we may ask cannot easily be answered because “the secret things belong to the Lord our God” (Deut. 29:29). God has His reasons, but He’s not obligated to share them with us. The “secret things” describe the deep purposes of God that we simply are not capable of understanding. What sort of explanation would suffice to explain to us why one person lives while another dies?

II. The ministry of divine comfort
But to leave the matter there would not be fair, for the Bible has a great deal to say about the ministry of divine comfort.

A. God Himself draws near to those who hurt. Psalm 34:18 says, “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” Here is a promise of God’s special presence in the midst of our pain. Through the Holy Spirit, the Lord Himself draws near to us in times of great suffering. We sense His presence in a way that goes beyond the natural. We hear His voice even though there is no sound in the room. Many Christians can testify to feeling this special sense of God’s nearness during times of great suffering.

B. God uses suffering to draw us to Himself.
In the same psalm, David declared, “I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears” (verse 4). Suffering turns us to the Lord as nothing else can. Perhaps you’ve heard someone say, “You never know if Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have. And when Jesus is all you have, then—and only then—will you discover that Jesus really is all you need.”

C. We grow faster in hard times than in good times.
Romans 5:2-5 describes the process God uses to develop godly character in our lives. In fact, Paul says, “We also rejoice in our sufferings” (verse 3). That may look like a misprint, but it isn’t. Paul isn’t suggesting that we should become masochists who rejoice in hard times as if we enjoyed the pain. That wouldn’t even be a Christian idea. He doesn’t say, “We rejoice because of our sufferings” but rather “we rejoice in our sufferings.”

Even in the most difficult moments, God’s people can rejoice because He is at work doing something important in them. Verses 3-5 explain the process. What starts with suffering ends with the love of God. This is a wonderful progression, but you cannot get to the love of God without starting in the place of suffering.

D. Our sufferings qualify us to minister to others.
In 2 Corinthians 1:4, we read that God “comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” The Greek word translated “comfort” in this verse is the same word Jesus used in Matthew 5:4. God uses our sufferings to comfort us so that we can minister to others in His name.

No one understands cancer like someone who has been through it. No one understands divorce like a person who’s experienced it. No one understands the pain of a miscarriage like a mother who has lost a child that way. No one knows the pain of losing a job like someone who has been told, “You’re fired.” Many Christians are superbly qualified to minister to others, but they don’t realize it. They are the ones who have been deeply hurt by the troubles of life, and through it all, they have discovered that God is faithful. Those people have an important message to share. They can say with conviction, “God will take care of you. I know, because He took care of me.”

III. The majesty of God’s sovereignty
What do these things teach us about the character of God?

A. Because God is sovereign and we are not, most of our questions will never be answered in this life. Some people can’t live with that truth, so they devise human answers to explain suffering and death. Those answers almost never work, and sometimes they hurt more than they help. When I am called to the hospital, I
never try to answer these hard questions. They are beyond me. Better to say less and be silent before the Lord than to try to explain the mysterious ways of God.

B. Because God is good, we know that He has our best interests at heart. That sentence gets to the heart of Romans 8:28. I am convinced that the goodness of God is the central issue of life. If you believe God is good, you can endure things that would break most people. As long as you believe in the goodness of God, you can live with unanswered questions. But once you doubt His goodness, you must become either a secret atheist or an angry Christian. God’s goodness doesn’t depend on our happiness.

C. Because God is wise, nothing in our experience is ever wasted. God’s purpose for His children is reached through suffering, but nothing is wasted. Romans 8:29 tells us that God has predestined us to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Ellen G. White explains this concept as follows: “Though the moral image of God was almost obliterated by the sin of Adam, through the merits and power of Jesus it may be renewed. Man may stand with the moral image of God in his character for Jesus will give it to him . . .”

If you feel the heavy weight of God hammering down on you, rest assured that nothing is being wasted. He is shaping you into “the image of His Son.”

D. Because God is love, He will not leave you alone in your pain. This is the promise of the second Beatitude: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matt. 5:4). God will come to you. You may not feel it or believe it, but it is true—He has promised it! If necessary, I could produce a long line of witnesses who could testify to God’s comfort in the midst of great suffering. After Calvary, God had nothing to prove to anyone. How can you doubt His love after you have looked at the bleeding form of Jesus hanging on the cross?

Conclusion
I realize that this may not answer every question, but it does answer the most important question: Does God care for me in the midst of my suffering? The answer is Yes. God cares for you, and if you doubt His love, fix your gaze on the Cross and be comforted.
“In Jesus’ name, Amen."

John 14:13, 14

“In Jesus’ name, Amen.” These words of Jesus contain a remarkable promise. They tell us that whatever we ask—anything at all—if we ask it in the name of Jesus, He will do it for us. It would be hard to find a promise broader than that. “Whatever you ask . . . in my name . . . I will do it.”

Our problem is not with the promise but with the condition. What does it mean to pray “in Jesus’ name?” Praying in Jesus’ name refers to a certain formula we add at the end of our prayers. So there is a sense in which every prayer we pray should always be offered in the name of Jesus.

But that still doesn’t tell us what it means to pray “in Jesus’ name.” Perhaps the best way to attack that question is to consider first what it doesn’t mean.

I. What it doesn’t mean
Praying in Jesus’ name means more than simply adding a phrase to the end of a prayer. Here’s a bit of Bible trivia that may surprise you. Go back and read all the prayers in the New Testament. Not a single one ends with the phrase “in Jesus’ name, Amen.” Yet surely those prayers were being offered according to the promise of this text. That tells us that this promise deals with much more than saying a few words and then saying Amen.

II. The importance of names in the Bible
Let’s spend a few moments thinking about the meaning of names in the Bible. In our day, names don’t have an intrinsic meaning. You might be Joe or Jack or Mary or Susan, but those names don’t automatically convey any particular message about who you are. But it was different in Bible times.

First, names in the Bible often represent the character, personality, origin, or destiny of different people. Jacob means cheater, Nabal means fool, and Peter means rock. What about the name of the Lord Jesus Christ? Lord means Master, Jesus means Savior, and Christ means the Anointed One sent from God. When you call out to the Lord Jesus Christ, you are declaring that He is your Master, your Savior, and the Anointed One sent from God.
Second, names also represent authority. We see this principle at work in the great confrontation between David and Goliath. Just “In Jesus’ name, Amen” before the battle begins, David boldly tells Goliath where his power is coming from (1 Sam. 17:45).

Third, names represent a person’s reputation. We see this clearly in reference to the name of the Lord. The very first petition of the Lord’s Prayer is “Hallowed be your name.” To “hallow” something is to treat it as being of great worth. You hallow God’s name when you treat it with the respect it deserves.

To pray in Jesus’ name is to pray based on who He is, with His authority, in order that His reputation might be enhanced in the world.

III. Praying “in Jesus’ name”
What does it mean to pray “in Jesus’ name”? Here are six answers to that question.

A. When you pray in Jesus’ name, you are confessing your faith that Jesus Christ is the only way to God. Hebrews 10:19-20 tells us that we now have confidence (the Greek word means “boldness” or “freedom”) to come into the very presence of God by virtue of the blood of Jesus. The only One who can bring you into God’s presence is the Lord Jesus Christ. “There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). If you do not come to God through Him, you cannot come at all.

B. When you pray in Jesus’ name, you are acknowledging that His name is the supreme name in the universe (Phil. 2:9-11). By virtue of His victorious resurrection and ascension into heaven, God has exalted Jesus to the very highest place in the universe. He has the greatest name in the universe.

C. When you pray in Jesus’ name, you are admitting that there is no power to answer your prayers in any other name, including your own. The whole point of prayer is to admit our total dependence on God. And we come to God in Jesus’ name because “salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).
D. When you pray in Jesus’ name, you are asking that God’s reputation be enhanced through the answer to your prayer (John 14:13). The purpose of our prayers should be to bring glory to the Father. After all, this is why Jesus came to the earth (John 17:1). Jesus came to glorify God through His obedient life, His sacrificial death, and His victorious resurrection. To glorify God means many things, not the least of which is to enhance God’s reputation in the world. When our requests will glorify God, we may be sure that they will be answered.

E. When you pray in Jesus’ name, you are asking that everything you ask for be consistent with God’s character, will, and Word (Rom. 10:13). Calling on the name of the Lord means asking for that which is consistent with all that Jesus is, all that He says, and all that He wants to accomplish in the world.

Think of it this way: You cannot lie or steal in Jesus’ name. You cannot ask God to bless adultery in Jesus’ name. You cannot ask God to bless your sin in Jesus’ name. You cannot swear in Jesus’ name. You cannot ask God to bless your anger in Jesus’ name.

Conclusion
What difference should it make to pray in Jesus’ name? It should deepen our sense of total dependence on Christ. We pray in Jesus’ name precisely because our own name carries no weight with the Almighty. On our own, we stand before God wrapped in the filthy rags of our own self-righteousness.

Finally, there is a clear gospel call that should be made. If you need to be saved, I know the name of the One who can save you. If you want to be forgiven, I know a name that can wash away your sins. If you want a new life, I know a name that can give you new life here and now.

There is no name like the name of Jesus. It is the only name “by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). It is the name that is above every other name. One day all creation will bow down before that great name. And in that name we may bring our requests to God, knowing that whatever we ask in His name, He will do for us. This is the promise of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.
The mission of the church

*Matthew 28:18-20*

Matthew 28:18-20 makes the duty of the church so simple. Many people make it so difficult. Scores of books have been written about the mission of the church, and seminars are offered to teach others the mission of the church, but Jesus reduced it all down to one command (verse 19): make disciples.

The other actions in these verses (going, baptizing, teaching) are all subordinate to Jesus’ main command to make disciples. The other actions tell us how to make disciples.

Making disciples is our plan. Going, baptizing, and teaching are our process. All of this is our mission.

I. Our mission

Jesus said that the disciples were to “go . . . and make disciples.” This is certainly what the disciples understood to be their mission. They were to gather followers. They were to gather learners from all the nations of the earth. They were to teach them. They were to go into the world and seek to gather followers and instruct them, teach them, and train them. Christ’s disciples were to “make followers of Jesus Christ”—following Him as their Master Teacher. They weren’t to make followers after themselves. They were to make disciples of Jesus Christ. That was their mission. That is our mission.

The disciples understood that to be a disciple would cost them their lives. Everything they had was to be given up (Matt. 10:37, 38). Making disciples doesn’t just happen in the four walls of a church, nor does it happen only in Bible study groups. It happens when we rub shoulders with the world and speak with them of the marvelous richness of grace that is found in Christ Jesus.

Making disciples is “heart work,” and God is the one who changes hearts. Ultimately, for the work of making disciples, we are utterly helpless. Yet, look carefully again at Matthew 28, where we receive our sufficiency for the mission God has placed before us.
II. Our sufficiency
As we come to the world with the message of the gospel of grace, we realize that we aren’t our own authority in this process. We alone can’t convince people to forsake the world and follow Christ. Only Jesus—through the Holy Spirit—has the authority and power to do this (Matt. 28:18; John 10:27, 28; 17:2). “But without the presence of the Spirit of God, no heart will be touched, no sinner be won to Christ.” Jesus has promised His involvement in this process.

He seems to say, “I am with you always! I have the authority. I will get the job done.” You remember that Jesus promised to build His church (Matt. 16:18). Our task is to make disciples. Jesus is the guarantee of our work. Jesus has guaranteed the work by His authority (verse 18) and His presence among us (verse 20).

III. Our practice
Let’s consider the following question: How did the disciples understand Christ’s command to make disciples? To understand how the disciples interpreted Jesus’ command to make disciples of all nations and baptize them, we can study the practice of the early church to determine the same question in our context. We will discover that they preached the gospel and planted churches. They were proclamation focused, and the church was central.

Remember the history of the early church?

For the first three or four years, the church was concentrated in Jerusalem. “The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem” (Acts 6:7). Then, after Stephen was stoned to death, the church scattered. Philip went to Samaria and Caesarea. Paul was called to Damascus. Peter went to Joppa.

Let’s look at Acts to see what happened:
• The good news of Jesus Christ spread north, and a large number believed (Acts 11:19-21).
• When the church at Jerusalem heard of this, Barnabas was sent to shepherd the church. But he quickly discovered that Paul was the man needed in Antioch. Paul was able to teach the church and lead them into maturity (Acts 11:22-24).
The church was scattered. The gospel was preached. Many in Antioch believed. For a year, Paul discipled those in the church, grounding them in the truth of God. The church was maturing. The disciples were growing (Acts 11:25, 26).

Now watch what God did through this church in Antioch. Turn to Acts 13, where the story of Antioch continues. They sent some of them away to repeat what God had done in Antioch!

God had drawn believers to Himself in Antioch and had matured them. Barnabas and Saul (Paul) were chosen and sent away by direct intervention of the Holy Spirit (see verses 2 and 3).

They came to Seleucia, Cyprus, Salamis, Paphos, Pisidian, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. They preached the gospel and strengthened the souls of the believers (Acts 13:1-3).

This is “missions.” Preaching the gospel. Gathering believers into churches. Discipling them in the faith. Sending them out to do it all over again (Acts 14:21-23). This happened during Paul’s first missionary journey. On his second missionary journey, Paul sought to strengthen the churches he had established and to establish others.

Now look at Acts 15. Paul was strengthening these churches by further discipling the people in these churches (Acts 15:40-16:1). The summary is given in Acts 16:5: “So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.”

Then Paul went on to duplicate his efforts. He planted churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth. Luke records for us that Paul “settled there [in Corinth] a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them” (Acts 18:11). In other words, Paul did in Corinth exactly what he did in Antioch before he was sent out—he discipled believers in the city.

Conclusion
We are called to do the same. As we do this, we will have to make several choices. Shall we go? What will we send people to do? We need to go and send people to make disciples! That is what our Lord commissioned us to do.

There are many different opportunities for people to go and do things locally and abroad.

Many people go to do many different things—good things! But when the church sends people, our priority must be to make disciples!
I believe this is the most appropriate biblical model for personal and church growth. Therefore, let’s “go . . . and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19).
The lamb of god

Matthew 1:18-25; John 1:29

Joseph was engaged to a young Jewish maiden named Mary. They were betrothed, which means they were legally married but not yet living together. During that time, word came to Joseph that Mary was pregnant. Joseph knew he wasn’t the father, but he knew that someone was! He believed that Mary had been unfaithful to him, and he decided to get a divorce (Matt. 18, 19). Yet, because he loved Mary, he wanted to divorce her quietly because the penalty for committing Mary’s crime was death by stoning.

However, before he could put his plan into action, God sent an angel to tell Joseph that things were not what he thought they were. He told this Jewish husband that Mary was carrying a child that was miraculously fathered by the Holy Spirit of God. Joseph learned that this child would be a special child with a special mission. Joseph’s reaction was to take Mary into his home and wait with her until the day the baby is born. Neither of them realized that the baby growing in Mary’s body was the Lamb of God who would one day die for the sins of all men. Verse 25 tells us that Mary eventually delivered her child. When she did, the Lamb of God was born. Subsequently, the Bible says that John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Today, I would like to share with you three characteristics of the Lamb of God.

I. The Lamb of God was a special Lamb (verse 20)

A. His conception was special. Jesus Christ had no human father! His Father was one of the three members of the Godhead—God Himself! What makes the conception of Jesus so wonderful is the fact that He was born to a virgin. We all know the traditional method by which babies are conceived and brought into this world; however, the Jesus’ conception was different! His mother was a virgin (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23; Luke 1:34, 35).

B. His conduct was special. From the day Jesus came into this world until the day He returned to heaven, He was a person of very special characteristics.
1. Miracles. Jesus could feed multitudes, open blind eyes, heal the sick, and even raise the dead. Everything He did marked Him as special. However, these activities were merely proof the lamb of god that He was indeed who He claimed to be (Luke 4:18; Isa. 61:1).

2. Messages. When Jesus opened His mouth, people marveled at the things He said. When He was only 12, He astonished the doctors of the Law (Luke 2:47). When He began His ministry, He continued to amaze the crowds that heard Him speak (John 7:46; Luke 4:22).

C. His claim was special. Jesus was never shy about telling people who He was. In fact, His claims were what caused the Jews to seek His death. What claim did Jesus make that was so offensive to people? The answer to that question is two-fold.

1. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God (John 10:36). Jesus claimed that He was the Son of God in heaven. People supposed Him to be the son of Joseph (Mark 6:3); however, Jesus claimed a special relationship with the Father in heaven.

2. Jesus claimed to be God (John 14:9; 8:58; 10:30). This claim was even more offensive to the Jews than the other one! By making this claim, Jesus was telling them that He was eternal, that He was their God, and that they needed to bow before Him and acknowledge Him as one of the three members of the Godhead.

II. The Lamb of God was a sacrificial Lamb (verse 21) Jesus came to earth to be the sacrificial Lamb (John 18:37). He came to die for the sins of humanity. Luke tells us that Jesus’ mission in this world was “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

A. He was a spotless Lamb. Before any lamb could be offered as a sacrifice, it had to be examined thoroughly and be declared spotless (Num. 28:9). An animal that was impure or deformed could not be offered. For Jesus to be the sacrifice for our sins demanded that He be a human without spot or blemish. Jesus filled this bill perfectly. Not only was He the Son of God, He was also the sinless Son of God (2 Cor.5:21; 1 Peter 2:22).

B. He was a submissive Lamb. Jesus wasn’t forced into His role as a sacrifice. He willingly submitted to all that He endured. He did it all out of a heart of love for
you and me. He submitted to the Father’s will and paid the price for our sins. He was a submissive Lamb (Isa. 53:7).

C. He was a sacrificed lamb. All the rest meant nothing unless the sacrifice was fulfilled. It wasn’t enough for Jesus to be sinless and surrendered; He had to suffer and die before sin could ever be destroyed (Heb. 9:22). III. The Lamb of God is a saving Lamb (verse 21)

If the story ended here, with Jesus dead on a cross, this would be a sad story to tell. There would be no reason to celebrate Christmas and no need to come to church. There would be no salvation and no hope for our souls. But—thank God—the story doesn’t end there! Three days after Jesus died on the Cross, He came forth—alive!—from the tomb (Matt. 28:1-6). He is still alive today (Heb. 7:25). Since this is true, I want to show you what the Lamb of God can do today.

A. He has the power to save sinners. Those who are lost in sin have hope today! They can turn to the Lord Jesus, and He will save their souls! There are three basic things that He will do in the heart and life of every sinner who comes to Him by faith.

1. He can cleanse sin. His blood has the power to wash away sins forever (Ps. 103:12; 1 John 1:7).
2. He can convert souls. The human soul is a wicked thing (Jer. 17:9). It is lost and undone and cannot have fellowship with God. However, when a sinner trusts Jesus for salvation, Jesus takes that life that was so far away from God and brings it near to Him (Eph. 2:12, 13).
3. He can change sinners. When Jesus saves someone, He also changes that person (2 Cor. 5:17).

Conclusion
When you think about Christmas this year, try to keep things in perspective. Today is the appropriate time to remember the special day when God sent His Son into the world to be the sacrifice for our sins. I invite you to come to Jesus right now. He can fix what is broken in your life. How many of you would like to accept the Lord Jesus and His eternal salvation? Would you like to reconsecrate your life to honor and serve Him? Jesus is the Lamb of God! Let’s honor Him by saying with John the Baptist: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”
A passion for souls
Matthew 9:36-38

The Bible is a book filled with meaning and blessing. However, some passages are very disturbing. For instance, in Psalm 142:4, the Bible says that “no man cared for my soul.” This passage should bother us.

I believe there are literally billions of people in our world about whom no one cares. It is safe to say that millions live in this world with no one to pray for them or tell them about Jesus. Sadly, many Christians know Jesus but do not care about the souls of the lost. What a contrast to the Lord Jesus Christ! His passion for souls brought Him from heaven to earth and motivated His every waking activity (Luke 19:10; Mark 10:45). It was this passion for souls that propelled Him to an old rugged cross where He gave His life to save lost sinners (Rom. 5:8).

In Matthew 9:36-38, Jesus looked upon the multitudes that had gathered around Him because of His miracles. As He looked at these helpless, hopeless, hurting people, Jesus saw four elements that caused Him to be moved with compassion for these lost ones. These same four elements ought to cause those of us who claim the name of Jesus to have the same heart for sinners that motivated our Saviour! Let’s look into this passage as we consider the thought, “A Passion for Souls.”

I. Jesus saw their departure from God AND their depravity in sin (Matt. 9:36)
   They were “scattered abroad” (verse 36).

