



Loving God... Loving Others

40-Day Devotional Guide

Ridgedale Baptist Church

1831 Hickory Valley Road
Chattanooga, TN 37421
www.ridgedalebaptist.org

You are a member of the family of Ridgedale Baptist Church. Together we are preparing to experience a spiritual renaissance, something that we believe the Holy Spirit has initiated: Loving God...Loving Others. This is not a program but an attitude, a spirit, a way of life, a Kingdom command.

The first step in this spiritual awakening is for our individual families to spend time together daily in prayer and meditation. We have prepared for you a 40-day devotional guide for that purpose. The daily devotionals have been written by members of our church. Each devotional is designed to lead our thoughts and actions to a particular daily focus. At the completion of the devotional, our prayer is that we will see and be a transformed church. Our goal is that the mind of Christ would be in us and that our actions would reflect His.

It is our prayer that you will use this devotional guide during the next 40 days. As God adds to our church family, we will ask new members to do the same, focusing on and celebrating His mighty deeds.

Bro. Bill

Day 1

WHAT A BLESSING!

*But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for **He causes His sun to rise on {the} evil and {the} good, and sends rain on {the} righteous and {the} unrighteous.** - Matthew 5:44-45*

The primary point in this passage is that we are to love one another, even our enemies. But note the highlighted sub point: **He causes His sun to rise on {the} evil and {the} good, and sends rain on {the} righteous and {the} unrighteous.** How many times have you said, “What a blessing”? Usually, that comment is made when something good happens.

The God who sends rain on the just and the unjust knows exactly what is coming our way. Whether it’s rain or sunshine, if God sends it to us or allows us to experience it, it’s going to be a blessing. Life and faith are both about seeing the glass as half full or half empty. As believers, we have learned the value of always seeing the glass as half full. That actually makes it exciting because we know that God still has something great in store for us.

We are not thankful that Darlene has cancer but we have been so blessed during this time with love and support that we lift our voices to say, “What a blessing!”

-Brother Bill & Darlene Owens

Day 2

GOD’S BLESSINGS AND “WE THE PEOPLE”

I once heard of a US citizen who was touring in South America and was amazed at the beauty and natural resources that were so abundant there. He remarked to his host, “I’m in awe of what I see here. It makes me wonder why your country has not prospered like mine.” After a brief pause, the host responded ---“I think the answer is obvious. My founding fathers came searching for gold but your forefathers came searching for an opportunity to freely worship God.” Only one letter differs in the spellings of the two focuses (gold vs. God), but there’s a world of difference in the outcomes they produce.

Looking at America today, it is apparent that God has done great things for “We the People”. However, when looking at trends now surfacing in America, I can’t help but wonder if our nation’s focus hasn’t already switched from one of seeking/serving God to one of seeking/serving gold (i.e. materialistic things).

Despite these concerns, the future is bright for us as Christians because we have eternal security only available in Jesus Christ. And, we have a story of hope to share with all--God’s love, mercy and forgiveness are still available to all who accept His Son and our Savior in repentant faith. If we will share this good news with others and consistently demonstrate to them how we genuinely love God and love others, America’s focus on God can be restored. In the process we’ll also learn the true meaning of Jesus’ teaching as recorded in Acts 20:35---“...it is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Today won’t you commit to giving more to others, especially the Good News of the Gospel, whether they live across the ocean or across the street.

-Ken & Sandy Blankenship

Day 3

WHAT IS A BLESSING?

On July 12th, 2011, my understanding of blessing was changed forever. It was a hot afternoon. I was sitting on my leather couch, watching my flat screen TV, in my air-conditioned house, which is way bigger than we need. I was enjoying all the things I considered to be blessings in my life. Then I received a phone call from Bill McGinnis. The staff had decided to give out hotdogs and drinks at the East Lake Courts housing project off 4th Avenue and Bill wanted to know if I would help. In case you don't remember, the weekend before, there had been an incident where three young men had driven through the development yelling racial slurs and shooting fireworks at the residents. As a result, tensions were high, which made me wonder if this was such a good idea. In fact, on the way, I called my friend on the police force. He was also a bit concerned and also wondered if this ministry outreach was wise.

When we arrived and set up, the people were eager to receive the food and refreshments. The children were smiling, as were their parents, who didn't have to worry about preparing dinner that evening. An adorable three year old boy came up and asked me if I would go to the playground with him. He grabbed my hand and proceeded to talk my ears off as we walked along. He wasn't concerned about race at all. He was just happy someone would take him to the slide! At the playground, we ran into a twelve year old girl. As the kids played, I heard the girl say, "Well, I am just happy I get to eat today!" My heart melted. How thankful she was for one little hotdog! The interaction with these two children, whom I may never see again, opened my eyes to what a true blessing is.

Wikipedia defines a blessing as: *the infusion of something with holiness, divine will, or one's hope or approval.* A blessing can be a noun, as in things we receive, like the meal the girl received. A blessing can be a person or feeling, like the love I felt from the little boy as he wanted me, a stranger, to play with him. However, I now believe that true blessing comes when it is a **verb**. By giving my time to try to bless the people in this community, I received the best blessing of all. I saw the love of Christ being shared with people and that love making a significant difference in their lives, even if for just one day. Peter says in 1 Peter 3:8-9: *"Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing."*

Make it your goal to be a blessing every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to how you can bless others. If you do, you will be the one blessed in ways you cannot even image.

-Kevin & Wendy Featherston

Day 4

WE ARE BLESSED

We thank God for all of our blessings and even sing about counting our many blessings but do we really recognize what they are and that they all come from God? Do we understand that He can and will stop giving us blessings if we do not follow His direction for our lives. In Jeremiah He told the people of Judah *"I have withdrawn my blessings from them."* - Jer. 16:5.

Moses spoke to the children of Israel prior to them going into the Promised Land in Deut. 28:1-14. He told them that God had given them direction, instruction and commands and that *"If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth, blessed will be the fruit of the crops of your ground..."* Some of those promised blessings were material—*crops of your ground* (v 11) while others provided needs such as rain and blessings on all the *work of your hands* (v 12).

Today we think about how God has blessed our nation and the freedom we have; freedom to worship God and tell others about Him that people in many countries do not have. We read *"Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord"* in Psalm 33:12. We think of our church and how the Lord has blessed us with the staff that leads and teaches us and the love among the members. Chris & I think and pray daily about how the Lord has blessed us, with good health, family & friends.

In all of this we must be careful not to just think in terms of material blessings which is so easy to do. We must constantly remind ourselves that *"Every good and perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights."* James 1:18.

I think that God will judge us with the blessings He gave us and what we did with them. He tells us that He *"will expect much of those who have been given much"* in Luke 12:48. He gave us the parable about the servants and the talents in Matthew 25 and shows us the rewards for making good use of what we have available. He tells us that *"blessed is he who considers the poor"* in Psalm 41:1.

We have two things that we must do in order to receive and keep God's blessings. One is to obey God's commands and direction for our life. The second is to use the blessings He has allowed us to have in accordance with His will and direction. He tells us in Philippians 4:19 *"My God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."* Philippians 4:19.

-Ben & Chris Landress

Day 5

REPENTANCE IS A RESPONSE TO LOVE

Revelation 3:19 (NIV) *Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.*

I was once a part of a men's ministry group that had, in serving together, grown close as friends. One of the men made some bad choices and ended up in an affair. He was losing his family. His wife, who was also a friend of Anita's, still loved him. And though his wife knew it would be a long road of reconciliation, she wanted him to come back to her, their two children, and the faith they shared.

Our men's group loved this guy and stood with his wife in prayerfully confronting him about ending the relationship with the other woman. At the confrontation, we not only shared our concern that he was throwing his life away, we promised to walk with him through the challenges and offered to help him get some professional counseling. At the confrontation the man refused our offers to help and he ran back to the other woman. Needless to say the affair was short lived, the woman was off to wreck the next home and he was left with nothing. He lost his job, he lost his marriage, he lost his children. Fortunately the story didn't end there. The man later wholeheartedly repented, got some help, called a friend from the men's group who walked with him through the challenges, and eventually his wife and kids returned to him. The story ended well.