   A. Outside the fold (no company or fellowship)
   B. Away from the Shepherd (no guidance or protection)
   C. Away from home (no comfort or rest)
   D. Apart from where they should have been (Eph. 2:12) Christians need to understand that this world is away from God! Not everyone is in a right relationship with Him, but all need a witness! The Good Shepherd seeks sheep like these (Luke 15:3-7).

   In Matthew 9:36, Jesus wasn’t referring to physical fainting; His words had a deeper meaning! He was moved with compassion because these people were lost under a burdensome load of sin.
Notice the sins of the world. We are surrounded by men and women who are capable a passion for souls of doing absolutely anything you can imagine. These depraved people need to be reached by a compassionate Christian soul-winner!

II. Jesus saw their destiny

A. Jesus knew that apart from Him, these people would be lost. No wonder He was moved with compassion! Jesus doesn’t want anyone to be lost!

Ellen G. White says, “In the apostasy, man alienated himself from God; earth was cut off from heaven. Across the gulf that lay between, there could be no communion. But through Christ, earth is again linked with heaven. With His own merits, Christ bridged the gulf which sin had made, so that ministering angels can hold communion with man. Christ connects fallen man in his weakness and helplessness with the Source of infinite power. But in vain are men’s dreams of progress, in vain all efforts for the uplifting of humanity, if they neglect the one Source of hope and help for the fallen race.”

B. Christians need the same vision!

C. Look around, church! There are people all around who will die without the knowledge of Jesus (Ezek. 33:8). We must share with them the vision from heaven and act accordingly.

III. Jesus saw their despair without a shepherd

A. They were without a shepherd!

B. The blessings of the church and of the saved—prayer, companionship, peace, joy, rest, satisfaction, etc.—are things the lost world knows almost nothing about.

C. Our duty as believers is to tell people about Jesus. Our hearts ought to be broken because the world doesn’t know our Saviour!

IV. Jesus sent His disciples to make a difference (Matt. 9:37, 38) Jesus places three responsibilities on the shoulders of His people:
A. Visualize. See the harvest! Recognize that not everyone is saved; millions are poised on the edge of everlasting destruction! We also need to see that the harvest is ready and waiting to be gathered! We will never reap until we first enter the field (Mark 16:15).

B. Agonize. “Pray ye therefore” (Matt. 9:38). This is a call to be broken and burdened over the plight of the lost. There are few broken hearts over the lost in our day! We need to attack the devil on their behalf, praying for them constantly and seeking the Lord for the souls of sinners.

C. Evangelize. It isn't enough to see the need, nor is it enough to pray for the lost and be concerned for their souls. Jesus desires that each of us does the work of an evangelist (Acts 1:8).

Andrew portrays the role of a burdened Christian (John 1:40-42; 6:8, 9; 12:20-22); he fulfilled the call to be a fisher of men (Matt. 4:18, 19). Ellen G. White says, “God might have committed the message of the gospel, and all the work of loving ministry, to the heavenly angels. He might have employed other means for accomplishing His purpose. But in His infinite love He chose to make us co-workers with Himself, with Christ and the angels, that we might share the blessing, the joy, the spiritual uplifting, which results from this unselfish ministry.” She also affirms, “The church of Christ is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men.

Its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. And the obligation rests upon all Christians. Everyone, to the extent of his talent and opportunity, is to fulfill the Saviour’s commission. The love of Christ, revealed to us, makes us debtors to all who know Him not. God has given us light, not for ourselves alone, but to shed upon them.”

CONCLUSION
What are you doing? Are you having any success (Prov. 11:30)? God’s plan is that His people share the good news with a dying planet. Our job is the greatest the world has ever known (Ps. 126:5, 6).
Perhaps we need to come before the Lord and confess to Him that we haven’t witnessed as we should have. Time is short, the laborers are few, and the harvest is plentiful and ready. Are you doing your part? Ellen G. White declares, “Those who are watching for souls, those who devote themselves most fully to labor for the salvation of the erring, are most surely working out their own salvation.”
May God help you to understand what a responsibility and privilege it is to have a passion for souls and to be a disciple in His family.
You have a Comforter!

*John 14:16-18*

The Holy Spirit is often called Paraclete, Advocate, or Intercessor. Christians don’t have to completely understand the person of the Holy Spirit; in fact, it’s impossible because He doesn’t tell us everything about Himself. All we need to know is that He is one of the Godhead and that He has an important mission. He is always working to make Christ known in our hearts, and He delights when we seek knowledge about why He has come (John 16:13, 14).

I. The Comforter (John 14:18)

Jesus stood before His disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. He had gathered His chosen ones for a last moment of communion before He was translated into heaven. Jesus was their guide, teacher, joy, peace, hope, and love. Now He was physically leaving them, and they must have wondered, “Now who will guide us?”

Jesus knew what His disciples were going to face: hardships, destitution, persecution, the loss of all things, the spoiling of their earthly goods, being dragged before magistrates, even being tortured for His name.

Although the disciples may not have understood Jesus’s immortal words, “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you,” He seemed to be saying to them, “I will never let you fight your battles alone. I know what you’re going to face, but I know the Father’s wonderful plan for you. If you knew and understood it, your hearts would rejoice!”

He promised His disciples, “I will pray to the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever . . . he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (John 14:16, 17).

The Holy Spirit is sent to the world, to the sinner, for one purpose: to be a convicter and convincer of sin, righteousness, and judgment. “And when he is come, he will reprove [convince] the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8).

First, He convicts of sin: “Of sin, because they believe not on me” (verse 9). The Spirit reveals that all sin is based on one foundation: unbelief. This refers to an unbelief in the power and blood of Jesus Christ to save and deliver from sin.
Second, He convicts of righteousness: “Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more” (verse 10). As Jesus looked at His disciples, He seemed to say, “You who see me ascending to heaven bear witness to my righteousness—for God would not translate an unholy man. The Holy Spirit will say through you to the world, ‘You called Him a devil, a glutton, a winebibber, an imposter. But how do you answer His being taken into glory by the Father?’”

Third, He convicts of judgment: “Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged” (verse 11). The Holy Spirit testifies to the world that there is now freedom for all men because Jesus Christ judged and destroyed Satan’s power at the cross.

Many Christians picture the Holy Spirit as a sweet, innocent mist sprayed over the earth. Some believe all they have to do is simply “breathe Him in”? But the Holy Spirit was not sent to us as a passive, weak influence; He is a divine Person with a personality! He has a mind, eyes, ears, and feelings.

II. The relationship-builder
The Holy Spirit has a way of simplifying our relationship with God the Father and Jesus. He is the One who teaches us to say, “Abba, Father.” This phrase refers to a custom from Bible times regarding the adoption of a child. Until the adoption papers were signed and sealed by the adopting father, the child saw this man only as a father.

He had no right to call Him Abba, meaning “my Father.” Yet as soon as the papers were signed, registered, and sealed, the child’s tutor presented him to the adopting father, and for the first time the child could say, “Abba, Father!” As the father embraced the child, the young one cried, “My father! He’s not just a father anymore. He’s mine!”

This is the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit. He teaches you about Christ. He presents you to the Father. And He keeps reminding you, “I have sealed the papers. You are no longer an orphan; you are legally a child of God! Now you have a loving, wealthy, powerful Father. Embrace Him; call Him ‘my Father.’ I have come to show you how much you’re loved by Him! He wouldn’t have adopted you when you were wild, sinful, and rebellious unless He loved and wanted you!”

III. His loving mission
The Holy Spirit’s mission is to comfort Christ’s bride in the absence of the Bridegroom, Christ. “He shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever” (John 14:16). “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26).

“Comforter” means one who soothes in times of pain and grief, eases pain and sorrow, brings relief, consoles, and encourages. By calling the Holy Spirit “the Comforter,” Jesus made an infallible prediction: He predicted that His people would suffer discomfort and would be in need of comfort—that there would be lots of pain and suffering among His people in the last days.

The Holy Spirit brings comfort by reminding us that He lives in us with all the power of God inherent in His being. And that’s why we can say, “Greater is He that is in me than all world powers combined!” God sent the Spirit to use all His power to keep us out of Satan’s clutches—to lift our spirits, give us hope, and flood our lives with the love of our Lord (Rom. 5:3, 5).

Conclusion
The Holy Spirit wants you to know what God has done for you. He seems to say, “You once said you gave your all to Jesus. You gave Him your love, and He still loves you. And now, neither will I let you go. I’ve been sent by Him to do a work—and I will keep doing it!”

There is no true comfort for anyone on this earth except that of the Holy Spirit. People run to counselors, psychologists, friends, priest, books, tapes, lectures, seminars, and group sessions, but how much comfort do they get? Not enough to last them the trip home! It’s all in vain; the pain keeps coming back. No, the world has nothing to offer a hurting spirit: “The world knew Him not” (John 1:10).

This is why we need the Holy Spirit to live in us. He alone can lay you down at night, as in a warm bed, and fill your heart with perfect peace. He alone can truly comfort you in times of pain and sorrow. He is the one who will assure you, “This comfort is not just temporary—it is eternal!” Do you want to ask for the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit?
Prayer is about requesting
Matthew 6:11

In Matthew 6, the Lord’s Prayer opens with an exclusive desire to bring honor and glory to God. We are taught to pray for His glory, His kingdom, and His will. In verse 11, however, we are taught to pray for ourselves. On the surface, this petition seems narrow and selfish, compared to the broad and unselfish attitude manifested in the first part of the prayer.

Yet, even this request for personal needs is intensely spiritual in nature. Prayer is about adoration, devotion, and worship. It is also about asking, dependence, and needs. Let’s consider the simple sentence “Give us this day our daily bread.” As we do, we are going to learn that prayer is about requesting.

I. The devotion of this prayer
By coming to God to ask for the basic needs of life, we are entering into a time of profound worship. In reality, no higher form of worship exists than that for a child of God to enter into the presence of his or her heavenly Father and unashamedly declare, “I cannot make it without You! I am totally dependent upon You, Lord!”

A. We believe in God’s power.
When we pray for God to meet our needs, we are proclaiming our faith in His power to do just that. We are telling our Father that we believe He is able to take care of us. This is the Bible’s testimony concerning our God (Job 42:2; Luke 1:37; Eph. 3:20).

B. We believe in God’s promises.
When we pray this simple prayer, we are confessing our faith in the promises God has made to His children. The Bible is very clear when it tells us that the Lord will take care of His own (Ps. 37:25; Phil. 4:19; Matt. 6:25-34).

C. We believe in God’s personality.
When we ask God for the daily needs of life, we are not trying to twist His arm to get Him to give us things He does not want us to have. We are not trying to overcome His reluctance to meet our needs. We are merely laying hold on His
provision. We are humbly acknowledging His willingness to give. Nothing honors God more than His children coming to Him in childlike faith, asking Him for what they need and believing that He loves them and that He is a generous God. God is not a miser who must be persuaded to meet our needs. He is our Father, and He delights in giving us the good things of life (Luke 12:32).

II. The dependence of this prayer
Not only does this prayer honor the Lord by worshiping Him as the great Giver, it also expresses the total dependence of God’s children upon their heavenly Father. Notice what this prayer says about us and our relationship to the heavenly Father.

A. It is a prayer of confession. This simple statement says, “I can’t meet my own needs, but You can.” When we pray this prayer, we are confessing our own weaknesses and limitations and confessing that we believe God is able where we are not. When we pray this prayer, we are not resting in our own ability to work and provide food for our tables.

B. It is a prayer of confidence. The idea of this simple prayer is this: “Give us day by day the things that are necessary for life.” This is not a request for God to meet needs that have not yet arisen; it is an expression of faith in God that says, “I believe You will take care of me one day at a time” (read Matt. 6:34).

C. It is a prayer of contentment.
This simple prayer says, “I am willing to accept the things You will send into my life today.” We may not always like the bread God sends our way, but we can trust Him to send us exactly what we need day by day.

So, if we are called upon to eat the bread of sorrow and affliction, He knows best. If we are allowed to feast on angel’s food and heavenly manna, that is also His choice for us. Our duty is to trust Him to do in our lives exactly what needs to be done every day (Rom. 8:28).

The practice of contentment is one of the greatest challenges believers face. Yet, it is what God expects from us (1 Tim. 6:6-8; Heb. 13:5, 6; Phil. 4:10-13).

III. The depth of this prayer
On the surface, this request—“Give us this day our daily bread”—is a simple, straightforward request, and yet, when you think about it, this prayer is very large in its scope.

A. It is a communal prayer. Notice the words “us” and “our.” This is not a prayer that can be prayed selfishly. It is not just about getting “my” needs met; it is about praying for the needs of the family of God. We are challenged and commanded to have the best interests of our brothers and sisters at heart as we pass through this life and as we pray (Phil. 2:4; Gal. 6:2; 1 Cor. 10:24). We are to pray for one another; for preachers, teachers, missionaries, single mothers, struggling teenagers, families that are suffering, and those who are sick; and for every conceivable need in the lives of others.

B. It is a comprehensive prayer. One commentator said this phrase could be expressed in this way: “Give us this day the things sufficient for our subsistence.” This is more than a prayer for food on our plates; this is a humble request for God to provide everything we need to make it through each day. If we could ever get to the place where we truly trust Him for all we need, day by day, worry would no longer be a part of our lives. We would be in a place of contentment and peace, knowing that our heavenly Father is in perfect control of all the situations in our lives (Phil. 4:6, 7).

It is not wrong to pray for our needs. Some people will not pray for themselves, believing it to be selfish and not spiritual. Jesus clearly commands us to pray for the necessities of life; therefore, let us not be ashamed to bring every need and every matter to Him, knowing that He will hear us, sustain us, and supply us as we move through this world (Heb. 4:14, 15).

May the Lord help His people realize that we are to ask, and if we will ask, we will receive (Matt. 7:7-11; James 4:2). God is not a tight-fisted, mean-spirited, heartless dictator who delights in watching His children struggle. He is a gracious, loving heavenly Father who delights in giving His best gifts to those who know Him!

Conclusion
I encourage you to come to the Father and tell Him about the needs in your life. Never be afraid, never be ashamed, and never limit your praying to “important”...
matters. Come to Him and call on His Name, believing that He cares, that He hears, and that He will answer you for His glory!
Prayer is about releasing. Why is this important? It is important because our prayer lives, the reality of God’s presence in our lives, and the closeness and power in our fellowship rest on how well we deal with our sin problem, both vertically and horizontally.

I. This prayer involves a confession

A. When we pray this prayer, we are confessing before the Lord that we have a problem. This is a truth that many believers have trouble with, but the fact is, we may be saved but we can and do still sin. This sad fact is made plain in 1 John 1:8, 10. It is also clear from the testimony of the apostle Paul in Romans 7:14-25. His experience is one we all share.

We need a clear consciousness of our sins! Many believers act as though they think sin is something that happens to others but not to them. As a result, they never go to the altar to pray. They never confess their wrongdoings and shortcomings. They never go to another believer and say, “I’m sorry. I hurt you, and I was wrong.”

B. We all have a problem with sin in our lives, and we all need help dealing with that problem. It is also true that if we are ever to get the help we need to deal with our sin problem, we need to admit our guilt before God.

C. Matthew 6:12 uses the word “debts” to refer to our sins. This is one of the words used in the New Testament when speaking of sin. Let’s look at these words and where each can be found.

1. Romans 3:23 and Luke 15:21. This particular word is used several times in the New Testament and means “miss the mark.” It is an archery term and is used to refer to an archer shooting an arrow that falls short of its target. It refers to the fact that in our sins, we all miss the standard of God’s perfect righteousness.
2. Ephesians 2:1 and Colossians 3:13. This word is often translated as “offense” or “trespass” in the New Testament. It carries the idea of slipping or falling. It refers to sins that result from carelessness instead of intentional disobedience.

3. James 2:9. This word is usually translated as “transgression.” It refers to “an intentional crossing of the boundaries established by God in His Word.” This is a far more conscious sin than the preceding two.

4. 1 John 3:4 and Matthew 7:23. This word is usually translated either as “iniquity” or “transgression.” It literally means “without the Law” or “lawlessness.” It is direct and open rebellion against God, His ways, and His Word.

5. Matthew 6:12. This word is translated as “debt, debtor or ought.” It refers to something that is “owed to another party.” Here, Jesus says that our sin is like a debt owed to God and to our fellow man.

So, when I pray, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors,” I am confessing to the Lord that I have a problem with sin in my life and that I recognize that I owe God a debt I cannot pay on my own.

II. This prayer involves a cry
If our greatest problem is sin, our greatest need is forgiveness. But, practically speaking, we sin on a daily basis. We may be in a permanent relationship with God that can never be affected by sin, but our walk with Him and our daily fellowship with Him can certainly be damaged by the sins that come into our lives (Is. 59:2; 1 Cor. 9:27).

A. When sin rears its ugly head in our lives, we do not need to hide it. We should never attempt to sweep sin under the rug and pretend it does not exist. Instead of hiding our sins, we should drag them out into the light and confess them as far as they are known. When it comes time to deal with them before the Lord, we should “confess” them to Him. The word “confess” simply means “to agree with, or to say the same thing as.” God wants us to reach the same place He is concerning our sins. He wants us to see sin’s horror, its pain, and its perversion as He does. He wants us to deal with sin as He does. He wants us to judge it in our own lives (1 Cor. 11:31, 32). This is the only way our sins can be forgiven and our fellowship restored with our Father.
B. This simple prayer is about confessing our problem before the Lord and voicing our plea to Him for forgiveness. If we could ever learn to do it His way, we could walk in constant victory before Him.

III. This prayer involves a condition
The most difficult part of this prayer is the last part. When this prayer is understood correctly, it is a prayer for God to extend forgiveness to us to the same degree that we extend forgiveness to others.

A. When we refuse to maintain fellowship with other believers in the family of God, our relationship with God the Father is affected. Regardless of what anyone does to us in this life, it could never possibly rise to the same level as our guilt before the Lord. Jesus illustrated this truth in Matthew 18:15-35. The lesson is clear: If we expect the Lord to forgive us when we cry out to Him, then we must be quick to forgive those who have wronged us. We are to forgive them to the same level that we have been forgiven (Eph. 4:32). If we refuse to forgive our brethren, then we should not expect the Lord to forgive us. After all, He is clear that our forgiveness before Him hinges on our willingness to forgive others (Matt. 6:14, 15).

B. When we have been wronged, offended, and hurt by others, we are to carry that need before the Lord, leave it with Him, and forgive the offender (Rom. 12:19). The Bible is clear about this matter: We are to forgive those who offend us and let their offenses go (Luke 17:1-5; Col. 3:12, 13; 1 Cor. 13:4-7).

We are never more like Jesus than when we forgive those who have offended us! So, when we pray this simple prayer, we are saying, “Lord, help us to be more like you!”

Conclusion
Forgiving and being forgiven are more important than we can ever imagine. Praying is about releasing. It is about us releasing our sins into God’s hands of grace, so that we can experience His forgiveness. It is about us releasing the debts others incur in our lives, so that our fellowship with God and with man is not hindered.
Prayer is about relying

Matthew 6:13

Matthew 6:13 is all about trusting the Lord in the greatest battle we will face in life. This is not the battle to put food on our tables or clothes on our backs. This is not the battle to approach God for forgiveness or even the battle to forgive those who have treated us wrongly. Rather, it is the battle we face every day as we fight the temptations of the flesh and the attacks of the devil.

Prayer is about relying. In the greatest battle of life, we need to learn to rely on God, for therein lies the secret of our victory!

I. The problem of temptation

The Lord Jesus tells us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation.” This simple request literally brims over with meaning.

A. This statement presupposes the leadership of the Lord in our lives. I think we would all agree that our heavenly Father is a sovereign God. Since this is true, does this also mean that God leads us into places where we are tempted to sin? The answer to that question is a resounding “No!” This problem is addressed in James 1:13. When Adam was tempted and fell into sin in the Garden of Eden, he tried to lay the blame at the feet of the Lord (Gen. 3:12). But, the fault did not lie with the Lord.

The fault was with Adam and Adam alone! God never leads us into direct contact with sin, but as we travel the path of life, every crossroad brings with it the option to take a path which leads us away from the Lord’s will for our lives. Every trial we face comes with the potential to fail. We may sin, but when we do, the fault lies with us and not with God. So, what is the Lord telling us to pray? Here is what I think this petition requests: “Lord, please do not lead us into a trial which will present a temptation stronger than our power to resist it.”

B. Since this is true, where does temptation come from? Again, James tells us very clearly that temptation arises from within the human heart (James 1:14, 15). You see, our human flesh is hopelessly flawed and given over to sin (Eph. 4:22; Mark
Temptation in and of itself is not a sin. But, when the instant temptation is embraced and pursued, sin is the result (2 Sam. 11). Just seeing Bathsheba on the rooftop bathing in the nude was not a sin. But, when David desired and pursued her, sin had been born, and the end of that sin was death and destruction!

The essence of temptation is a problem within man. You see, the heart of the problem is a problem in the heart (Matt. 15:17-20). We need help! We need a Helper who is greater than we are. We need Someone who can strengthen us in times of temptation (Heb. 2:18).

II. The power of temptation
Our need to pray for the Lord’s protection from temptation is so great because we are so prone to failure. We have already discovered that our drive for sin, our hunger for sin, and our capacity for sin dwells within our own hearts. Temptation is merely an outgrowth of who we are by nature, and that is why it is so often so hard for us to resist.

A. Temptation is a powerful opponent, but most Christians have no idea as to its real power. You’ve heard someone say, “The temptation was so powerful that I couldn’t resist.” But, in truth, the person who gives in to temptation’s allure knows nothing at all of its power! Only the person who stands against it and wins the victory over it can testify to the great power temptation can wield!

So it is with temptation and sin. When we yield to the attractions of the flesh and the world, it is easy to go wherever temptation takes us. But, when we stand our ground and refuse to yield to sin’s siren call, we discover just how much of a pull the flesh and sin have on our lives.

B. Thank God, the power of temptation has no more force in our lives than we allow it to have! If we wish to stand against it, we can! Our Lord has given us some precious promises that will strengthen us in the midst of our temptations and guarantee our victory over them, if we yield to His will and not to temptation! What are those promises? Read Isaiah 43:2; 1 Corinthians 10:13; and 2 Peter 2:9. What we need is a living revival of Romans 6:6-18!
III. The plea in temptation
This verse closes with the words “but deliver us from evil.” This verse is really saying, “Deliver us from the evil one.” As Christians, we all have an enemy who hates us and wants nothing more than to see us fall and fail. The ultimate goal of this enemy is to use us to bring disgrace and dishonor to the name of the Lord Jesus and God the Father.

This enemy is the devil, and he desires to see us fail (Eph. 6:12)!

A. When we pray this prayer, we recognize that we are unable to fight this war on our own. Therefore, we call on the name of the Lord, employing His power to stand against the devil in the battle with temptation and sin. This was the tactic Jesus used during His time of temptation (Matt. 4:1-11).

When Jesus was tempted, He turned to the spiritual resources of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God and made His victorious stand against evil.

B. We are to appropriate the resources we have been given in the Person of the Holy Spirit and in the power of the Word of God. We are to dress up in the “whole armor” of God and make our stand (Eph. 6:10-18). Incidentally, the phrase “having done a

Conclusion
Through prayer, victory is ours in the battle with temptation. We are challenged to pray about our needs in this battle, and we are to trust the Lord to deliver us in the hour of temptation. He will do His part.

Victory is available, but only those who are serious about waging war on the lust that dwells within them will experience the Lord’s victory.

Do you need help in the battle with temptation? If you need something from the Lord or if you just wish to seek His help in avoiding the pitfalls of sin, come before Him and look to Him for the strength you need. Prayer is about relying. May the Lord teach us that in the greatest battle of life, we need to learn to rely on Him, for therein lies the secret of our victory!
The precious prayer in Matthew 6 ends as it began. Jesus taught us to begin our prayers with praise. We are told to pray “Hallowed be Thy name.” Now, we are called to rejoice in who God is and in the power He holds.

We have covered much ground in these sermons. We have learned that:
• Prayer is about remembering: “Our Father which art in Heaven.”
• Prayer is about reverencing: “Hallowed be Thy name.”
• Prayer is about ruling: “Thy kingdom come.”
• Prayer is about resigning: “Thy will be done.”
• Prayer is about requesting: “Give us this day our daily bread.”
• Prayer is about releasing: “And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”
• Prayer is about relying: “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” We will learn today that prayer is about rejoicing: “For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever, Amen.”

In a world filled with trials, troubles, and problems, it is a comfort to serve a God who is worthy of all the praise and glory we can give Him. It is a comfort to find Someone and something to rejoice about.

I. We can rejoice in His pre-eminence

A. He is sovereign. The word sovereign means “independent and holding complete power.” When we say that God is sovereign, this is what we mean. He is “over and above” this world.

The Bible is clear: The God we serve is all-powerful and in absolute control of all things (Is. 43:13; 46:10-11; Eph. 1:11). Christians, rejoice! Our Father is still on the throne, and no one will ever dethrone Him (Ps. 45:6; 145:13). When Jesus first taught this prayer, Caesar in Rome literally ruled the world. The Roman Empire stretched from the British Isles all the way across the Mediterranean and as far away as India. Caesar had power over every man, woman, and child in the known world. And yet, Jesus said to pray, “Thine is the kingdom . . .”
Don’t let a lost, cynical world tell you that God is out of business. He is still on His throne, and the kingdom of this world is His. One day, the announcement will come from glory (Rev. 11:15). What will be revealed to all on that day is a reality today!

B. He is supreme. When man was created and placed in Eden, he was given dominion over this world (Gen. 1:26-28). When man sinned, he gave that dominion away, and Satan, not man, became the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4). When Jesus Christ came into this world, died on the cross, and rose from the dead, He redeemed everything Adam had given away. He paid the price and destroyed Satan’s dreams of ruling the universe. Our God, not Satan, is now the supreme Lord of the universe. He alone deserves our worship, love, devotion, and allegiance.

Therefore, when we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we acknowledge God’s supremacy and our subjection to Him as our Sovereign God. We are acknowledging that He is our King and we are His servants. This implies that we are His and His alone.

II. We can rejoice in His power

A. His power is enormous. We have established the fact that God is sovereign and in control. Now we are told to rejoice in the fact that He has the power to control things as well. Friends, we do not serve an anemic, weak God. We serve a God of power and ability! He can do anything He pleases because He holds all power. He is Almighty God! Allow me to share some verses with you that showcase the power of God: Genesis 18:14; Job 42:2; Psalm 62:11; Jeremiah 32:17; Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27; Ephesians 3:20.

B. His power is eternal. We are told that God’s kingdom, power, and glory are “for ever.” Another of God’s great attributes is the fact that He is immutable. This word means “unchanging or unable to change.” This describes our God (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8; James 1:17). His power today is the same as it has ever been! What confidence that should give us when we come to Him in prayer! All God has ever been, He still is and will continue to be. After all, He is “I AM.”

III. We can rejoice in His personality
A. He alone deserves glory. Everything God is doing as He exercises His preeminence and His power is for His glory (Ps. 8:1). He does what He does so that He might be honored by His creation. He does what He does so that humanity might be drawn before Him in worship. He does what He does so that His name may be exalted. He alone is glorious, and He alone deserves glory!

Our God is a jealous God, and He will not share His glory with another (Ex. 34:14; Is. 42:8). When we pray, let us therefore remember that not only does our Father have the authority and the ability to answer our prayers; He also has the alacrity to answer them as well. He wants to move in our lives, our homes, our churches, and our world in power and for His glory, but He will only do so when He—and He alone—receives all the glory!

B. He alone determines glory. We learned earlier that God's kingdom, power, and glory are “forever.” This is a great promise we can rejoice in. He will always possess the kingdom, the power, and the glory, but I want to point out that He and He alone determines who will share His glory someday. Only those who know Him in a grace relationship will be permitted to enter into His glorious kingdom (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

Conclusion
The Lord's Prayer closes with the word “Amen.” What does “amen” mean? A lot of us say it, but do we really understand what it means? Here are some interesting facts about the word “amen.”

• It is the last word in the Bible.
• Jesus’ first word in John 1:51 was “Amen.”
• “Amen” was among the last words in Jesus’ life while He was on the cross (Luke 23:43).
• The word “Amen” is found 25 times in the Old Testament.
• The word “Amen” is found 125 times in the New Testament.
• “Amen” is often translated in the Bible as “Verily, verily.”
• ”Amen” means “so be it,” “let it be true,” “I affirm this,” and, in some places, it means “true.”

Prayer is about rejoicing! It is all about rejoicing in the pre-eminence, the power, and the personality of our heavenly Father! We are to rejoice because all that is His is ours because we are His (Rom. 8:17).
Prayer is about accepting


The Lord’s Prayer, recorded in Matthew 6:9-13, introduces four facts, the “Four Rs,” that we need to remember each time we say to the Almighty God, “Our Father which art in heaven . . .” (see verse 9). The “Four Rs” are relationship, reality, realization, and responsibility. Please reflect carefully on them and intentionally consider accepting those facts in your connection with God.

I. Relationship
A. God is called “our Father.” What a precious truth! This is the ground upon which we may approach Him with our prayers. When God made man in His image (Gen. 1:26), God became the Father of the human race in creation. But, when man fell into sin, man received a new “father” (John 8:44). Now, the only way any person can experience the Fatherhood of God is through the new birth (John 3:3, 7).

When the new birth takes place, we are immediately adopted into God’s family (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5-7; Eph. 1:5). When we are saved, we instantly become children of God (1 John 3:1, 2). This new relationship opens up our access to His presence as our Father.

B. God not only births us into His family; He had the will, the resources, and the ability to father us. He has promised to sustain us, supply us, and care for us until we arrive home in glory (Matt. 6:25-34; 10:29-31; Phil. 4:19). We earthly fathers have the same desire within our hearts for our families, but there are times when our resources are not sufficient to meet their needs. We should never fear that with our heavenly Father (Ps. 24:1; 50:10). He is well able to meet our needs (Eph. 3:20).

II. Reality
A. The next two words, “which art,” are filled with glory and wonder. They remind us that we serve a God who exists and who is more than a figment of our imagination.
In fact, faith in the existence of God is the very ground upon which we may approach Him (Heb. 11:6). This verse teaches us that we must believe God exists and that He hears and answers prayer; otherwise, we are merely praying to Him in vain. God is real, and when you call on His Name, you are reaching up to One who hears you and who will move in response to your need!

B. We serve a God who is, not a God who was and not a God who will be someday. But, as God told Moses in Exodus 3:14, His name is “I AM that I AM!” This reminds us that God is the self-existent, eternal One. He has existed unchanged from all eternity past, He continues to exist in the present, and He will continue unchanged into the vast reaches of eternity future.

C. Since God is real and changes not, you and I can approach Him with confidence, resting in His reality. Prayer is not an exercise in futility! Because God is real, prayer is real! Because God is real, there is power in prayer. Rest in that hope and exercise your right to enter His presence!

III. Realization
A. When the Bible tells us that our Father dwells “in heaven,” it is telling us that He occupies a place of honor, glory, and power. Since He is in heaven, He is above the evils and problems of this world. Since He is in heaven, He is in a position to move in power in response to our petitions. Since He is in heaven, He is in a position to be exalted and honored by those who dwell below.

B. When we pray:
1. We should enter His presence humbly.
   Our Father is God! He made this world. He is holy. He is wonderful. We, on the other hand, are vile and wicked (Isa. 64:6). In fact, when we do enter, we can only do so through Jesus, our Savior and Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5). But, when we come in His name, the name of Jesus, we can be assured of an audience and an answer (John 14:13, 14; 15:16; 16:23, 24).

2. We should enter His presence confidently.
   This may sound like a contradiction, but it isn’t. Even as we humble ourselves before God, let us pray in faith, believing that He will hear us and answer us for His glory. To approach Him in doubt is to slam the door of prayer (James 1:6-8),
but to approach Him in simple faith is to guarantee the success of our prayers (Matt. 21:22; Mark 11:22-24; 1 Tim. 2:8).

3. We should enter His presence worshipfully.
When we approach the Lord in prayer, we need to remember to whom we are speaking. He is God. He is Lord. He is awesome! Let us come into His presence to worship, honor, and glorify Him. To do so places us in a position of close communion with Him and opens the storehouses of His glory in our lives.

4. We should enter His presence hopefully.
Our Father is already in our heavenly home, and He awaits our appearance there. Therefore, when we pray, we are merely turning our attention toward home. We look away, by faith, to that eternal homeland that awaits us. We are not seeking answers to prayer that are rooted in the troubles and problems of this life. We are seeking heavenly benefits. We are seeking those things which originate in our new home.

IV. Responsibility
A. You will notice that God is called “our Father.” He is not just my Father or your Father; He is our Father. This reminds us that when we pray, we have a responsibility to pray as part of a family.

B. We have the duty before the Lord to pray one for another. We are to carry one another’s burdens to the throne of grace (Gal. 6:2; Phil. 2:4).

C. Remember, we have no right to pray for things that are selfish in nature. We must remember to structure our prayers so that they reflect that which is best for the whole family of God, not just what we think is best for us. For instance, when there is a situation at church that needs prayer, we should not ask God to work things out the way we want them worked out. We should pray that God will do that which is best for His family and for His glory, even if it isn’t what we want! He isn’t only “my Father;” He is “our Father!”

Conclusion
Today we have learned four ways to accept God our Father. We have studied the “Four Rs” introduced in the Lord’s Prayer. Before we pray to close our message, I would like to ask the following: How many of you would like to accept these four
facts—relationship, reality, realization, and responsibility—as we pursue a deeper communication with the living God?
May God bless you! May our prayers be also acceptable in His sight! Let's pray.
Prayer is about reverencing
Matthew 6:9

In the first paragraph of the Lord’s Prayer, we read: “Hallowed be thy name . . .” What do these words mean and how might they enlighten our walk with God?

I. These words speak about a description
A. The phrase “hallowed be thy name” tells us something about the character of God.

In fact, the names of God revealed in the Word of God reveal His character to us. The only way we can know God is through the many names by which He has revealed Himself to us. His names tell us Who He is!

B. In the Old Testament, God was commonly known by the name Jehovah. This is the name by which He revealed Himself to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod. 3:14). There, we are told that this name means “I AM that I AM.” This phrase literally means, “I will become what I please.” The word translated “I AM” in Hebrew is Yavah. This word has the literal meaning of “the Becoming One.” It speaks of God as One whose will is supreme, whose purposes are certain, and whose word is unalterable.

C. This great name took many forms over the years, as different facets of God’s character were revealed to His people. Let me give you a few derivatives of the name Jehovah that the Jews used:
1. Jehovah-Jireh (Gen. 22:14): “The Lord will see to it” or “the Lord will provide.”
2. Jehovah-Nissi (Exod. 17:15): “The Lord is our banner” or “our victory.”
4. Many other names of God are given in the Bible. He is called Elohim, which means “God.” He is called Jehovah-Elyon, which means “the Lord Most High.” He is called Jehovah-M’Kaddesh, which means “the Lord our sanctifier.” He is called El-Shaddai, which means “the all-sufficient One” or “the Almighty God.” He is called Adonai, which means “Lord.” He is also called “Father”— that is a name which blesses my heart! God is called by many names, but the greatest of all His names is Jesus Christ. This is the God who took upon Himself human flesh, was
born into this world, and died on the cross for our sins. His names reveal who He is and what He does for His people.

D. When we enter God’s presence in prayer, we are to take time to worship, honor, and praise Him for who He is. We are to lift heart, soul, and voice to the One who is God, the One who loved us, saved us, keeps us, and cares for us. We are to take the time to reverence Him and honor His hallowed Name.

II. These words speak about a decision
A. When we come before the Lord in prayer, we face a decision. We can either focus our prayers around ourselves or we can center our thoughts on Him. The phrase “hallowed be thy name” expresses a desire on the part of the petitioner to bow before the Lord in humble submission and reverence. It expresses a desire to praise and worship before the Lord.

B. We can learn about reverencing God by looking at Jewish practices in the past. The ancient Jews had such reverence for the name of God that they would not say His name out loud. They created the name Yahweh from two of the Lord’s names so they could talk about Him without saying His name. They feared they might use His name in vain and thus be guilty of blasphemy (Exod. 20:7). Jewish scribes, who were engaged in the practice of copying the Word of God, were so respectful of His hallowed name that they would wash their bodies and change their pens before they wrote His name. After they had written His name, they destroyed that quill so that it could not be profaned by writing a lesser word. Many times, when referring to God, the Jews simply referred to “The Name.”

Today, we need to learn the same degree of reverence for the hallowed name of God. Far too many people are guilty of taking His precious name in vain. Words like “Gosh,” “Golly,” “Gee,” “Gee whiz,” and “Cripes” are all derived from the names of God and Jesus. Be careful, little tongue, what you say! How many times have we heard—or said—”Oh God!” or “Oh my God!” or “Jesus!” or any of a thousand others just like those? Even Christians are guilty of saying things like, “Oh, Lord!” or “My God!” We’ve all done it, but it is degrading to the Lord’s name to throw it around so casually. His name is a hallowed name, and it is to be treated with respect and reverence.

C. We must come before Him with a burning desire to lift His glorious name in praise. If you do nothing else when you pray, you should at least learn to enter His
presence to worship His name. After all, when you worship and hallow His name, you are worshiping and hallowing God Himself! We must pray within the parameters of His will, never asking for anything that would dishonor His name.

III. These words speak about devotion
A. That prayer, “hallowed be thy name,” speaks of who God is. It also expresses a desire on the part of the one praying to worship Him for who He is and what He has done. I think it is also a petition for help in living out His holiness in our daily lives. There is no greater disservice done to the great and hallowed name of God than what is done by those who claim to love and worship Him when their lives are less than they should be!

B. Our greatest desire should be to live in such a way that the world sees Jesus revealed in us (Matt. 5:16). Our very lives are to hallow His name. We should be able to write over every area of our lives the inscription “Hallowed be thy name.” When we cannot write that inscription over an area of our lives, that area must be changed and brought under the subjection of God’s will.

C. “Hallowed be thy name” is a prayer for God to be glorified by all that we are and in all that we do (1 Cor. 10:31). God’s name is already holy, and we cannot make it any more so. The only way we can hallow His name is through the lives we live. Is that the kind of prayer that you can honestly pray today?

Conclusion
That little phrase, “Hallowed be thy name,” is a call for us to reverence the Lord by honoring Him for who He is; respecting Him and worshiping Him when we pray; and living out His perfect will in our daily lives. How are you doing in the area of hallowing His name? If there are areas that need work, then I invite you to bow before the Father and ask Him to teach you how to hallow His name for His glory!
Prayer is about reigning

Matthew 6:10

When you and I come to know God as our Father, we find out just how truly wonderful He is. This knowledge creates within us a desire to see Him glorified; thus, we pray, “Hallowed be Thy name.” It also creates within us a hunger to see others come to know Him; thus we pray “Thy kingdom come.”

“Hallowed be Thy name” expresses a desire to see God glorified. But, we must also know that He will never receive all the glory due Him until His kingdom becomes a reality both in us as individuals and in the world as a whole. Therefore, we are told to pray “Thy kingdom come.”

These three words may be short in length, but they contain a message that is immense. Understanding what each of these words means can help shed some light on the power contained in this short phrase.

1. “Thy”—This word is a pronoun, and it refers to the Father who is in heaven. The kingdom we are talking about is not human in origin. It is not a kingdom with castles and moats, knights in shining armor, and ladies-in-waiting. It is a spiritual kingdom that belongs exclusively and totally to God.

2. “Kingdom”—This word comes from the Greek word basilica, and it means “royal power, kingship, dominion or to rule or to reign.” So, to pray “Thy kingdom come” is to pray for God’s reign to come upon the earth.

3. “Come”—This little word is an imperative verb meaning “suddenly, insistently, and quickly.” It suggests the sudden appearance of a new kingdom upon this earth that is under the total control of God Almighty.

Thus, to pray “Thy kingdom come” is to pray for the sudden and absolute rule of God over the entire world. Real prayer is about seeking God’s rule in the world. I want to give you three conclusions that arise out of this understanding of the phrase “Thy kingdom come.” These three conclusions teach us the truth that prayer is about reigning.

I. This petition is prophetic
A. It is clear when you read the Bible that God often promises that there will be a future kingdom of righteousness upon this earth. When we pray “Thy kingdom come,” we are asking our Father to bring this kingdom to pass on the earth; therefore, we are asking God to fulfill all His promises and prophecies concerning His earthly kingdom.

B. Notice a few of the passages that speak to this thought: Isaiah 9:6, 7; Daniel 2:44; Luke 1:32, 33; Matthew 25:31. Just as surely as Jesus was born, lived, and died on this earth, there will come a day when He will reign and rule here in power, glory, and righteousness!

C. This future kingdom will be vastly different from any kingdom that has ever existed upon this earth. Earthly kingdoms are tainted by the effects of sin (2 Cor. 4:4; Rom. 8:22). The world lies under the grip of sin, but a day is coming when Jesus Himself will rule this world (Rev. 11:15).

D. When we pray “Thy kingdom come,” we are echoing the groans of nature; voicing the great songs heard around God’s throne in glory (Rev. 4:8-11; 5:11-14), and we are sharing the same desire that resides within God’s heart. We are praying that His righteous, absolute rule might be realized upon this earth. That is a noble prayer!