Our hearts were broken for this friend when he refused our accountability and help. We could see the grim future for him if he continued, but we couldn't MAKE him choose the right thing. That was a choice he had to make. Eventually, he made the right choices, but we were pained by his initial refusal because we knew it would mean more pain for him and his family.

The truth is God loves us more than anyone else can. He can see the painful consequences ahead for us. He confronts us and rebukes us and disciplines us. He promises to walk with us through the difficulties in dealing with our sin. Even though God has all power, He doesn't MAKE us repent. He leaves that choice to us.

None of us are immune to sin. If you have been confronted with a sin in your life, choose to turn back to God's love. He loves you and wants to see you turn from the choices that will ruin your life.

Loving God...Loving Others,

-Bill & Anita McGinnis

Day 6

REUNITED WHERE WE BELONG

Luke 15:7 (NIV) *"I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."*

This scripture is the last verse of Jesus' parable of the lost sheep. When we hear the word "repentance," we may envision a fiery evangelist preaching to the sinners to REPENT or be damned. It is true that, throughout scripture, God expects repentance; if we are unrepentant, we will eventually reap the consequences of our choice. However, if we read this scripture out of the context of the parable, we may miss another truth found throughout scripture—God is forgiving.

In this parable, Jesus, as the shepherd, leaves his flock of 99 to find the missing 100th sheep and rejoices when that one which has strayed is returned to the fold. Jesus follows this story with two more parables about redemption, the parables of the lost coin and the prodigal son. In all three lessons, something of value is lost, found and returned to its place of belonging.

Likewise, we must emulate the shepherd seeking the sheep, the widow seeking the coin and the father seeking his son. We must not condemn other sinners, but lovingly seek the lost that they may also be redeemed.

The whole point of repentance is not to avoid condemnation, but to be fully reunited where we belong. We are truly blessed to belong to Him.

"I fall short of your expectations daily. Forgive me, Lord. Thank you for expecting me to walk in your light and for providing a path back to your loving arms. Help me to help others know your mercy. Amen."

-Sam & Pam Henry

Day 7

REPENTANCE BRINGS PEACE & ASSURANCE

Luke 15:7 (NIV) *“I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who not need to repent.”*

II Peter 3:9 (NIV) *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

My phone rings with a raspy hoarse voice on the other end *“Baby, I need you to take me for a biopsy on my throat.”* Sitting in the hospital waiting room I hear *“Your father needs an emergency tracheotomy due to an apparent cancerous tumor pressing on his vocal cords.”* Speechless, breathless, and shocked I felt I had just been handed my father’s death sentence. Being his primary caregiver I was responsible to insure he had his two aggressive radiation treatments daily. During this time I found myself doubting my Father’s salvation. I prayed for God’s guidance and perfect timing in witnessing to him. While having lunch on a beautiful spring day I asked him if I would see him in Heaven with Jesus. He placed his finger over the opening of his trach and said *“Baby I’ve been to the foot of the cross for forgiveness.”*

Thank you Lord Jesus for the peace and assurance that I will see my Father in Heaven.

-Bruce & Faith Baird

Day 8

WHAT IS LOVING GOD & LOVING OTHERS REALLY ALL ABOUT ANYWAY?

A few years ago, I was driving with my family when we passed a car stranded by the side of the road east of Knoxville. After deliberating for a few moments, we turned around and decided to offer our help to them. As it turned out, they had a flat tire and didn’t know how to change it. I put the spare on for them and found out they were headed to this area! Knowing that they could not go very far or fast on their spare, it dawned on me that we were only a few miles away from where I went to college. I told them to follow me, and I led them to a Wal-Mart where they could get a new tire and be on their way. I gave them my cell phone number and told them to call me if they had any more trouble on the way home. They thanked me and attempted to share their faith with me when I stopped them and told them I was a minister and was happy that the Lord allowed us to cross paths!

I felt pretty good about myself for stopping to help those two stranded motorists, but then I realized that part of the reason I felt good for what I did was because I do not do that sort of thing often enough! In the 1970’s, a few seminary professors did a study in which they asked their students to prepare a lesson on the Good Samaritan. Then, they sent the students across the campus one by one to the auditorium where they were to deliver the lesson but had also staged a scenario in which each student would pass by a person in need on their way to give the lesson. In one of the several studies they did, 90% of the seminary students offered no help to the person in need, even though they were prepared to give a lesson on that very topic!

In Luke 10:25-37, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. He closes it by saying, *“Go and do likewise,”* which we see in it’s original Greek tense is a **command** from Jesus to us. We are commanded to help others when they are stranded or helpless. We are to do it so much that it is commonplace for us, not extraordinary. We hear elsewhere in Scripture that we are to be known for these good works. **THAT** – being known for helping others on a regular basis – is what Loving God and Loving Others is all about. What can you do today – and every day - that would allow you to be known as one who loves God and loves others?

-John & Emily Lemons

Day 9

THE GREAT COMMANDMENT

The last week of Jesus' life before his crucifixion was so tight he must have had his day planner on 15 minute increments: Triumphal Entry, squabble with the Temple authorities, curse the barren fig tree, debate Temple authorities on theological, legal, tax issues. (Yeah, they were hung up on taxes 2,000 years ago, too.) One rushed day during that week, a Pharisee asked Jesus, "*Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?*" (Matthew 22:36). We have frequently misunderstood this exchange entirely – beginning with misconstruing the question and continuing on to miss the meaning of the answer.

Most Bible versions translate this question as asking about the "greatest" commandment. The Pharisees actually asked about the "great" commandment. First century rabbis were searching for The Great Commandment – the one command of the Law that encapsulated all the rest. The question was this: can we reduce the entire Law of the Hebrew Scriptures to a single command so that if we obey that Great Command, we automatically obey all the rest? This question truly got at the heart of the matter – *what is this life of righteousness before God all about?*

Jesus had a ready answer – *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind* (Deut. 6:5). In the Bible, the "heart" refers, not to the emotions, but to the will. For the emotions, biblical writers refer to the bowels! In the Bible, the soul is not an immaterial thing residing in the body but the body animated by spirit or breath. As Genesis 2:7 says, "*And the Lord God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living soul.*" The soul is the whole person – breathing flesh and bones and spirit. Jesus replied to the question of The Great Commandment that we are to love God with our entire *will* and commitment, the whole of our *self*—body and spirit, and using our entire *mind*, rationality, and intelligence.

Then Jesus followed up with an answer to a question no one had raised. He said the second commandment is very much like the first commandment: *Love your neighbor as yourself* (Lev. 19:18). Astounding! Audacious boldness! The entire Law – the entire will of God is about love – and nothing else. Furthermore, loving our neighbor is very much like loving God. Loving God *means* loving the neighbor.

A few days earlier, a legal scholar asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus told him the story of The Good Samaritan, and finished by implying strongly, "*You, go be a neighbor to whoever needs your help – your friends, your enemies, Romans, Herodians, tax-collectors and traitors, insurrections and terrorists, and even those half-breed heretic Samaritans* (Luke 10:29-37). Later that week Jesus said concerning our fellow Christians, *Love each other* (John 15:12,17). Three years earlier Jesus had led off his teaching ministry by commanding, *Love your enemies* (Matt. 5:44).

What's this life of serving God all about? Love God, your family, and your fellow Baptists. Love Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, Jews, and even Muslim Arabs. Love the illegal Hispanic immigrant, and the homeless bum sleeping on the street. It's all about love – and nothing else. It's simple, but it's certainly not easy.

-Leroy & Annette Spinks

Day 10

HOW IT'S POSSIBLE TO TRULY LOVE GOD AND OTHERS

In a scene from the HBO television series on the life of America's second President John Adams, he is saying farewell to his beloved daughter Abigail as he prepares to leave Massachusetts to participate in the Continental Congress. "While I am away," he says, "I expect you to be good and to do good."