Let us therefore pray “Thy kingdom come” and join our voices with John as he says, “Even so, come Lord Jesus.”

II. This petition is personal
A. Just as surely as we are praying for the appearance of a future kingdom, we are also praying for His kingdom to be realized in our lives.

B. The word kingdom means “royal power, kingship, dominion or to rule or to reign.” When we pray “Thy kingdom come,” we are praying for God to rule and reign in our personal lives. This petition expresses a desire for God to be our Lord, Sovereign, and King.

C. This is ultimately a prayer that God will be enthroned within our hearts. We should seek to see that we are dethroned, that Satan is dethroned, and that God alone is enthroned in our hearts!
D. A lot of people do not like this concept. They want a Jesus they can mold into their image. But, if you want the Jesus of the Bible, you must capitulate all to Him and His Kingship. This desire is the mark of a genuinely saved believer (John 14:15)!

E. While the literal reign of Jesus is a future event, those who are saved by His grace are citizens of that kingdom right now (Phil. 3:20). We are to pray that His kingdom will be lived out through our lives for His glory.

III. This petition is practical
A. When we pray “Thy kingdom come,” we are expressing a desire to see His work, His Word, and His will advanced in the world today. Friends, we might as well face this fact:

We will not make this world any better through our efforts. In other words, we will not be able to usher in His kingdom by ourselves. He will bring it when He comes, and it will be established by His power alone. We can, however, have a part in seeing that our Lord’s kingdom is spread abroad in the world around us.

B. There are several ways we can do this:
1. Through prayer. We are to pray for God’s kingdom to come and for His will to be done in the world around us.

2. Through submission. We are to yield our lives to Him so that He can live through us. As we do, He demonstrates His love, grace, and saving power to a lost and dying world (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:10; 2 Cor. 4:7).

3. Through outreach. When we are properly burdened over a lost and dying world, we will go into that world and spread the gospel message. Our desire will be to see others saved, and we will do everything in our power to make that happen. We have been commanded to do this (Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:19, 20), and we have all the resources we need (Acts 1:8; Rom. 1:16).

C. We need to ask ourselves these questions: What are we doing as individuals and as a church to spread God’s kingdom in the world today? What can we do to be more effective for His glory?
Conclusion
Are you praying for His kingdom to come in this world? Are you doing all you can to see that the message of the King—the gospel—is shared with the lost? Are you as yielded to His Lordship in your own life as you should be?

There may be someone listening to this sermon who is not yet part of God’s kingdom. Today would be a great time for you to come before Him and receive Him into your heart and life.
Prayer is about resigning

\textit{Matthew 6:10}

We are going to learn the truth that prayer is also about resigning. In our prayer lives, we are to grow until we come to the place where we lay all that we are on His altar and yield the totality of ourselves and our wills to the will of our heavenly Father. This is not always an easy task, but it is absolutely necessary if we expect to become all God saved us to be (Rom. 12:1, 2).

Let's consider God’s will and what our response to it should be.

I. God’s will: A definition

Some people look at God’s will as the iron-fisted rule of an overbearing dictator. God is too strong to resist, so people give in to Him with a resentful attitude. They would do something else if they thought they could!

Others see God’s will as being inevitable, so they submit, not out of faith but out of surrender. They do not submit to God’s will out of love or joy but out of resignation to what they see as certain. These folks pray, but they do not think their prayers will make a difference; they believe the die is already cast.

Still others seem to think that man’s duty in prayer is to bend God’s will so that it aligns with our will. They see prayer as an attempt to get God to do what they want Him to do.

All three of these outlooks are flawed. Yes, God is sovereign. He is in absolute control of the universe, but He still invites His children to pray about things in their lives.

Yet, when we pray, we are not doing so to get our will done in heaven. We pray so that God’s will might be accomplished on earth through us. Notice that prayer is all about Him: Thy name; Thy kingdom; Thy will. God is a sovereign God, but He still commands us to pray.

With that in mind, let’s take a minute to set the record straight as to just what the will of God is all about.
A. God's will of decree. There is one sense in which God has determined some things in advance. These things will be accomplished, and nothing can hinder, stop, or sidetrack the process. This kind of determination can be seen in creation, in the order that is maintained in the universe, in God's dealings with sin and Satan, and in the matter of salvation. The Word of God is clear when it talks about God's definite will being a reality (Isa. 14:24; Jer. 51:29; Rom. 8:28; Eph. 1:9-11; Ps. 115:3).

God's eternal plan will be accomplished! Satan, sin, and death will be judged and done away with forever. The redeemed saints of God will go to heaven. Things will play out just as God has determined they will, and nothing will derail His purposes!

B. God's will of desire. Unlike God's decreed will, that which God desires may not come to pass. But, let me quickly add that even if those things which fall within this area of His will are not accomplished, His decreed will still stand, unviolated and unchanged. That may not make sense to us, but God's perfect, decreed will is always going to come to pass.

"Pray in faith, and the mystery of His providence will bring its answer." Ellen G. White, Prayer, 59.

II. God's will: A depiction
This verse tells us that God's perfect will is being done in heaven; it also says that we are to pray that His will might be carried out to the same degree upon the earth.

A. How is God's will done in heaven? It is carried out completely, consistently, and constantly. It is done without complaint, without murmuring, and without discussion.

It is done quickly and with joy and excitement. And, it is done out of a heart of love for Almighty God (Ps. 103:20).
B. God’s will is not being done on the earth as it is in heaven. If it were, there would be no crime, no sin, no rebellion, no abortion, no homosexuality, no murder, no false doctrine—the list could go on forever!

God’s will, as it is written in the Word of God, is not being done, but we are to pray that it will be! There is a desperate need for God’s will to be done in this world. There is a need for God’s people to earnestly pray that His will might be done here to the same degree that it is done there!

III. God’s will: A duty
If I am to pray sincerely that God’s will be done on the earth as it is in heaven, then I am praying that this world and my own heart will be brought into perfect conformity to His revealed will.

A. When I pray “Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven,” I am asking the Lord to take my life and conform it to His Word and to His will. I am yielding all I have and all I am to the hand of the Potter. I am echoing the prayer and following the example of the Lord Jesus when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Not My will, but Thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). I am taking my life and giving it finally and fully to Him to do with as He pleases (Rom. 12:1, 2). I can’t control what the world does in relationship to God and His Word, but I can control what I do. My duty is to bow and bend to His will, regardless of what that will is.

B. When I pray “Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven,” I am asking the Father to use me to make the earth a little more like heaven. I am praying for spiritual wisdom to learn His will (Ps. 119:27, 33). I am praying for spiritual desire to do His will (Ps. 119:32, 36). I am praying for spiritual strength to carry out His will (Ps. 119:25, 28; Phil. 2:12, 13; Heb. 13:20, 21).

Conclusion
If God is truly my heavenly Father, if I am really interested in hallowing His great Name, and if I am truly committed to seeing His kingdom come into the world, then I am also going to want to yield to His will in my life. Are you committed to the will of God for your life? Have you placed your all on the altar? Have you yielded all to God and His will? Are you doing everything in your power to see His will done on earth as it is in heaven?
You see, when we learn to submit our all to Him and pray for His will to be done in our lives, we are honoring God as our Father, hallowing His precious name, and seeing to it that the work of His kingdom is advanced within us and within our hearts.
Finding success in 2021
Joshua 1:1-16

Through long years of preparation and a burning-bush experience, God called Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. In Deuteronomy 34, we read that at the conclusion of Moses’ life and calling, God had finished preparing Joshua, Moses’ greatest general, to become the leader of Israel. Joshua had been faithful to God and to Moses’ leadership; in Deuteronomy 34 and Joshua 1, we see the beginning of a new chapter in the history of Israel.

For 40 years, Moses had led the children of Israel. He led them through the plagues of Egypt. He led them to safety at the first Passover. He led them out of Egypt and across the Red Sea. He led them to water in the desert. He led them to food: manna and quail. He led them to Mount Sinai and to the law of God. For 40 years, he did his best to follow God and lead his flock to God’s promises. For Moses, his time on earth was complete.

Right now we stand before a new year, 2021. I want you to think about how you spent 2020 and how you plan to spend this new year. Moses led Israel for 40 years, and then he died. Now God was ready to use Joshua to lead the children of Israel to the next steps in filling the covenant that He had made with Abraham decades earlier: a land of their own, descendants in numbers that could not be counted, a future in which the whole world would be blessed. God promised success to Joshua, and in this section of Scripture, God tells him how to obtain success. One definition of success is “a favorable course of termination of anything attempted.

The gaining of position, wealth, fame, etc.” For the Christian, success means being obedient to God’s will. (The Christian’s definition and the world’s definition differ.) We all want to enjoy success in 2013. As we prepare for a new year—a happy new year—let us look closely at five principles for success contained in Joshua 1.

I. Understand the purpose of God
Moses had been faithful in leading Israel. He had been a good steward of the task God had given him to complete. Now God told Joshua exactly what to do: “You
and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give them” (verses 1, 2). Joshua did not argue with God as Moses had done more than 40 years earlier, nor did the thousands of Jews that he was to lead. Forty years in the desert had taught them to obey God. God said, “Joshua is the boss. Now let’s move forward.” Joshua knew God’s purpose for his life.

In what areas does God want you to find success in 2021? What has He done for you in 2020 to prepare you for His purpose in 2021? What does He want for our church? The songwriter wrote, “Where He leads me I will follow . . . I’ll go with Him all the way.”

II. Have faith in God’s promises
Look at Joshua 1:2-4 to see how God tells Israel and Joshua exactly what He is going to give them: a map, a global positioning system (GPS). Many people today refuse to acknowledge God’s promise of the land He had pledged, but God keeps His promises. We are taught that “without faith, it is impossible to please God.” As we begin 2021, how is your faith in God’s promises?

III. Be assured of the presence of God
God promised Joshua, “As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you” (verse 5). Jesus makes the same promises to us Christians. Wow!

God the Holy Spirit will live in us and move in us and give us reason for being (Acts 17:29). Remember, we are to live by faith and not by feeling. You may be saying, “Preacher, you don’t know what I have to go through! You don’t understand.” No, I do not, but God does, and He will be with you forever. So stay strong and let God’s presence encourage you in 2021.

IV. Have courage and accept God’s power and strength
I believe that after Moses and Joshua had died, much of the courage granted to God’s leaders came from being taught that God had blessed the obedience, commitment, and devotion of these two men and other Bible patriarchs. They knew the great things that God could accomplish through total commitment to and reliance upon God for strength.
Do you remember that over 40 years before, while serving as spies with 10 other men, only Joshua and Caleb had faith to believe that God could fulfill His promise? The other spies were afraid of the giants in the Promised Land. What giants are you anticipating in 2013? The God who was faithful to Joshua will be faithful to you in this new year. “Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (verse 9).

V. Pay attention and do exactly what God commands “Do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go” (verse 7). In 1 John, we are reminded that if we walk in the light, we will have fellowship with Jesus and our sins will be cleansed. Do you remember these song lyrics: “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.” To be happy we must walk with the Lord. Not behind or ahead of Him. Not to the right or left, but in the narrow way that leads to life. The majority of our world is on the broad way that leads to destruction.

Some want to escape hell with the smell of its smoke on their clothes. We must live lives of holiness and carefully walk the highway of holiness. We must worship and follow God enough to pay attention to His commands.

Conclusion
In verses 16 and 17, we read that Joshua delivered God’s message to Israel. They submitted to God’s will by following Joshua’s leadership, and Joshua and his people were successful. God gave them the Promised Land. To prosper and have success in 2021, we must submit our all to God. God wants total commitment. When we give Him that, He will fill us with His Spirit (see Deut. 33:9), and we will have joy as He gives us success and prosperity. May God bless you and give you a successful New Year!
The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit
Acts 1:1-8

As we study God’s promises in the Bible, we can see His plans for bringing His people back to Him. The Messiah was promised right after the fall of Adam and Eve. As soon as they were expelled from Eden, they were promised victory and an eventual return to Paradise (Gen. 3:15). Jesus came down and fulfilled this promise! While writing to the Philippians, Paul describes it in a wonderful way (Phil. 2:5-11). The promise of the Holy Spirit was given by Jesus Himself (Acts 1:8). The fulfillment was a rapid one, as recorded in Acts 2:1-4.

All through the ages, God’s people were praying for the Messiah to come and for the power of the Spirit. These two promises were finally fulfilled. Jesus came down and died for us. The early Church was empowered by the Spirit to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

Christians today are fervently praying for Jesus’ return and for the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in these end times. The Bible calls it the Latter Rain (Joel 2:23). In verses 28 and 29, there is a prophecy of a mighty outpouring of the Spirit of God—upon all flesh!

Prayer—the key ELEMENT
1. When Jesus died, the disciples were disheartened, discouraged, and sad; however, we must reflect on what happened after Jesus’ ascension. As the disciples watched their risen Savior go up to heaven, there was peace in their hearts! From despair they turned to the blessed hope, found inner peace, were immersed in joy, and lifted their voices in prayer.

2. The disciples came down from the Mount of Olives and spent time in prayer (Acts 1:14).

3. Prayer had an important role in the coming of the Spirit. Prayer should be the number one business in the agenda of the church.

4. God said, “Call to me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know” (Jer. 33:3, NKJV).
Life under the Holy Spirit

1. It is important to examine and reflect on the life of the believers under the power of the Spirit. Luke the apostle gave us a tremendous insight into what happened when the Spirit came down for the first time: The believers were on fire for the Lord and left Jerusalem, boldly preaching a message of repentance and salvation. What an awesome power!

2. As recorded in the book of Acts, here are some of the key elements of this great power in the lives of the early Christians:
   • The Spirit gave them power to tackle some tremendous obstacles (2:47).
   • The Spirit enabled them to break the barriers of foreign languages (2:6).
   • The Spirit gave them courage to witness (2:36).
   • Thousands of people were baptized (2:41).
   • They were immersed in the Word of God (2:42).
   • They studied the doctrines of the Church (2:42).
   • They were fellowshipping together (2:42).
   • They were eating and breaking bread (2:42).
   • They spent time in prayer (2:42).
   • The Spirit changed their daily lives (2:43-47).
   • They took time to praise God and witness for Him (2:46, 47).
   • The apostles did wonders and signs (4:30).
   • The Holy Spirit transformed unlearned men into scholars for Christ (4:13).
   • The Holy Spirit gave them conviction and boldness (4:20).
   • Their prayers shook the foundations of jails and filled the people with the Holy Spirit (4:31).
   • Prison doors were opened and chains were broken as the apostles prayed (5:19).
   • Miracles were performed by the apostles (3:6).

Praying for a revival in the church

1. We hear a lot of preaching and talking about the need for revival and reformation in the Church. Seventh-day Adventists believe that prayer is the key, the sine qua non, without which nothing will happen. Ellen G. White confirms this thought by saying that a “revival needs to be expected only in answer to prayer.”

She goes on to explain: “A revival of true Godliness is the greatest and most urgent of our needs. . . . Our heavenly father is more willing to give His Spirit to them that
ask Him, than are earthly parents to give good gifts to their children. But it is our work, by confession, humiliation, repentance, and earnest prayer, to fulfill the condition by which God has promised to grant us His blessings.”

2. To make this a reality, Mrs. White tells us that there are some conditions: pray more, forgive more, and criticize less!

3. Another great obstacle for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is criticism, which is really a lack of love for those whom God created. We are not to judge; God is the Judge!

4. Again, Mrs. White gives us some insights into what will happen in the church when we commit ourselves to the Lord and pray earnestly for the coming of the Spirit: “When we have entire, wholehearted consecration to the service of Christ, God will recognize the fact by an outpouring of His spirit without measure; but this will not be while the largest portion of the church are not laborers together with God.”

5. Again, prayer will be the key to revive the church and help its members witness for Christ. Thousands will be converted, and this message will touch even those “who have strayed from the fold.”

Conclusion
Humbly, we ask the Lord, “What should we be praying to bring the power of the Spirit in our lives and empower the church to finish the task that is before us?”

The book Last Day Events, by Ellen G. White, gives us some major points to pray and look for:
- A revival of true godliness (189).
- Obtain victory over pride, selfishness, love of the world, and every wrong word and action (192).
- Yield our souls to Christ (193).
- “By the power of the Holy Spirit the moral image of God is to be perfected in the character” (183).
- “By prayer and faith we are to continually seek more of the Spirit” (187).
- “We must put away all envy, all strife for the supremacy” (187).
Paul tells us what we need to do to make the outpouring of the Holy Spirit a reality: “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). So our prayer should be, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus! Come, Holy Spirit!”
Building a successful marriage

Luke 16:16-18

Many couples have little knowledge of how to have a successful marriage. After all, being married and having a successful marriage are two different things! What defines a “successful” marriage? From a Christian viewpoint, a successful marriage is a marriage that pleases God. A marriage that pleases God is one that is built on biblical principles.

I. The first key to a successful marriage is being committed to a permanent relationship.

God’s plan is for marriages to last a lifetime. Jesus speaks to this in Luke 16:18, where He rebukes those who give way to easy divorce. (The Bible does allow divorce in cases of unfaithfulness).

These are very uncompromising standards, but they are God’s standards, so it is important that we take them seriously and understand that when we decide to marry someone, we are committing to a permanent relationship.

Our society doesn’t think divorce is a big deal, but what does God think? (Read Malachi 2:13-16 and Mark 10:2-12). Again, I do not think you can miss the intent of Jesus’ words. Marriage is a permanent relationship. Divorce is not an option except in cases of unfaithfulness. A commitment to a lifelong relationship helps build a successful marriage.

The only way a couple will get beyond the struggles and difficulties of marriage is to be committed to a permanent relationship; otherwise, they will take the easy way out of a troubled marriage: divorce. A strong marriage is not built on compatibility; it is built on a commitment to a lasting relationship.

II. The second key to a successful marriage is being committed to a faithful relationship.

This means that you will not cheat on your spouse. You will have no intimate relationships with anyone else—ever. No exceptions and no excuses! In God’s eyes,
any intimate relationship with someone other than your spouse is adultery. The Bible has a lot to say about adultery, and it certainly is different than how the world portrays adultery.

The seventh of the Ten Commandments is, “You shall not commit adultery” (Ex. 20:16). In Old Testament times, the punishment for adultery was the same as for intentional murder: being stoned to death. Adultery is a serious offense in God’s eyes. Of course, the New Testament has a lot to say about adultery, too. Let’s read one of those passages now (Heb. 13:4).

Commitment to faithfulness in a marriage is successful not only in that it pleases God; it is also vital to a lasting and fulfilling marriage. Remember that intimacy is more than just a physical act. Intimate physical relations outside of marriage break the bonds that hold a marriage together. Although not impossible, very few marriages recover fully from infidelity.

III. The third key to a successful marriage is being committed to a cooperative relationship.

This means being a team player. Both of them—husband and wife—must do their part. Cooperation means that each person is willing and committed to fulfilling their God-given role and responsibilities within the marriage. No marriage will be fully successful unless both husband and wife cooperate by listening to their leader and coach, Jesus Christ, and fulfilling the role He has given them.

Husbands, you are to “love your wives even as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25). This means husbands must be willing to sacrifice whatever is necessary to meet the needs of their wives.

Second, husbands are to be “considerate as you live with your wives and treat them with respect . . .” (1 Peter 3:7). In other words, do not be a self-seeking dictator, making demands of your wife. Respect her as a gift from God, made in His image and a co-heir with Christ.

Wives, you have a part to play also in this cooperative relationship, too. First, you need to be supportive of your husbands. Genesis 2:20 tells us that God created Eve to be a helper for Adam. She was there to support him. A husband needs to know
that his wife will support him no matter what, not criticizing him or undermining his plans. Second, wives are to be submissive to their husbands (1 Peter 3:1; Col. 3:18; Eph. 5:22). Being submissive means to willingly let your husband take a leadership role in the marriage.

IV. The fourth key to a successful marriage is being committed to a Christ-centered relationship.

Jesus compared building a life to people building houses. Some build on a foundation of sand, which means that Jesus Christ is not the center of their lives; their house cannot stand when the storms come. Other people build their house on a rock, meaning that Jesus Christ is the center of their lives; when the storms come, their house will stand. It is the same with marriage. If you build your marriage with Christ as the focal point, it will endure the storms of life.

Without a real, sincere relationship with Christ, your marriage will not be fully successful and may not even last. Without Christ, we are blind to our own faults, unable to change our behavior, and unwilling to forgive others. How could a marriage endure and prosper in such circumstances? The answer is that it cannot, so make sure that you stay close to Jesus.

Conclusion
Ellen G. White says, “Jesus wants to see happy marriages, happy firesides. The warmth of true friendship and the love that binds the hearts of husband and wife are a foretaste of heaven. God has ordained that there should be perfect love and perfect harmony between those who enter into the marriage relation.

Let bride and bridegroom in the presence of the heavenly universe pledge themselves to love one another as God has ordained they should. . . . All who enter into matrimonial relations with a holy purpose—the husband to obtain the pure affections of a woman’s heart, the wife to soften and improve her husband’s character and give it completeness—fulfill God’s purpose for them.”
Reaching the lost

Luke 15:1-10

In Luke 15, we read two parables about something valuable that was lost. In both stories, the lost item—whether a sheep or a coin—has monetary value. Nobody, including the religious leaders who valued material things, would ignore such a loss; rather, they would make every effort to find it, and they would rejoice when they found it.

If this is true about things that are lost, shouldn’t it also be true for people who are spiritually lost? The term “lost” refers to those who are not Christians, those who are outside of the household of God but whom God desires to come home. You can see this in the story of the prodigal son, where the father says about the son who has repented and returned home that “he was lost and is found” (verse 32). Clearly, the lost things in these parables represent people who are spiritually lost.

Shouldn’t we respond to people who are lost in the same way or an even greater way than we would to lost things? Shouldn’t we exhibit the same efforts and perseverance in searching for them? Shouldn’t we be filled with joy when they are found? I believe that this passage exists primarily to remind Christians of how they should respond to the lost.

You could also interpret these parables as illustrating how God responds to and searches for the lost. Even if that is the case, the message remains essentially the same because if God responds in a certain way to those who are lost, then it is obvious that Christians should follow His example.

I. The first thing needed for reaching the lost is compassion (Luke 15:1, 2)

Tax collectors and sinners gathered around Jesus. These lost people were not running from Him; they were running to Him. They were not avoiding Him, ignoring Him, or even hostile toward Him. Why were sinners so willing and even eager to listen to Jesus? It certainly wasn’t because Jesus had an easy message that tickled their ears.

It wasn’t because Jesus compromised on sin and said that everything they were doing was acceptable. They weren’t gathering around Jesus because He was
putting on a sensational show of signs and wonders. At this point in Luke’s narrative, the emphasis is on Jesus’ teaching; miracles are hardly even mentioned. Why did the “lost” seek out Jesus rather than run from Him? I believe the answer is His compassion. Jesus loved them and showed His love to them in a compassionate way rather than through condemnation. In verse 2, the Bible says that Jesus “welcomes sinners and eats with them.” The Greek word translated “welcomes” in this verse can be defined as “to receive as a friend.”

This was Jesus’ attitude toward those who were lost in sin. Jesus welcomed them; He was compassionate and accepting of them despite their sins and faults. He was a friend, not a foe. Jesus had an attitude that attracted lost people. What about us? If we as individuals and as a church are going to reach people, we will have to show that same love and acceptance.

II. The second thing needed for reaching the lost is effort (Luke 15:3-5)
In these two parables, Jesus emphasizes the effort that went into finding the lost. In the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus said that the shepherd would “leave the ninety-nine sheep in the open country and go after the lost sheep…” In the parable of the lost coin, the woman lights a lamp, sweeps the whole house, and searches carefully for the lost coin (verse 8).

In both cases, the lost thing had to be sought after with great effort. The shepherd did not wait for the lost sheep to wander home, and the woman did not wait for the lost coin to turn up. In our Christian lives and in the church, it sometimes seems that we do the opposite. We tend to wait for the lost to come to us. We’re passive rather than active. We’re waiting for people to come to Christ instead of putting effort into bringing them to Christ! I know that I have been guilty of this. I want people to be saved, but I haven’t made a great effort to search for the lost. This has to change if we’re to reach the lost as Jesus did.

In reality, how do we practice this principle? There are several things we can do. First, a significant part of our prayers should be for the lost. Second, we must make every effort to reach the lost. While it is important that the church as a corporate entity make every effort to reach the lost, the most important thing you and I can do in reaching the lost is to do our best to share Jesus with everyone with whom we come in contact.
III. The third thing needed to reach the lost is persistence (Luke 15:4-8)
In both parables, Jesus notes specifically that the person continued seeking after
the lost item until it was found. In other words, Jesus seems to be pointing out that
persistence was necessary for success. After all, lost sheep among spacious fields
and hills and lost coins on the dirt floor of the Jewish home would not have been
quickly or easily found.

It’s the same with reaching the lost. It is not easy to reach people’s hearts so that
they receive Jesus. Usually, our first efforts do not meet with success. Sometimes it
takes years and years of persistence, but we should not be discouraged or give up.
If a sheep or coin was valuable enough to persistently search for, then people who
are spiritually lost are too valuable to give up on. Even when our efforts do not pay
off quickly, we must remember how valuable these souls are to Christ, and we
must keep trying to reach them.

Conclusion (Luke 15:5-7, 9, 10)
The religious leaders of the day had been indifferent toward the lost and even
antagonistic to their coming to Jesus. Jesus used these two parables to illustrate
how wrong their response was, especially when compared to how they would have
responded to recovering something far less valuable. Jesus pointed out how joyful
they would have been at the recovery of a lost sheep or a lost coin; certainly then,
they should be joyous instead of angered when lost souls return to Jesus.

Jesus pointed out that what matters most to God is the lost. They matter so much
to Him that when the lost are found—even one of them—all heaven rejoices and
throws a party! There is more joy over one sinner coming to Jesus than over 99
people being right where they’re supposed to be with God. If lost people matter
this much to God, shouldn’t they matter as much to us? Shouldn’t we be willing to
give everything needed in order to reach the lost? My answer is “Yes,” and I hope
yours is also.
A name above all

Matthew 1:18-25

“O How I Love Jesus”—one of my favorite hymns! It exalts the name that God said is “above every name.”

Names in our day do not mean much. Parents choose their children’s names for many reasons. Some names are different, some are weird, and some are chosen to honor a family member or someone the parents think of as their hero. But, most of the time, there is no special significance behind the choice of a name.

In Bible times, things were different. Names were given for a reason. Names meant something, and people often lived up to their names: Jacob (“trickster”), David (“beloved”), Abraham (“father of a multitude”), and Moses (“drawn out”). In the Bible, Jesus is given many names and titles. He is called Alpha and Omega, bread, bridegroom, bright and morning star, captain, counselor, covenant, chosen of God, and Christ. He is the door, the desire of all nations, Father, and Emmanuel.

He is God, High Priest, King of Israel, King of Kings, King of glory, and King everlasting. He is the life, light, love, lily, lion, lamb, lawgiver, living stone, and Lord of glory. Of all the names given to Him, however, none is as precious, as sweet, or as majestic as the name Jesus. Let’s look at the name that is above every other name.

Let’s consider the name mentioned in Matthew 1:21. The angel commanded Joseph to name the baby Mary would bear “Jesus.” Why? That name would describe in detail the entirety of all Jesus was coming to do.

I. That name declares His identity

The name “Jesus” means, “Jehovah is salvation.” It was a very common name in biblical society. Jesus may have had a common name, but He was no ordinary baby. His birth was normal, but His conception was anything but the one “of the Most High” (Luke 1:26-38).

Jesus was a real human baby, but He was also God in the flesh (John 1:1, 14). When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, God came to earth to live among men (Phil. 2:5-8).
Imagine! The Creator became dependent upon the created! When we speak of the Jesus of the Bible, we are referring to God in the flesh!

II. That name declares His intentions

His name means “Jehovah is salvation.” The word “salvation” tells us what Jesus came to this world to accomplish: He came to “save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). The word “save” means “to keep safe and sound, to rescue from danger or destruction.”

How would Jesus accomplish this? In Mark 10:45, He tells us in His own words: Jesus came to this world for one purpose—to die on the cross for sinners (John 18:37; Phil. 2:8b, “even the death on the cross” [Isa. 53:4-6; Ps. 22:1; 12-18]). Even our Lord’s great mission statement in Luke 19:10 reveals His intentions.

Ellen G. White says, “The name of Jesus is all powerful to save. It is this magic name that dispels our darkness, and gives us light in the Lord. It cheers our hearts in the darkest seasons of our pilgrimage, and gives us peace with God.” In spite of all He did while He was here, His primary purpose in coming into this world was to die for His people.

III. That name declares His impoverishment

The name “Jesus” is our Lord’s human name. He is given many names in the Bible, but the name “Jesus” is the name that identifies Him with the people He came to save (Phil. 2:5-8a). He was all God, and He was all man, too!

Imagine this: the Lord of glory came into this world. He came not as a king but as a humble servant. He was born in a manger, not in a palace. Jesus understood poverty (Matt. 8:20), weariness (John 4:6; Matt. 8:24), hunger (Matt. 4:2), rejection (John 1:11, 19:10), loneliness (John 6:15; Matt 26:29), temptation (Matt. 4:1-11), and the rest of the trials of the human condition. He endured these things so that He might identify Himself with us, understand us, and be able to comfort us in our trials (Heb. 4:15, 16).

Ellen G. White says, “Whatever spiritual blessing we need, it is our privilege to claim it through Jesus. We may tell the Lord, with the simplicity of a child, exactly what we need.
We may state to Him our temporal matters, asking Him for bread and raiment as well as for the bread of life and the robe of Christ’s righteousness. Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things, and you are invited to ask Him concerning them. It is through the name of Jesus that every favor is received. God will honor that name, and will supply your necessities from the riches of His liberality.”

IV. That name declares His individuality
As I stated earlier, there were many children in Jesus’ time who shared His name, but there was only one who could be called “Emmanuel” (verse 23). Thousands of babies were born into the world that same year, but only one would grow up to be the Savior of the world!

After all these years, Jesus still stands alone. He is the only One who can save a lost soul (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). He is the only one who can save a sin-sick soul! Humanity has fallen into a deep pit of sin.

As we lie in it dying, many would-be saviors walk by with their advice. The legalist says, “You shouldn’t fall into pits.” The religionist says, “I can tell you how to get out of that pit and avoid other pits in the future.” The pessimist says, “You’re going to die in that pit!” The optimist says, “I have seen worse pits than that.” The realist says, “You need to accept your pit.” The spiritualist says, “There is no pit.” Jesus comes by, and He says, “I’ll get into the pit with you and lift you out!” That is exactly what Jesus did for you and me (Ps. 40:1-3).

Conclusion
Yes, there is something special about Jesus’ name. Do you know Him? Have you experienced the power behind His name? If you have, then you know why this name is above every other name. You know why Jesus is exalted and why just the mention of that precious name can speak peace to the troubled, comfort to the hurting, life to the dead, joy to the sad, hope for the hopeless, and glory to the saved soul. Do you need Him? He is as close as the mention of His name (Isa. 55:6).
From a dream to a nightmare

Matthew 1:18-25

Have you ever experienced a moment when your dream becomes a nightmare and you find yourself in the starring role? Have you ever asked, “Why?” We all have! Let me show you a better alternative than asking “Why?” I want to point out the witness of a man named Joseph. He saw his dreams fall into a million pieces at his feet. What happened in his life is worth studying, and his story may help you and me when our dreams are shattered.

I. A shattering discovery (verse 18)
A. It was a time of excitement. Mary and Joseph were engaged to one another. The ancient Hebrew engagement period was as binding as marriage. Surely they were excited about their future together as husband and wife.

B. It was a time of expectation. The Bible tells us that the news from the angel took place before the engagement period was over. Surely they were both counting the days until they could be together and live together as husband and wife.

C. It was a time of embarrassment. It was during this time that Joseph learned that his bride-to-be was pregnant. This would have been a source of great embarrassment to Mary and to Joseph, as well as to their respective families. It seemed that all the dreams Joseph had for the future had been shattered by this devastating news.

II. A sobering deliberation (verse 19)
A. Joseph’s character is revealed. In the midst of this very difficult situation, Joseph’s true self was revealed. We are told that he was a “just” man. This simply means that he was blameless under the Law and that he walked by faith in the Lord. He was a man of God before these events befell him, and what he was in his heart came to the surface in his trials.

B. Joseph’s choices are revealed. Joseph had three choices:
1. He could publicly humiliate Mary because of her perceived immorality. This choice could possibly lead to her death under the Law (Deut. 22:13-21).
2. He could divorce her quietly and walk away, leaving her to raise the child in shame and poverty.

3. He could marry her and raise her child as his own. A Jewish man would rarely have chosen this option.

C. Joseph’s compassion is revealed. Joseph decided to react to Mary with compassion. This was not an easy decision, but it was a decision that was in Mary’s best interests. Instead of making a public example out of her and perhaps even bringing about her death, Joseph decided to deal with her in a quiet manner.

III. A satisfying declaration (verses 20-23)
I find it interesting that the Lord did not answer Joseph’s prayer for direction until after Joseph had reached a decision on his own. Sometimes the Lord allows us to exhaust all our human reasoning before He gives us divine insight into the situation we are facing.

A. It was a declaration of divine providence.
As these thoughts troubled Joseph’s mind, the Lord sent an angel to speak to him in a dream. The angel brought Joseph words of explanation, exaltation, and exhilaration. Joseph was made to understand the origin of the child his bride carried. He was made to understand that his dream (the dream that, in his mind, had turned into a nightmare) was really a miraculous work of God.

B. It was a declaration of divine provisions.
Joseph received details of a miracle that much of the world still hasn’t grasped: God entered this world through the womb of a Jewish virgin! Joseph was told that Mary would have a son and that this son was to be named Jesus. Surely Joseph didn’t know all the details about the miracle child his bride was carrying, but he knew enough to be sure that this child was a divine provision for the sins of the world.

C. It was a declaration of divine presentations.
Joseph was shown that the child Mary carried in her womb was none other than the Deliverer for whom the world had waited since man sinned in the Garden of Eden (see Gen. 3:15). This baby was to be the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies. Joseph was allowed to see that his hurt, anger, and confusion were
necessary to bring about the greatest miracle the world has ever known: God becoming flesh and entering the world to die as a man (John 1:1; 14; Phil. 2:5-8).

When your dreams are shattered, when your plans are derailed, and when your hopes are destroyed, remember that although it may look bleak from your perspective, God is working out His perfect will in your life. Just walk forward, one step at a time. You will arrive at the place where your questions are answered and your needs are met—in His time!

IV. A shocking decision (verses 24, 25)
A. Joseph’s quick reaction. As soon as Joseph understood what was happening in his life, he reacted in faith. He took Mary into his home and into his heart as his wife. His was a response of pure faith. He still didn’t know how things would work out, but he knew that God was working. That was enough for Joseph.

B. Joseph’s qualified restraint. Joseph may have taken Mary into his home, but he refrained from having sexual relations with her. He respected God’s plan and knew that she was to be a virgin when Jesus was born. This, too, was a response of faith. Instead of demanding what was rightfully his as Mary’s husband, he willingly set aside his rights so that the will of God might be accomplished!

C. Joseph’s quiet resolve. Joseph waited patiently until Mary gave birth to her son. No doubt Joseph cared for the expectant mother as best he could. When the time came and the baby was born, Joseph did his job as a father and named the boy Jesus. Naming the child was the father’s responsibility (Luke 1:63).

In naming the baby as God instructed, Joseph was saying that he was willing to embrace God’s plan for his life, even though he didn’t fully understand it. He was willing to raise this child as his own, even though he knew the baby was not his son.

Conclusion
When your dreams are shattered, your plans are derailed, and your hopes are destroyed, remember that while it may look bleak from your perspective, God is working out His perfect will in your life. We may not like it when the Lord allows our hopes and dreams to be crushed, but when all is said and done, we will see
that His plan was perfect all along! Are you willing to commit your dreams and plans to the Lord?
In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus uses two powerful metaphors to describe His people: He calls them salt and light. Both of these substances are valuable, and both are useful; however, they are vastly different in how they approach their respective functions.

Salt is hidden; light is obvious. Salt works secretly; light works openly. Salt works from within; light works from without. Salt speaks of the indirect influence of the gospel; light pictures its direct communication.

Both salt and light have the ability to alter their world. So does the Christian! Perhaps that is why Jesus used these common, everyday images to describe His people and the influence they are to have in the world.

I. The power of this light
Let’s look at a few ways light affects our world:

A. Light conquers darkness. Wherever there is the least bit of light, darkness is forced to flee. The same is true in the spiritual realm (Ps. 119:105, 130)—a godly Christian can bring rays of light into the darkest situation!

B. Light changes deadness. Trees burned in a forest fire sprout new leaves, and violets grow in the footprints of the flames. We know that the light of the gospel of grace brings life into our dead souls. Our hearts are warmed by the truth of the Word of God, and we are delivered from death and darkness by His light.

As we let our lights shine in a dark, dead world, the same phenomenon takes place. God uses the light of our witness and testimony to warm the dead sinner’s heart and to draw him or her to Jesus for salvation. Our light, which is really His light being reflected by us, is a means of bringing the life of heaven to the dead souls here on earth.

C. Light conditions dreariness. How many times have you seen days of gloomy, dreary weather suddenly brightened by the gleaming rays of the sun? How often
have we felt the cold, chilling fingers of autumn instantly lose their grip as the sun brightens the sky overhead? We have all seen dreary days immediately transformed by the appearance of light.

This world can be a dreary place. In saying this, I am referring not to weather but to spiritual climate. But, however dark, dank, and dreary my life may be, when it is exposed to the light of the people of God, I am instantly brightened!

"The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world" Ellen G. White, Christian Service, 15

II. The places of this light Since this light is so precious and powerful, where and how are we to let it be seen?

A. Through the light of an institution.
Jesus refers to “a city set on a hill.” A city is not a single light but a collection of many lights. The cities in biblical times were often constructed of white limestone. The image of “a city on a hill” speaks of letting our lights shine as a community of faith. It refers to the influence of the church in the world around us. As a church, we let our light shine by our standards and our style of worship and by the things we represent.

You can know almost everything you need to know about a church by the preaching it has, the Bible it uses, the songs its members sing, and the activities they engage in. Like a city set on a hill, we cannot be hidden!

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is to be a city set on a hill. We are to be a vocal, visible, vibrant witness for the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of the world’s gathering darkness. God did not establish this church so that we could do our own thing and drift away from Him as many other churches have. He established this church to be a light for Him in the darkness of this place. Are we fulfilling our mission?

B. Through the light of an individual.
Then, Jesus speaks of a candle. The word translated “candle” refers to ancient oil lamps. These were usually clay containers filled with olive oil in which was placed a piece of twisted flax to serve as a wick. Since most houses were windowless, an
oil lamp was necessary for the occupants to be able to see. No one lit a lamp and hid it under a basket. To do so would have been foolish! The lamp was lit so that the people in the house could receive the light and see other objects and people in the room.

This verse speaks to the power of the individual believer’s witness. Just as a church has a testimony, so do you! Jesus saved us to be lights for Him. This is our mandate (Mark 16:15). This is our mission (Acts 1:8). As an individual, are you fulfilling God’s call to be a light for Him? Don’t hide your light under a bushel!

In Luke 8:16, Jesus adds this phrase: “or, putteth it under a bed.” The bushel refers to the world of labor; the bed refers to the world of leisure. Jesus seems to be saying that some people are too busy to let their lights shine, while others are too lazy.

III. The purpose of this light Jesus tells us of the two-fold purpose of the light He has placed in our hearts:

A. It is a witness to the lost. When lost people see the light of Jesus shining through the lives of the redeemed, they will take notice. Jesus Christ really does possess the power to transform a broken life into a thing of immense beauty (Eph. 2:1-10)!

B. It is a witness to the Lord. There is no greater witness than a born-again believer reflecting the light of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no more powerful testimony than a life which displays the proof of His presence through the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23).

Just as light exists not to call attention to itself but to draw attention to the things it illuminates, our witness does not magnify what we have done. Our testimony is about a great God who loved us and saved us when we deserved damnation instead! Our purpose is not to make people look at what we do and say, “Wow, what great Christians!” No! We want them to see us and say, “They must serve a great God! I’d like to know Him, too!”

Conclusion
Are you a light for Jesus? Could you do better? Are there people in your life that you want to bring to the Lord? Whatever the need, respond to Him and let Him have His perfect way in your life!
An old saying says, “You’re never too old to learn.” Here is one lesson you’re never too old to learn: “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Ps. 90:12). What that means is this: “Teach us to number our days and recognize how few they are; help us to spend them as we should.”

Whether you are young or old, 6 or 60, healthy and wealthy or puny and poor, you can make the rest of your life the best of your life.

I. Set proper priorities
If your priorities are out of order, your life will be out of order. If your priorities aren’t right, you won’t be right. You don’t have to pray about what the first priority in life should be; Jesus has already told us: to “seek ye first the kingdom of God.”

The word “seek” means to “actively pursue” or “to go after.” It’s in the present tense. It means continuously. Every day of your life, you should be seeking first the kingdom of God. To seek the kingdom, you must first seek the King. You cannot have a kingdom without a king. The first priority of your life must be to seek the King of the kingdom.

Did you know that the Christian life is more than just accepting the Lord? It is seeking the Lord. The Lord is not someone you passively accept; He is someone you actively seek.

God does not have favorites, but He does have intimates. James 4:8 says, “Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you.” In His Word, God has promised, “And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13).

But it is not enough to seek the Lord. You must seek Him first. Jesus wants preeminence in your life. Jesus wants the first moments of your day. He wants the first part of every paycheck. He wants to be first.
But not only are we to seek the King, we are to seek the kingdom. The kingdom of God ought to be the obsession of your life. The word “kingdom” literally means “rule” or “reign.” A kingdom is a place where a king rules. To seek the kingdom of God is to seek the rule and the reign of God over your entire life.

When you truly seek a king and his kingdom, you are automatically looking for three things:
A. You are seeking the glory of the king. Every part and parcel of your life, every minute and moment of your time, every ounce and pound of your strength, every muscle and fiber of your body ought to be given for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

B. You are seeking the guidance of the king. A loyal subject always wants to do whatever the king would have him or her to do. There is no higher calling in life than to find out what your King wants done and then to do it. Begin every morning of your life by asking the Lord Jesus what Paul asked on the Damascus road: “Lord, what would you have me to do?”

C. You are seeking the government of the king. A loyal subject desires to be controlled by the king, to be governed by the king, and to be ruled by the king.

II. Seek personal purity
Not only are we to seek His kingdom, we are to seek His “righteousness.” That is, not only are we to be seeking God’s control over us, we are also to be seeking God’s character within us. The kingdom of God is to be experienced not just inwardly; it should also be expressed outwardly.

A true Christian makes it easier for others to believe in God. What does it mean to seek the righteousness of God?
A. We must desire it. We do what we really want to do, and we are what we really want to be (Matt. 5:6). You ought to desire to be right, do right, and live right.

B. We must derive it. We are to seek “His righteousness.” God is not interested in your righteousness; He is only interested in His righteousness. God is not interested in what you can do for Him; He is interested in what He can do through you.
It will be a great day when we learn the difference between self-righteousness and the Savior’s righteousness. After he was saved, Paul made this one of the goals of his life (Phil. 3:9).

Righteousness must be imputed before it can be imparted—before you can live it, God must give it (2 Cor. 5:21).

C. We must depict it. We should live like kingdom subjects. Will Rogers said, “We ought to live in such a way that we would not be ashamed to sell the family parrot to the town gossip.”

III. See promised prosperity
The Lord says that if you seek His kingdom and His righteousness, “all these things shall be added unto you.” What “things” was the Lord referring to? He was talking about all the things people worry about.
- In verse 19, we are told that people worry about finances.
- In verse 25, we are told that people worry about food.
- In verse 27, we are told that people worry about fitness.
- In verse 28, we are told that people worry about fashion.

We need all these things. That’s why the Lord said, “For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things” (verse 32). The Lord has promised that if you seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, you will have all the things you need (note that He didn’t say you would necessarily have all the things you want!).

There are four lessons parents ought to teach their children, and it would be good for some adults to re-learn the same lessons:
- You don’t need everything you want.
- You don’t want everything you need.
- God doesn’t give us everything we want.
- God always gives us what we need. If you don’t have it, it’s because God knows you don’t need it at this point in your life.

Conclusion
It is our job to serve God, and it is His job to supply us. Most people have that backward—most people think that it is our job to supply us and that it is God’s job to serve us.
Do you want to make the rest of your life the best of your life? If so, allow Jesus Christ to be your Lord. Put Him first. Live every moment for Him, and He will take care of everything else.
Praying without pretense

Matthew 6:5-8

Of all the privileges God’s saints enjoy, perhaps the greatest is the privilege of prayer. To be able to go directly into the presence of the Lord is an honor beyond description (Heb. 4:16). To be able to speak to the God who created and controls the universe and to know that He has promised to hear us and answer us is a blessing too great to comprehend (Jer. 33:3; Isa. 65:24).

What a gift we have been given! What a privilege is ours, to be able to speak to God—knowing He will hear and answer, knowing that He has invited us to be involved with Him in the work He is doing! But, like anything else in life, we humans can even mess up something as profound and beautiful as prayer.

In Matthew 6:5-8, Jesus exposes some of the problems in prayer that were rampant in His day. He condemns the pretentious praying of the “hypocrites,” the religious elite of that day. Jesus tells us that their prayers will amount to nothing!

Today, I want to preach from these verses on the subject of “praying without pretense.” The word pretense means “insincere or feigned behavior.” Therefore, you and I need to learn how to pray without pretense. Let’s look at what Jesus said about this matter.

I. Some cautions regarding public prayer (verse 5)
In this verse, Jesus refers to several problems. Let’s take a quick look:
A. Prayer had become a ritual. The Jew prayed, but his prayers were scripted and the form was set. He either quoted verses from memory or read them. Of course, some Jews might have prayed in sincerity, but to most, prayer was simply a ritual.

B. Predetermined prayers were formulated for every aspect of life. For every conceivable life event, a prayer had been developed to deal with it. This led to prayer being something that could be recited from the head and not lifted up from the spirit.

C. Prayer was limited to preset times and occasions. Instead of praying when they felt led to or when a need arose, the Jews all prayed at set times.
D. Long prayers were held in high regard. The Jews believed that the longer and more elaborate the prayer, the more likely it was to be heard by God. Jesus warned against this practice (Matt. 12:30).

E. Many prayers were comprised of meaningless repetition. The Jews were notorious for repeating phrases and adding adjectives to the name of God, thinking they would be heard by Him.

F. They wanted to be seen and heard by others. This is the worst offense of all. Rather than being a time of communion with God, prayer had degenerated into an attempt to impress others.
   1. Beware of wrong motives.  
      God tells us that prayer is not about being seen or heard by others; prayer is a time of personal communion with Him. Jesus was not forbidding public prayers, but He was telling men to beware of who their audience was.

   2. Beware of wrong methods.  
      The people Jesus called hypocrites were guilty of standing in public places (such as synagogues and busy street corners) and praying loud, long prayers. These people wanted to impress others with their piety and religiosity.

II. Some advice regarding private prayer (verse 6)  
In verse 6, Jesus tells them how they should pray. Why the warning and guidelines for prayer? Even in an activity like prayer, there is still the danger of misunderstanding it.

A. Real prayer is a priority.  
   Jesus does not say, “If you pray.” He says, “When you pray.” God expects His people to pray. We are commanded to pray (Luke 18:1; 1 Tim. 2:1-8). Since we are told to pray, we must make prayer a priority.  
   Communion with God should be the highest priority of each day. You will never grow in the Lord beyond the depth of your prayer life!

B. Real prayer is personal.  
   Jesus tells His people to go into a private place to pray. There are things that need to be said in prayer that do not need to be said within earshot of others. When we
pray in private, we have the freedom to declare our hearts to the Lord. We can humble ourselves before Him. We can be who we really are.

C. Real prayer is precious.
When Jesus uses the phrase “pray to thy Father which is in secret,” He is referring to the very dwelling place of God. Jesus tells us that when we enter into genuine prayer before the Lord, we are able to enter the “secret place” with Him (Heb. 4:16). We do not need a human priest to stand in for us; through Jesus Christ, we have access to the throne of our Father in heaven.

III. Some conditions regarding personal prayer (verses 7, 8)
A. Refrain from repetition. Pagans, as well as many of the Jews, believed that they would be heard by the Lord if they repeated their prayers or the same phrases over and over. An example of this is seen with the Baal prophets (1 Kings 18:26-29) and with the people of Ephesus (Acts 19:24-34).

Jesus does not want His people to engage in meaningless repetition. We must remember that it is not the length of our prayers that matters, nor is it the eloquence of our words; even the content of our prayers is not an issue. What matters most is the condition and attitude of the person who is praying and the motive behind the prayer.

B. Rest in your relationship. Jesus reminds us that God is our “Father.” As such, He knows what we need before we ask, and He is concerned that our needs be met (Matt. 6:24-34; Luke 12:32). Prayer gives God the opportunity to hear His children express their love for Him, their dependence on Him, and their faith in Him. Prayer affords God the opportunity to demonstrate His love, power, glory, providence, sovereignty, and provision for His children.

C. Rely on His resources. Since He is God and since He is our Father, we can go to Him in confidence and faith, believing that He has the power to answer us when we call upon Him. Faith in God is essential for prayers being answered (Heb. 11:6; Matt. 21:22; James 1:5-8).

Conclusion
I do not want to be a hypocrite in my prayer life! As God is my witness, I don’t want to impress you with my prayers. I want to develop my private, personal
prayer life until it is everything God would have it to be. I want to avoid pretense in my prayers.

How about you? Is your prayer life all it should be or has the Lord touched a sore spot through His Word? If we will come to the place where our prayer lives honor the Lord, He will bless us in a tremendous way.
Who made you my judge?
Matthew 7:1-5

Did you know that Matthew 7:1 is quickly replacing John 3:16 as the most memorized and quoted verse in the Bible? For instance, I am going to make a few statements. Let’s see if you agree with me:

- Homosexuality is a sin. Homosexuals need to repent of this sin in order to be right with God.
- All pre-marital sex is wrong. Two people living together out of wedlock are living in adultery.
- Abortion is murder. Abortion is the killing of a human being, and doctors who perform abortions are (with rare exceptions) guilty of taking innocent human lives.

When these kinds of statements are made, people immediately trot out their favorite verse in the Bible: “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” Then they say something like this: “Who made you my judge?”

That brings up this question: Is it ever right to pass judgment on the actions of others? Be careful how you answer! Let’s look at what Jesus has to say about this vital matter.

I. There is a caution to be heeded (verses 1, 2)
A. The word judge means “to pronounce judgment; expression of strong disapproval or harsh criticism.” It refers to “acting the part of a judge; or to passing judgment on the words and deeds of another.”

B. Jesus says “Judge not.” Does this mean that all judgment is wrong? No! The Bible mentions some occasions where Christians are called on to exercise judgment over others.
- 1 Corinthians 5:3-5, 12-23—Here, Paul judges a man guilty of fornication with his father’s wife. He condemns the man and his actions and calls on the church to do the same.
• Matthew 7:6—We are told to judge some people as dogs and swine and as being unworthy of the precious treasures of the Word of God.
• Matthew 18:15-18—Sometimes the church must exercise discipline against a wayward member.

So, what is Jesus talking about in Matthew 7? The word judge means “to criticize, condemn, censor.” Jesus is talking about looking at people and attempting to judge their motives and their real spiritual condition based on what we see in their lives.

C. The person who sets himself up as the judge of others will himself face judgment someday. The critic forgets that he will also face God in judgment (Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10). Next time you think about judging another person, consider these verses: James 3:1, 2; 2:13; Luke 6:37, 38. When you judge another person, you will eventually reap what you sow (Gal. 6:7).

D. Here is the bottom line: We have no right to judge and criticize the lives of those around us. I say this for several reasons:
1. Don’t criticize because you don’t know all the facts.
2. Don’t criticize because we all fail God and sin (1 John 1:8-10).
3. Don’t criticize because you do not know what’s in the other person’s heart.
4. Don’t criticize because, when you do, you are attempting to assume the authority of God (Rom. 14:4; James 4:11, 12).
5. Don’t criticize because one day you will face God in judgment yourself (Rom. 14:12).

II. There is a challenge to be heard (verses 3, 4)
A. Here, Jesus speaks to the real issue: When we judge another person, we always do so from a warped perspective. Jesus uses the humorous image of a man with a log sticking out of his eye trying to remove a little splinter from another person’s eye. The word mote refers to “a dry twig or a piece of chaff.” The word beam refers to “a load-bearing beam in a house” or a log. Imagine how impossible that would be!

B. The problem with judging others is that we are often guilty of the same (or worse) sin ourselves (Rom. 2:1). Jesus is saying that the sin of the critic is greater than the sin of the person being judged. When we judge others, we reveal a heart that lacks genuine love for our neighbor (Matt. 22:39).
An old poem by G. W. Cooke puts it this way: “There is so much good in the worst of us / And so much bad in the best of us / That it hardly behooves any of us / To talk about the rest of us.”

III. There is a counsel to be honored (verse 5)
A. Jesus says that people who judge and criticize others are hypocrites! Then, He offers some valuable counsel to those who fall into this trap from time to time.

B. Jesus tells the would-be judge to first clean up his own life so that he will be in a better position to help his brother. When our own hearts are clean, we are told that we will be able to “see clearly.”
1. We will see our own hearts more clearly. We will understand that we ourselves are sinners who are prone to fail.
2. We will see God more clearly and better understand that we will stand in judgment before Him someday.
3. We will more clearly see people’s need for love, compassion, and help.

C. When our own hearts have been fixed and our own vision has been cleared up, we will be able to reach out in the right spirit to a fallen brother or a lost sinner.

We will not approach them with a spirit of judgment, reproach, and condemnation; rather, we will come to them with a spirit of compassion and restoration. That is the way it should be done (Gal. 6:1-2).

D. It is not wrong to confront a person with his sin. In fact, it is wrong not to (Lev. 19:17; Prov. 27:5; Matt. 18:15; Luke 17:3).

Refusing to confront a person about his or her sin is just as wrong as a doctor refusing to confront a patient about his or her sickness. If you want to understand what Jesus said in Matthew 7:1, you must also understand what He said in John 7:24: “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.” That says it all!
You cannot judge a tree by its leaves, but you can judge a tree by its fruit. You
cannot judge a book by its cover, but you can judge a book by its contents. The key
is not to judge by appearance.

Conclusion
Let's follow Jesus' advice: “Judge not, that you be not judged . . .” (Matt. 7:1).
The pool at Bethesda

John 5:1-15

In Bible times, healing pools and shrines were very common. People believed that the pools or the gods could heal them, but true healing comes only from Jesus. Jesus is greater than gods and cultures, greater than fears and weakness, and greater than our sins—even our pride. Jesus takes us beyond our hurts and fears and truly liberates us. Jesus performed many miracles. Let’s take a closer look at the miracle He performed at the pool of Bethesda.

I. Commentary on key words from various versions

First, let’s look at some key words and phrases from this passage:

• “Some time later.” An unspecific time reference and adage, like saying “a few weeks later” or “a few months later.”
• “Feast of the Jews.” This could have been one of three feasts: Passover, Pentecost, or Booths (also called Tabernacles). Since this day occurred on the Sabbath, it was extraspecial and holy. Jesus could not have picked a better day to challenge the pious frauds of His day (Lev. 23:34-43; Num. 29:12-38; Deut. 16:13-15).
• “There is.” These words are in the present active tense, which suggests that at the time of John’s writing, the pool was still open, and thus the destruction of Jerusalem had not yet occurred. How is that significant? It tells us that John’s Gospel was written before 70 A.D.
• “Sheep Gate/Market.” This was a gate in the wall of the city of Jerusalem used for sheep. Sheep can’t be mixed with other animals because they get distracted and are then hard to herd.
• “Bethesda.” This was a medicinal pool that people flocked to for healing. It was very popular, overflowing with people desperately seeking relief from their ills. The pool is located in the north part of the Temple Mount, near what was called Sheep Gate—just as the Bible described.
• “Invalid.” In this case, the invalid was someone suffering from an unknown sickness that immobilized him and prevented him from walking well enough to get where he wanted or needed to be.
• “Thirty-eight years.” It does not mean that this man lay at the pool for 38 years; rather, it tells us that he had been ill for 38 years.
• “Do you want to get well/made whole?” This seems like a strange question, for who would not want to be healed or restored to a better place in life? However, you cannot help someone who does not want to be helped.
• “I have no one to help me.” The man seemed to have the desire to be healed but not the means.
• “Water is stirred/moving.” This refers to a local legend that an angel would come to stir the pool with “supernatural power” (See The Desire of Ages, 201).
• “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” Miracles are mainly meant to prove Christ’s claims and Lordship and His power to transform our lives. Even if Jesus heals us, we have to rise up and follow through (Isa. 35:1-7; John 11:43).
• “Cured/Healed.” Although faith is usually required in cases like this one, it seems that faith was not required here. Rather, Jesus used this man’s situation to show His position and power and allowed this man the grace he did not deserve and would later reject (Matt. 9:22; 13:58; Mark 6:5-6).
• “Law forbids.” This refers to the religious regulations of the Pharisees, such as providing medical help that is not life-saving on the Sabbath. The Law said that the men were to keep the Sabbath and not do any work on that day.
• “Carry your mat.” If the sick man had stayed on his mat, he would have held on to his past identity and problems. The mat would have become the chain to pull him back—back to despair, back to hopelessness.
• “Man who made me well.” This was an evasion of gratitude and responsibility that led to a slippery slope of betrayal, which would lead to our Lord’s conflict with the religious leaders and eventually to His crucifixion.
• “At the temple.” The man went to the temple because the Law required anyone who had been healed to make an offering of thanksgiving. Jesus knew where to find the man who received this incredible gift of healing (2 Sam. 4:4; 1 Kings 14:4).
• “Stop sinning.” This is a call not to return to whatever we have done in the past that has kept us in sin or oppressed or sick. Jesus wants us to succeed in life, and we do this by desiring to grow in His way, removing the distractions and problems that become barriers to hold us back.
• “Something worse.” This refers to the consequences of sin with current relationships and also with eternity (John 9:3; 1 Cor. 11:28-32).

II. Devotional thoughts and applications
True healing is all about the transforming work Christ does in us. Physical healing is an insignificant shadow to God’s important redemptive work and how we incorporate Him in our lives.
How can someone not want to be healed? To continue to be sick is a powerful chain that holds us down. Sometimes, it is all we have and all we know, and we fear to venture into wellness. Of course, our willpower and desires cannot always help us. Nonetheless, whether we are in a spiritual encounter, a medical surgery, or in therapy, the desire to get well or grow is powerfully important.

People who are weak in faith or stagnant in their spiritual growth are that way (for the most part) because they do not want to receive divine help with their problems. They do not see God as the equpper and sustainer of their lives. They do not want to be helped out of their weakness; they either think they can do it on their own or have given up. They love their weakness; their helplessness is their comfort and identity. The result is stagnation and ignorance of the One who can bring them comfort.

We have all been there at one time or another— I know I have been! But I also know that there is healing and power in Jesus Christ.
We are the salt of the earth

Matthew 5:13

In the Bible, God refers to His children in various ways: sheep, brethren, little ones, etc. When Jesus refers to us as “salt,” He is reminding us that we have the opportunity and the responsibility to be an influence in the world. It is interesting that Matthew 5:13 follows the Beatitudes. In the Beatitudes, Jesus lists some qualities that ought to be present in every citizen of His kingdom. When we possess these characteristics, we will be a positive influence and make a difference in the world around us.

Light is an external element that enables one to see. Just as a glistening, limestone city high on a hillside cannot be hidden for the light coming from its walls, so the Christian who shines with the brilliance of the Lord Jesus cannot be hidden from the view of the world. In other words, your testimony will be used by God; those around you will see it and be touched by it.

I would like to focus on the idea of our being called “salt.” In this one verse, Jesus makes three statements that need to be considered and understood by every child of God today. Let’s look together at them as we consider the statement, “Ye are the salt of the earth.”

I. A description to analyze
In general, people do not realize the importance of salt in maintaining the life and health of their bodies. An exact percentage of salt is always present in our bloodstream, and any great deviation from this amount can result in sickness or even death.

Salt is a sustainer of other life, too. For this reason, sea water will support many more organisms than fresh water. As a preservative, salt retards spoilage. Also, it is a splendid condiment, adding zest and flavor to our food.

Salt in the Scriptures is said to be:
• A symbol of a binding covenant (Lev. 2:13)
• A healing and cleansing aid (2 Kings 2:20, 21)
• An stimulant to the appetite (Job 6:6)
• A preventive of decay (Luke 14:34, 35)
• A promoter of peace (Mark 9:50)
• A stimulant to our testimony (Matt. 5:13)
• An evidence of grace (Col. 4:6)

We are called “salt” because of:

A. Our preserving ability. Salt wards off rot and decay. It is rubbed into meat in an effort to preserve it. The inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah could have been saved by the preserving influence of just 10 righteous men (Gen. 19). I am convinced that the presence and the prayers of “salty” Christians have done more to preserve this world than anything else we could name.

B. Our penetrating ability. Salt will penetrate and infiltrate whatever it touches. It is an aggressive substance (Acts 8:1, 4; 17:6). I believe that we have been called by the Lord to be an active force in the world around us.

C. Our purifying ability through the blood of Jesus. Salt has remarkable cleansing abilities (2 Kings 2:19-22). Elisha added salt to the waters at Jericho. Christians have a purifying effect on the world around them because of the purifying power of Jesus’ blood.

D. Our pleasing ability. Salt blends and adds flavor, bringing out the best in food. In fact, some foods are better off uneaten if they don’t have salt! In the same way, Christians should flavor the world around them. As salt, we are to live our lives so that we bring out the best in those around us (Phil. 1:27).

E. Our promoting ability. Salt creates a thirst for water in those who are exposed to it. As salt, Christians have a wonderful opportunity to promote in the world a thirst for Jesus. Remember what the Lord told us? He said that out of our bellies would flow rivers of living water (John 7:37, 38). When we take the call of Jesus seriously and live right, look right, act right, talk right, worship right, dress right, etc., then we have the ability to create a thirst for Jesus in the hearts of those around us.

F. Our proven ability. Salt changes nearly everything it touches—food, ice, and so on. We are called to be thermostats, not thermometers, in the world around us.
We are to be the instruments that God can use to implement change in a wicked world.

II. A danger to avoid
A. Salt was very valuable in the ancient world—in fact, the Roman Legions often paid their wages in salt. This payment was called a “salarium.” This is where the expression “not worth his salt” comes from.

B. In ancient times, it was possible for salt to lose its flavor. The salt in those days was far different from the salt we use today. Our salt is a chemical compound called chloride of sodium or sodium chloride.

C. It is possible for Christians to lose their saltiness as well. This happens to us when, just like salt in ancient times, we get too close to the world. When we allow our wells to be filled with the world’s junk, we are practically useless to the Lord and His kingdom’s work!

III. A destiny to abhor
A. In ancient times, when salt lost its savor, it was taken out and cast into the footpaths. It was used much as gravel is used today. Its only purpose then was to kill the weeds that might grow in the road and for men to walk on to keep their sandals out of the mud. Literally, it was to be trodden under the foot of men.

B. Every Christian needs to understand that when we lose our saltiness and when we cease to function as salt in the world, we have become good for nothing. We can most certainly lose our usefulness to the Lord and His work. When this happens, we have become something to be trodden upon and treated with contempt.

Ellen G. White says: “When Christians do not reveal Christ, of what value are they? Are they not like savorless salt, “good for nothing”? But when they reveal in their lives the saving principles of the truth, poor, sin-hardened souls are not left to perish in corruption. Good works are seen; for the living principles of righteousness cannot be hidden” (The Review and Herald, October 15, 1901).

Conclusion
I don’t know about you, but I want my life to be useful to God. I want Him to be able to use my life to bring others to Him. I want to be a blessing and a light for the Lord.

There is a tremendous need today for every child of God to be all that God wants him or her to be. We need to be focused on the business of purifying, preserving, penetrating, pleasing, and promoting so that the Lord can use our lives and our testimonies for His glory. May God help us to be salty Christians!
Great Commission or Great Omission?

Matthew 28:18-20

Before His ascension, Jesus issued what has come to be called The Great Commission. A commission is “an authoritative command; a directive; a command.” The disciples took the Lord’s command seriously. They went into the world and shared the gospel of Jesus; thousands upon thousands were saved by the grace of God. The disciples’ message was so powerful and their witness so effective that their critics accused them of “turning the world upside down” (Acts 17:6, NKJV).

That was then, and this is now! What was given as The Great Commission has turned into what some have labeled The Great Omission. When something is omitted, it is “left out, undone, neglected.” Instead of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth as the Lord commanded, some churches won’t even take the gospel to the end of the street. We are satisfied with our spiritual condition, but we are not motivated to see others come to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Has The Great Commission become The Great Omission in your life and mine? Are we as a church doing everything we can to find inroads of outreach in the world around us? I want to share four facts from these verses that give us much-needed insight into The Great Commission.

I. We have a divine mandate (verse 19)

The mandate of The Great Commission is to “go.” “Go” is a word of action! We cannot “go” if we are sitting still. We cannot “go” if we do not make a move.

This verb literally means “as you go.” As we pass through this world, we are to carry the gospel message with us, sharing it with everyone we meet along the way.

There are two ways we can do this.

1. It involves our lifestyle (Matt. 5:13-16). Like salt, our lives should create in people a thirst for the Lord. Our joy, our peace, and our difference from the world should cause them to want to know why we are like we are.
2. It involves our lips. We are told to “teach.” That word has the idea of making disciples or to instruct. We are to live the right kind of lives, but we are also told to share our faith. We are to tell a lost world what Jesus did for us when He saved us and what He can do for them if they will trust Him as we did. It is not enough to just show it—we must also say it! Mark 16:15 says this: “Go into all the world, and preach the good news to all creation.”

The word “preach” comes from a word that means “to herald.” The word “preach” is a present-tense, active-voice, imperative mood verb. An imperative is a command. Active voice means that you are to be involved in carrying out this command. The present tense means that it is something we are supposed to be doing all the time.

II. We have a divine message (verse 20)
Jesus tells His followers to share a specific message: “. . . to obey everything I have commanded you . . .” As we go and tell the world about Jesus, the message we are to share is very clear: We are to share the gospel. Jesus came to this world to make the gospel a reality. He came to this world to die on a cross, rise from the dead, and open a way of eternal salvation for all who will receive Him into their hearts. Jesus came to this world as the Savior of men (Luke 19:10; Mark 10:45; John 14:6).

He came to make a way for lost sinners to get to God. Our message is not about our church or our denomination. It is not about our style of worship. All of those are important, but none of them can save a lost soul. Our message is a simple message: hope to the hurting, life to the dead, peace to the tormented. It is a message that every person in the world needs to hear. It is a message that is universal in its application. It is a message that has the potential to change every life (John 1:11, 12). There is no other message that God will use to draw sinners to Himself, and there is no other message He will use to save lost souls!

III. We have a divine mission (verse 19)
Jesus tells us that we are to “go . . . and teach all nations” (Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8). Our mission is to every person in the world; our mission field is the entire world. While He may never call you to go to a foreign land to tell the story of salvation, Jesus expects you to share the gospel where you live.
He expects us to reach out to all people without regard to their ethnic heritage, race, past, lifestyle, economic standing, etc. If they are sinners, they need to hear the message of the cross. If they are lost, they need a Savior.

If they do not know Him, they need Him, and we have been authorized and commanded to reach them! What are we doing to reach the world around us? Are we active in our Jerusalems? Are we fulfilling The Great Commission? Or are we guilty of committing The Great Omission?

IV. We have a divine mentor (verse 20)
Jesus doesn’t send us into this lost world without any resources. He doesn’t expect us to accomplish this Great Commission in our own power. In fact, these verses give us two of the greatest resources we have as witnesses of the gospel.
1. We are promised His presence. “I am with you always . . .” When you are sharing the gospel with a friend, a family member, even a total stranger, the Lord Himself is right there with you. He will help you, enable you, embolden you, and use you if you will simply obey Him and share the gospel with others.

2. We are promised His power (Acts 1:8). When we share His gospel message, we can be confident that God will use His message for His glory. He will take our feeble words and attach power to them. The Spirit of God will take our efforts and use the words we share to convict the hearts of the lost (John 16:7, 8).

Conclusion
I do not want to hurt anyone’s feelings, but here are the facts: We have become more concerned about buildings than about people. We are more interested in having meetings than we are in fulfilling our mission. We are more interested in our personal comfort than about who is drowning in the sea of sin just beyond our walls.

We are more concerned about the color of a man’s skin than we are the condition of his soul. We want to see people come into church as long as they are the “right” kind of people. I am afraid that for many of us, The Great Commission has become The Great Omission. That can change—it must change! It will change only when we come to the Lord and ask Him to change our own hearts!
Growing up—in outreach

1 Corinthians 3:5-7

With these words, Paul calls those in Corinth to remember the days when they first came to Jesus Christ. Paul was the first to bring the gospel to Corinth. Many in Corinth came to Jesus through the words of Paul. But, according to Acts 19:1, Apollos spent some time in Corinth, too. Surely, some of the Corinthians came to faith through his words as well. Many believers were loyal to Paul, because he was the one who led them to Jesus.

Other believers were loyal to Apollos, because he was the one who had a great impact upon them. But, Paul set things straight, saying that he and Apollos were “only servants, through whom you came to believe.” Paul didn’t lift himself up as some mighty apostle who deserved undivided attention. Nor did he lift Apollos up as someone special, either. Instead, Paul told the people that he and Apollos were servants of Christ who brought the message of the gospel to Corinth, and the people believed.

I. We are servants of the gospel (verse 5)

That’s all we are: We are servants through whom others may come to faith. In this way, we are like Paul. In this way, we are like Apollos. As believers in Christ, we are the tools that God uses to bring people to Himself. And this is by design. When Jesus left the earth, He gave His disciples a mission. He said it many times in many different ways, but His aim was clear: We are His servants, entrusted to share His gospel with others.

We can read it at the end of every gospel account (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 22:46, 47; John 20:21). God doesn’t simply use the leaders in the church; He uses us all. And all of us have a responsibility to share the gospel. Some—with giftedness, opportunity, and God’s blessing—have more fruitfulness, but all of us have the responsibility to be servants of the gospel.

There are people in your life who need to hear the good news of Jesus Christ from you! Perhaps it is in your workplace, in your neighborhood, or in your family. You may be the only voice in their world who has the gospel to share with them. So,
let's be servants of the gospel. When you have an opportunity to serve those outside the kingdom, jump at the chance.

"We do not belong to Christ unless we are His wholly." Ellen G. White, Christ Object Lessons, 50.

II. We plant and water (verses 6, 7)
This gives us a great perspective of our duties to the unbelieving world around us. We are to plant and water. It's not our responsibility to convert people—that's God's job. I would encourage you to find ways to plant and water the gospel. It takes work. It takes effort. It takes intentionality. It's not just going to happen; you have to plan and carry out the plan.

Church family, we have people outside and right here in our midst who need to be reached. Reach out to them and plant and water the gospel! People come in and visit the church. Meet them and greet them. Reach out to them. It's a fearful thing to come to a new church, so when you see a visitor, do what you can to help make him or her feel comfortable at church.

III. God causes growth (verse 7)
For those who think that evangelism is a partnership where we do our part and God does His part, verse 7 puts it straight. We plant and water. God causes the growth, which is everything. God uses us to accomplish His work. He does everything.

Throughout the entire New Testament, it is clear that God is the One who changes people. First Peter 1:3 says, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy has given us new birth into a living hope.” God causes us to be born again.

When speaking with Nicodemus, Jesus never commanded him to be born again. If you look carefully in the text in John 3, you hear words like this: “No one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again” (verse 3). “No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit” (verse 5). “You must be born again” (verse 7). Jesus is merely putting before Nicodemus the requirement of entering into the kingdom—the new birth! But Jesus never commanded
Nicodemus to “be born again” by himself, as if he had the ability to do this. Rather, Jesus emphasized the necessity of being born again to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Ellen G. White comments, “Nicodemus was converted as the result of this interview. In that night conference with Jesus, the convicted man stood before the Saviour under the softening, subduing influence of the truth that was shining into the chambers of his mind and impressing his heart. . . . Jesus told Nicodemus not only that he must have a new heart in order to see the kingdom of heaven, but how to obtain this new heart” (Letter 54, 1895).

Just as you had no say in being born the first time, neither do you have control of being born the second time. “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going; so it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). There is no controlling over the wind.

There is no controlling over the Spirit. But when the Spirit comes and changes a soul, it’s like being born all over again! And God is the one who does it. He opens the eyes to see the light of the gospel of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4). He opens the heart to believe (Acts 16:14). He opens the mind to believe (1 Cor. 2:14). That’s why Paul says that it is “by His doing that you are in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor. 1:30).

CONCLUSION
God converts. God causes growth. What does that mean? It means that we need to pray. It means that we need to plead with God to give life to those who are apart from Christ. Plead that God will move in their lives. As Charles Spurgeon said so well, “The Holy Spirit will move them by first moving you.”

It is God’s plan to cause growth in the church. He moves us to have a heart to reach out to others. We need to grow in outreach. May God give us the strength to do so. May God give the growth.
Leviticus talks about sacrifices, priests, foods that are clean, and foods that are unclean. Leviticus talks about dealing with leprosy and impurities from bodily discharges. Leviticus talks about festival days, feasts, articles of the tabernacle, and much more.

But these things are merely shadows of a greater reality. They may look like sacrifices and priests and ceremonial days—and indeed they are—but the apostle Paul tells us that they are shadows. Consider Colossians 2:16, 17.

By these words, Paul is simply saying that the things in the Levitical law (like food and drink and feasts and festivals) are simply shadows upon the wall of a cave, which are being cast from the original form of Jesus Himself.

On several other occasions, the New Testament uses similar language (Hebrews 8:4, 5 and 10:1). When you put these passages together, you begin to see that the book of Leviticus has an ultimate reality which is not contained in the book of Leviticus. The reality behind the book of Leviticus is Jesus Christ. These things in Leviticus are shadows of Jesus.

Leviticus 19:2 says, “Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.” There are two points: (1) God is holy, and (2) you need to be holy.

I. God is holy
We see this fact affirmed in other texts (Lev. 11:44, 45; 20:26; 21:8). This is repeated throughout the Scriptures. Throughout biblical history, men and women alike affirmed that the Lord was holy.

From Job (Job 6:10) to Joshua (Joshua 24:19) to Jeremiah (Jer. 50:29); from Hannah, the mother of Samuel (1 Samuel 2:2), to the whole city of Bethshemesh (1 Sam. 6:20); from King David (Psalm 22:3) to the psalmist Asaph (Ps. 78:41) to the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 1:4)—all made explicit statements affirming the holiness of God. God’s holiness is also proclaimed in heaven. “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty” is what the angelic beings never cease to say (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8).
The word “holy” in the Hebrew text is the word Qadosh, which means to be separated or apart or sacred or consecrated. Something that is set apart and dedicated for use in the service of the Lord is considered to be holy. Throughout the book of Leviticus, many things are described as being “holy.”

The priests were a group of people who were “set apart” to serve the Lord in the temple. The garments of the priests were “set apart” for only the priests to wear. Certain places in the temple were designated as “holy places” (Lev. 6:26; 16:2). What made them holy is that they were “set apart” for specific duties that the priests would perform.

But when you apply the word “holy” to God, the word gets a whole new meaning. In this context, we aren’t talking about things being “set apart” for the use in the service of God; rather, we are talking about God Himself being set apart from us. The character of God is so high above us and so far beyond us that we can’t quite fully grasp it.

R. C. Sproul said, “When the word holy is applied to God, it does not signify one single attribute [of God]. The word is used as a synonym for His deity. That is, the word holy calls attention to all that God is.” In other words, God’s holiness is His essence. God is entirely different than we are, especially in His purity. Whenever there are encounters between a man and God, we find the man on his face, bowing to the holy Lord, entirely aware of his own sin.

This was the case with Isaiah the prophet, a righteous man. There is a great illustration of this in Leviticus 10:1-3. In the first three verses of this chapter, we read about two men who had just been ordained to the priesthood. They were Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu. Read and consider the text.

This is what it means for God to be holy (Lev. 19:2). It means that He is so different than we are that we must approach Him as His holiness deserves. We need to tremble before the enthroned one (Ps. 99:1). We are to exalt Him as great and exalted in Zion (Ps. 99:2). We need to worship at His footstool (verse 3). It’s at the feet of God that we belong, bowed prostrate before Him, knowing our sinfulness and knowing His holiness. Nadab and Abihu learned this lesson the hard way.
They died before the presence of the Lord because they weren’t approaching Him as His holiness deserved. May we learn from their example.

II. You need to be holy
This is what the book of Leviticus is all about. If you learn anything from the book of Leviticus, you learn that nothing unclean can enter into the presence of God. The first 10 chapters of the book of Leviticus give highly detailed instructions regarding the sacrifices that were to be offered up to the Lord.

The sacrifices had to be done exactly as the Lord had commanded. The priests had to do exactly as the Lord had commanded. The reason for doing so was to obtain forgiveness from the Lord for sins that had been committed.

Only when the people obtained forgiveness were they acceptable before the Lord. We need to be cleansed from all our impurities. We need to be forgiven for all our sins. We need to be freed from all our guilt. As we come to God, we will be clean in His sight. When your sins are forgiven by God, your life will change. God will transform you to walk in a holy manner. God works in you to bring about a practical holiness that pleases Him.

CONCLUSION
You need to be holy. I need to be holy. The writer to the Hebrews says it clearly: “Pursue peace with all men, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

Read and consider 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10. These verses clearly identify some behaviors that will disqualify you from the kingdom of God. Should you prove to be a fornicator or an idolater or an adulterer, you will not inherit the kingdom. We aren’t talking about earning anything. We aren’t talking about meriting the kingdom. We are talking about sons and daughters submitting themselves to the will of their Father.

The good news is that there are many who used to be like this and who have been transformed by the power of the gospel to inherit the kingdom. We know this because of the very next verse that Paul writes: “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit
of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11). When we come to Christ, God will transform us and change us. Are you holy?
In many countries today, there is a stigma with religious leaders asking for money. Many religious leaders have given the church of Jesus Christ a horrible reputation. We have seen religious leaders fall due to financial scandals in their organizations. Peter warned of the false prophets: “In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories” (2 Peter 2:3).

He said that these false prophets are “experts in greed” (verse 14). Paul was accused of being greedy while he was with the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 2:5), an accusation which he forcefully denied. Jude warns of those who will “flatter others for their own advantage” (Jude 16). The stigma of greedy religious leaders isn’t a new phenomenon. For that reason, we must be very careful about how we handle the matter of giving to the church. Let’s look at a few principles that relate to this whole matter of giving. I. God doesn’t need our money (Ps. 50:7-13)

Let’s enter into God’s courtroom. Israel is on trial. God is both the Judge (verse 6) and the prosecuting attorney. We will pick up the prosecution’s argument, beginning with verse 7: “Listen, my people, and I will speak; I will testify against you, Israel: I am God, your God.” God is going to speak against Israel, who thought that their religiosity was going to save them. They thought that God needed the sacrifices they offered to Him.

In verse 8, God first admits that they were a religious people. He says that their sacrifices are “ever before me.” They were correct in their external obedience to the Lord to offer to Him the continual sacrifices which He required. Their repeated offerings according to the law were correct and commendable. Their religious activity wasn’t their problem.

As we shall see, their problem was that they thought God needed their sacrifices to thrive. Their theology was simply that of the pagan gods all around them, who supposedly thrived on the sacrifices offered to them. They naturally thought that God needed them and their sacrifices. But He doesn’t. God is not like this.
In verse 9, God is basically saying, “I will not accept your sacrifices. If you think I need your sacrifices, I don’t want them. I won’t have them. Take them back.” Then He puts forth his reasons in verses 10-13.

We only give to God what He has first given to us. David expressed this thought nicely when he had received offerings to build the temple. He prayed (1 Chron. 29:12, 14, 16).

When giving to the church, we need to realize that God is not a beggar who needs what we have to accomplish His work on this earth. The beggar asks because he has no resources to meet his need, but God has all resources at His disposal and will accomplish His plan upon the earth—whether we give from our resources or not (Isa. 46:10). When Jesus came into Jerusalem and the religious leaders scolded Him for receiving the praise of the people, He responded, “If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out” (Luke 19:40). God will accomplish His purposes using His own resources.

He illustrates this in Psalm 50:12, “If I were hungry, I would not tell you.” God wouldn’t tell us because He can satisfy His hunger by Himself. God doesn’t need us to satisfy His hunger. We need to realize that God doesn’t need our money. He is entirely self-sufficient. He doesn’t need us in any way (Acts 17:24, 25).

When you give to the church, you need to realize that you are not giving to help God accomplish His purpose.

God doesn’t need what you have. God was saying, “Those sacrifices that you are offering? I don’t want them! . . . But there is something that you can give me.” Look at Psalm 50:14, “Sacrifice thank offerings.” The same thing is repeated in verse 23: “He who sacrifices thank offering honors me.” Much of it comes down to our motives in giving. Does God need us to give to Him? No. Does God want us to give to Him? Yes, if our motives are proper.

II. God wants us to give with proper motives (Ps. 50:14, 15; 2 Cor. 9:6-8)

The Bible tells us what motives should be present in our giving. We should give:

1. Thankfully (Ps. 50:14, 15). The motive here is the key. Israel’s problem was that they were sacrificing out of a sense of obligation.Externally, they were doing all the right things (see verse 8), but apparently, their attitude was wrong. Verse 12
seems to indicate to us that they were sacrificing to sustain God. They didn’t understand why God wanted their sacrifice. But God says, “Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving.” God delights when we give out of gratitude. God disapproves when we give out of duty (as the Israelites were doing). The remainder of verses 14 and 15 are merely descriptions of those who worship God with thankful and dependent hearts.

2. Generously (2 Cor. 9:6). In this chapter, Paul is requesting that the Corinthians give financially to the “support of the saints” (2 Cor. 8:4; 9:1). He is raising money to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem, not to fund the church. Proverbs 11:25 says, “A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.”

3. Purposefully (2 Cor. 9:7). Literally, this means “chosen beforehand.” The picture of giving here is that of a well-planned exercise. It has been thought about, deliberated, discussed, and reasoned ahead of time. The choice of what to give has been made at home in one’s right mind. It has been “purposed in his heart.” In other words, your giving to the church needs to be a willful and deliberate act.

4. Joyfully (2 Cor. 9:7b). Paul says that our giving isn’t to be done from any negative motive. You shouldn’t give out of obligation, guilt, pressure, or constraint. You shouldn’t give because you are forced to give or coerced to give. We shouldn’t even give because it is our duty to give.

Conclusion
God has prepared good works for us to walk in (Eph. 2:10). Our resources to fulfill all of these good deeds are not found in ourselves! This is great news! We don’t need to provide everything by ourselves; we can look to Him who is able to provide it for us. But God doesn’t only provide the resources; He “abounds” in His provision to us.

When you think of giving to the church, do you think of God as a drain, sucking up all of your resources? Or do you think of God as a fountain, refreshing what we may give away? Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:21). We might say it like this: “Where your checkbook is, there will your heart be also.” Hearts are difficult to discern, but treasures indicate what the heart is like.
May God give us hearts to give to His kingdom and glory with motives that are pleasing to Him.
Priorities for the new year
Acts 2:42

When you think about the year ahead, what spiritual priorities will you place before yourself during this time? In order to understand what our priorities should be, let’s look carefully at the things to which the early church devoted itself.

These priorities are clearly listed in Acts 2:42. (1) the apostles’ teaching; (2) fellowship; (3) the breaking of bread; and (4) prayer.

First, I encourage you to be “continually devoted” to the “apostles’ teaching.” I encourage you to read your Bible all the way through this year. Do you think you’re too busy? By reading it aloud for only 15 minutes per day, you can get through it by the end of the year. I would strongly encourage you to make reading the Bible your top priority this year.

Second, I encourage you to be “continually devoted” to “fellowship.” As you recall, “fellowship” means sharing. Do not think that you can experience true fellowship in your church by simply attending services every Saturday morning and then quickly leaving. In order to share our lives together, we need to be with one another during the week.

Third, I encourage you to be “continually devoted” to “the breaking of bread.” The phrase “breaking of bread” is most likely an allusion to celebrating the Lord’s Supper. The key to any celebration of the Lord’s Supper is a focus upon the death of Jesus Christ for our sins. This year, I encourage you to remember often Christ’s work on the cross. Reflect upon Jesus and remember Him. He alone is the One who can forgive all of your sins.

He alone is the One who can strengthen you when temptations come. A look to the cross is what contains the solutions to all your problems. I would strongly encourage you to reflect upon the life of Jesus Christ and the promise of His return. Finally, just as the early church members were “continually devoting themselves . . . to prayer,” prayer should be a priority for your life in 2021!
Do you think prayer is important for your life? Is prayer a priority for you? The essence of being a Christian is knowing God. When Christ transforms a heart, He also places in it the desire to know Him and to commune with Him!

The early church members were continually devoting themselves to prayer (Acts 2:42). Some translations point out that the word used here in verse 42 is not “prayer” but “prayers.” The early church was “continually devoting themselves . . . to prayers.” Let me give you three simple ways to pray. These are not mind-boggling; they are simple and straightforward. But I trust that they will be good for your soul to hear as you evaluate your priorities for 2021.

I. Pray with the church

After Jesus returned to heaven, the disciples gathered together, unsure about what the future would hold for them. They were depending upon the Lord in every way (Acts 1:14). They were united in their purpose of prayer, praying with one voice to God. The church was praying together.

We see the same thing in Acts 4:23-24; 12:2-5. The church was laboring in their prayers. The church was passionate in their prayers. These are but a few of the examples we have of the early church praying together. We could look at many others. For example, the leaders of the church at Antioch were praying together (Acts 13:1-3). The elders of the church at Ephesus were praying together (Acts 20:36).

The church at Tyre prayed with Paul, and the Bible specifically states that wives and children were included (Acts 21:5). The point of our text is obvious: As a church, we ought to pray together! Will 2021 be a year when you commit yourself to praying with the church?

II. Pray by yourself

Let us examine Acts 9:11. This is the story of Saul of Tarsus. While on his way to Damascus to pillage the church, he was wondrously converted. You remember how “a light from heaven flashed around him” (verse 3) and blinded him (verse 8). You remember how Jesus appeared to him and said, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (verse 4). Saul was led by the hand into Damascus, where he neither ate nor drank (verses 8-9). Then, the Lord appeared to Ananias and said,
“Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying” (Acts 9:11).

Saul was now a converted man who was praying to the Lord. The Lord told Ananias to go see Saul, precisely because he was praying. We can only guess that Saul was praying alone. Though he was in the house of Judas, we hear nothing of Saul praying with the household. Saul was praying alone, trying to figure out why he had become blind.

Acts 9:40 give us another example. Here we see Peter in Joppa attending to a disciple named Tabitha (verse 36), whose name in Greek was Dorcas. Dorcas had died (verse 37). Peter went to her home and found many widows weeping over her death (verse 39). Then verse 40 says, “But Peter sent them all out and knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body said, ‘Tabitha, arise.’ And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up.”

Perhaps it is an obvious point that you should pray by yourself. But I feel that it is necessary to mention because private prayer is the foundation to public prayer. Unless you pray by yourself, your prayers with the church will be fruitless. Praying in public without praying in private is like running a marathon without training.

III. Pray with your family Do not think that when you have prayed by yourself and with the church, your task of prayer is done. It does not stop there! Our families need to be prayer centers. I tell you this for your own good. The happiest family is the family that prays together. The most secure family is the family that honors God. The Bible tells us that “those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed” (1 Sam. 2:30).

This year will be successful only if you “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength” (Deut. 6:5). Trust daily in His goodness and grace. Look to Christ for your strength. The early church was “continually devoted” to these things. Can we not do the same?
Lessons to learn for the Second Coming

Matthew 24:32-44

In our text for today, Jesus is preparing His disciples for the Second Coming. In Matthew 24:42, 43, Jesus says, “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.” Before Jesus gave us these words, He first taught some lessons.

I. Learn from the fig tree (Matt. 24:32-34)
The parable of the fig tree is simple. Jesus is talking about the change in season, using the fig tree as an example. In Jesus’ day, the fig tree was very common in Israel, much as it is now. In that part of the world, fig trees put forth their fruit for nine months of the year. They are dormant during a few winter months but are covered in blossoms during the early spring. When the tree blooms, you know that summer is near.

The illustration and its explanation are easy, but its application is difficult. What is Jesus referring to when He speaks of “changes”? Jesus said that when you look at “these things,” you will know that the time is near. What are “these things”? Jesus spent much of His discourse describing the things that would take place before He comes. Have “these things” taken place? Since the days of Jesus, there have always been deceivers, wars, disasters, earthquakes, persecutions, and defections, and the gospel has continued to spread.

“These things” took place in the days just after Jesus. Jesus said that they would: “Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (verse 34). Many of “these things” have continued to take place since the generation that was alive in the days of Jesus. Since the ascension of Jesus (as recorded in Acts 1), I believe that the days have been primed for Jesus to return again.

The lesson of the fig tree is this: “Know that summer is near!” The lesson for us today is this: “Know that the Lord is near!” This is the language of the New Testament writers (Phil. 4:5; 1 Peter 4:7; James 5:8, 9).
James uses almost the same terminology as his divine brother. Jesus said, “The Lord is near, right at the door” (verse 33). We need to learn this lesson. When we think of Jesus’ Second Coming, we ought not think it is a long way off. We ought to think of the coming of Jesus as soon and near. From the fig tree, learn that the coming of Jesus is soon!

II. Learn from Jesus (Matt. 24:35, 36)
Verse 35 indicates a certainty in the words of Jesus, but verse 36 indicates an uncertainty in the words of Jesus. He is uncertain regarding the timing of these things. From these two verses, I want to pull out two lessons for us to learn, one lesson from each verse.

From verse 35, we learn that these things are certain. Admittedly, Jesus’ words in this chapter are difficult to believe, especially regarding the parable of the fig tree. Jesus said that when you see these things happen, you know that His coming is near. You know that His return is soon! But He spoke these words more than 2,000 years ago! This very observation has led many to renounce the faith. In 2 Peter 3, Peter anticipated this problem to Christianity.

When we hear the word “soon,” we think that it will be the next thing we do. In some circumstances, “soon” could be next week or next month. But certainly in our minds, “soon” doesn’t mean 2,000 years!

That is where God is different than we are. For us, eternity is 70 years! “Soon” means this year, this month, tomorrow, or even right now! But, for God, eternity is eternity! And so, for Him, “soon” can be 10,000 years. All eternity will make any delay—however long—seem as if it were but a day. “With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter 3:8).

How long has the Lord delayed His coming? Two days! The days of delay have a purpose; they are for repentance (2 Peter 3:9). Any delay in His coming is an expression of His kindness toward the unrepentant. Perhaps the Lord is being kind to you! Perhaps today is a day when you need to repent of your sin and bow to the Savior!
Every person who has ever set a date for the return of Christ has always been wrong! In fact, you must realize that if anyone sets a day for the return of Christ, you can be assured that He will not return on that day. From the fig tree, learn that the coming of Jesus is soon! From Jesus, learn that the return of Christ is certain!

III. Learn from Noah (Matt. 24:37-41)
Jesus goes back to Genesis, the very first book of the Bible, to illustrate His coming. He tells the story of Noah. You remember that Noah was a man who lived on earth when the corruption of men had spread far and deep. While Noah was building the ark, life went on as usual. Jesus said that before the flood, “they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage” (Matt. 24:38). Jesus describes a typical life. None of the things mentioned by Jesus was particularly sinful. The people’s sin was to ignore the words of Noah.

The eight people in the ark were the only ones saved from the flood. Those who weren’t in the ark perished. The point of the story is clear. Most people didn’t understand that a flood was coming (Matt. 24:39). They made no preparations for that day. They heard Noah’s warnings, but they certainly didn’t believe that the flood was coming. In verse 39, Jesus said, “So shall the coming of the Son of Man be.”

I believe Jesus was trying to make a point here that His return will be sudden! In Noah’s day, life went on as usual. Though the warning was sounded, the people ignored it. When Jesus returns to this earth, His coming will be just as sudden. When the Lord comes back, there isn’t going to be any time to repent. The game will be over. It will all be decided! From the fig tree, learn that the coming of Jesus is soon! From Jesus, learn that the return of Christ is certain! From Noah, learn that the return of Christ will be sudden. All of these lessons are different variations on the same point: Be ready. This is where we began this morning. Jesus said, “You be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will” (verse 44).
Remember the Second Coming
2 Peter 3:3-9 (NAS)

This message has three points, because Peter emphasizes three things as he tells us to remember the second coming of Christ.

I. Don’t forget that mockers are coming (verses 3, 4)
Peter seems to say, “Don’t be surprised when people come up and mock you for believing in the second coming of Christ.” They will come; there is no doubt about it. It’s not that Peter is brilliant here, nor is it that he needed an extra-special revelation from God to make his point. Rather, it’s that there have always been those who deny the coming of God—and there will always be people who deny His coming.

In the book of Psalms, David explains how his enemies have said to him all day long, “Where is your God?” (Ps. 42:3). In Psalm 115:2, the nations are saying, “Where, now, is their God?” In Malachi’s day, the cry was, “Where is the God of justice?” And if people have always denied God’s coming, won’t there always be people who will deny Christ’s return? Of course they will! And this is Peter’s point.

The epistles of the New Testament are flooded with references to the return of Christ. Consider the following verses: 1 Corinthians 11:26; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; James 5:7; 1 Peter 1:13; 1 John 3:2; Revelation 1:7 and 22:20.

The message of Christianity couldn’t be clearer. Our Messiah has come. He was crucified for our sins. And God raised Him from the dead, exalted His name above all names, and seated Him at His right hand. Let’s move on to the second point.

II. Don’t forget that all is not the same (verses 5-7)
Peter does a masterful job in this text of diffusing the argument of these scoffers, who deny the return of Christ. Verses 5-7 are a direct response to these mockers who deny the second coming of Christ.

The first phrase in verse 5 sets it up: “For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice.” In other words, these mockers are maintaining that all has been the same
since the days of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, Solomon, Hezekiah, and right up to Peter's day. For those living in Peter's day, that was a long time.

Abraham lived about 2,000 years before Christ, and for the next 2,000 years, the world remained essentially the same. In fact, their argument would be even stronger today, because we are some 2,000 years after Peter wrote. But Peter points out that all has not been the same; the flood destroyed the earth long ago (verse 6). And then Peter brings up the final judgment, which awaits all who deny Christ's second coming (verse 7).

Peter's point is this: "Don't forget that all is not the same" (verses 5-7). It wasn't the same in the past—God destroyed the world with a flood. It won't be the same in the future—God will destroy the world with a fire. So don't rest upon the fact that things have been the same for thousands of years. Go back a bit further, and you will remember how the world was once destroyed with a flood. Think about the future, and you will know that the world will be destroyed with fire. Christ is returning again. As verse 10 says, "The day of the Lord will come like a thief." It's going to be sudden. It's going to be quick. It's going to be unexpected.

"No human language can portray the scenes of the second coming of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven. . . . He will come clad in the robe of light, which He has worn from the days of eternity." Review and Herald Sept. 5, 1899.

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III. Don’t forget that God is patient (verses 8, 9)

The first thing that you notice in verse 8 is that it sounds a bit like verse 5. In verse 5, Peter wrote that the changes the earth has experienced “escaped the notice” of the mockers. Here in verse 8, Peter urges us not to let one fact “escape your notice.” The same Greek word—lanthano—is used in verse 5. It means “to forget, neglect, be hidden.” Peter says, “Don’t forget that God is patient.” This is the point of verses 8 and 9. Don’t neglect this fact.

In verse 8, Peter quotes from Psalm 90:4, in which Moses wrote, “A thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or as a watch in the night.” Isn’t this the essence of patience? Patience takes little regard for the passing of time. Two people agree to meet at a certain time.

One person arrives on time, but the other person is 10 minutes late. A patient person won’t be rattled by the passing of time; he or she is okay with it. Look at verse 9: “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”

The Lord has made a promise that He will return. Any delay in His return isn’t a sign of weakness or inability. It’s not that God has forgotten His promise. It’s not that God is incapable of fulfilling His promise; rather, it’s a sign of His patience. He will fulfill His promise someday!

How ironic that the reason God delays His coming judgment—because He is waiting for repentance—becomes the very reason people refuse to believe! Take note here of the heart of God. His heart is for people to repent!

Obviously, there are questions that abound in this verse. How is it that God doesn’t wish for any to perish, but people actually do perish? Is God not in control? Are there things that He really wants but can’t accomplish? No. God is fully in control. The God who can destroy the world with a flood can certainly change a
human heart. The God who will destroy the world with a burning fire can do as He pleases.

Romans 2:4 says, “The kindness of God leads you to repentance.” Is this the case with you? Has God’s kindness in delaying His return led you to repentance, or are you still holding strongly to your sin, unwilling to repent and cry out to the Lord? May today find you repenting of your sins and crying to the Lord for mercy before it’s too late.
Pictures of the cross

Galatians 6:14

In today’s sermon, we are going to look at four different metaphors, or pictures, God has used to tell us what was accomplished at the cross. This sermon will expand your view of the cross so that you don’t look at just one dimension of it.

I. Justification

Many passages in the Bible speak of justification (1 Cor. 6:11). Furthermore, the Bible writers foresaw that “God would justify the Gentiles by faith” (Gal. 3:8). We are “justified by His grace” (Titus 3:7). We could go to any of these passages and learn something about justification. Romans 4:1-8 put forth the example of Abraham being justified by faith. And then it puts forth the blessing pronounced by David upon those who are justified.

Regarding Abraham, the question that Paul deals with here is the question of how Abraham was justified. Was he made righteous before God based upon his own righteousness or was there another way? Based on the Old Testament, Paul makes it clear that Abraham was not justified by the works of the law; he was justified by faith (verse 3). How can God justify the ungodly? How can God justify sinners and still be righteous Himself? The answer to these questions comes through the cross of Christ. The answer comes in our next picture.

II. Redemption

Galatians 3:13 speaks of our redemption.

This verse tells us how Christ redeemed us. He redeemed us by hanging on the cross. His death upon the cross became the payment for our sins. And in this way, God is just in forgiving us by faith, because He paid the price for our redemption. He gave His life for our lives.

Let’s read Romans 3:19-26. Verse 24 speaks of how we have redemption in Christ Jesus. We see the role of the law in verses 19, 20. The law tells us of our sin. It tells us of our failure to please the Lord. It tells us that no flesh will ever be justified in God’s sight through the law. But in verse 21, we see Christ breaking in. He came in apart from the law. He came in to do for us what the law could never do, weak as it was (Rom. 8:3). We are all sinners, and as such, we have all fallen short of the glory of God.
of God (verse 23). But according to verse 24, we are now, through Christ, “justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.”

Justification is a gift, a gift of God’s grace, but it comes through the redemption of Christ. Though it is free for us, it isn’t free for God. It cost Him infinitely. It cost Him the blood of His Son. Though we are justified by faith, it’s not as if God is unjust, overlooking our transgressions which must be punished. Instead, He paid for our redemption through His blood.

III. Propitiation

“Propitiation” may not be the most common word in your vocabulary, but it ought to be. Every religion deals with the question of our standing before God. Many of the world religions see their god as being angry with them because of their sinful behavior. They believe they need to do something to appease this god. Often, an animal is sacrificed on an altar. This is called propitiation—turning God’s wrath away from you. God is no longer angry with you; rather, He is happy with you and ready to bless you.

Yet for the biblical mind, propitiation is often understood as the “mercy-seat” of the sanctuary where God deals with humanity. Where once there was anger toward you because of your wrongdoing, now there is happiness and delight and joy in your relationship.

In many religions, God is an angry God, but in Scripture, God dwells with man and, through His actions, allows humanity to have peace and forgiveness. This is a new picture of the cross—the God who dwelt with man in the wilderness “tabernacle” and died so that His anger might be taken away from our sin and poured into Christ the sacrifice (Isa. 53:10). At the cross, God’s anger at sin is no longer focused toward the sinner but toward Christ, and it is this realization of what God has done through Christ that will stir your soul to live for Him in great happiness (2 Cor. 5:15).

All of us are born “children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3). By nature we are objects of God’s anger (Eph. 2:3). God’s anger is toward those who reject Him and His ways (Col. 3:6; Rom. 1:18). And yet, the good news of the gospel is this: “For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1
Thess. 5:9, NIV). We obtain our salvation through Jesus Christ, who appeased the wrath of God by becoming a propitiation in His blood (Rom. 3:25).

Christ Jesus has satisfied the wrath of God. That is what propitiation means—but it means more than that! Not only has God been satisfied by Christ’s sacrifice for us; He is happy with us, and His favor is disposed toward us. Propitiation transforms God’s disposition toward us.

IV. Reconciliation
Reconciliation brings us into the family.
Like propitiation, reconciliation depicts a transformation. It speaks about the transformation from enemies to friends.

Romans 5:6-11 (read). God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved by His life?

And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. Paul moves through a progression. In verse 6, he identifies us as “helpless.” This merely means that we are weak and impotent. In verse 8, we are identified as “sinners.” This means that we are rebelling against the Lord.

In verse 10, Paul describes us as being enemies of God. This means that our rebellion turned hostile against Him. And yet, the great reality of reconciliation is that we are now “reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (verse 10). This means that there is no more hostility between God and us. Through the cross of Christ, we are now at peace with God (5:1).

But the imagery of reconciliation used in the Bible goes beyond merely being at peace with God. It’s not only that we are no longer fighting with each other; rather, there is a genuine relationship with God that is built upon love.
Part of our reconciliation to God is adoption. Reconciliation brings us close, into God’s family (Gal. 4:4-7). God not only redeems us and declares us righteous, but
He also brings us into His family. There are four pictures to describe the work of Jesus upon the cross: justification, redemption, propitiation, and reconciliation. May we rejoice in all that God has accomplished for us in the cross of Christ.