When I heard Adams give his daughter that simple but profound assignment, I was impressed. In a few words, he had boiled down the Bible's two greatest commandments: love God with all your heart (be good) and love your neighbor as you love yourself (do good) (Matthew 22:37-39).

Imagine my surprise when later I came to realize that John Adams was not a Christian. While a student at Harvard, he was heavily influenced by deism and left the Congregational church to become a Unitarian. So, while Adams did believe in a god who created everything, he denied the deity of Jesus Christ and the possibility, or the necessity, of a personal relationship with the creator through Christ's atoning blood. For John Adams, human reason was supreme and the Bible was merely a book of moral rules to be accepted or rejected by reason.

So, in keeping with John Adams' philosophy of religion, he gave Abigail an easy assignment: be good and do good as you see fit or be true to yourself and do what you want to do.

But interpreted through the Word of God, Abigail was given an impossible assignment. First, because the Bible is more than a list of moral rules to accept or reject by reason. The Bible is the inspired Word of God and in its pages we learn both who God is and how He enables us to live in relationship with Him and others. Second, because we cannot live as God expects us to in our own strength. Apart from faith in Jesus Christ, we cannot be as good as God demands and apart from the power of the Holy Spirit we cannot and will not do good to others as He commands. But when Christ sits upon the throne of our life, our love relationship with Him moves us to love others as He loves us. Only in Christ can we be good and do good.

-Bob & Barbara Segrest

HOW DO YOU DESCRIBE LOVE?

Different people have different views and opinions of love. Webster's Dictionary gives the following explanations of love: *"Affection based on admiration, a warm attachment, enthusiasm or devotion, unselfish concern that freely accepts another in loyalty or devotion and seeks his good."*

When God created man, it was a demonstration of His concern and passion that man would obey and worship Him with passion and thanksgiving. Everything that man needed was provided for him in the Garden of Eden. But man wasn't satisfied with all the pleasures and comforts provided and he wanted more. More power and knowledge.

Because of Adam & Eve's decision they got less instead of more. Their rebellion led to the expulsion from the Garden of plenty to a life of sweat and hard work. After their departure God looked at them with pity and saw they needed something to enhance their lives. They needed an atonement for their rebellion and to be reinstated to a full relationship with God. Some type of sacrifice was needed to remind them their sin had separated them from the sweetness of God's presence in their lives. A type of blood had to be shed to cover them so the animal sacrifice was instituted. Years passed by and this ritual was stopped. But an atonement was still needed because man still rebelled against God. So God made the ultimate choice of a sacrifice that would be perpetual. He loved man so much that He gave His Son, Jesus Christ. Love for the unlovely. His warm attachment, unselfish concern that freely accepts another in loyalty and seeks his good, the fatherly concern of God for man. This type of love led to the death of His only son that man could once again have fellowship with the heavenly Father and man's sin would no longer hold him in bondage.

Since God loved us so much that He gave His all, He expects us to have the same love for other people. The only way that we can truly experience the fullness of His love is to share it with other people. He instructs us to *"go into all the world teaching and baptizing in MY name."* The world includes where we live, our neighbors, relatives and in the work place. When this command is obeyed to the fullest, then we can truly say we love God and our fellow man. We do this with a passion out of a fatherly concern for their spiritual needs.

This love is to flow like a stream rejuvenating everything it touches. It is not the type of love that is confined to a lake or pond just sitting there and going nowhere. Real happiness is concluded in obeying His commands and striving to be more like Jesus Christ.

-Ray & Betty Walker

BELOVED AND LOVING

1 John 4:7-11

Theme: We love one another as a result of having been loved so greatly by God.

There are two great realities that must always be kept in parallel with each other, love and truth. When we do not keep these two in parallel with each other, they can become destructive forces in our lives. Love divorced from truth soon becomes mere sentimentalism. Truth divorced from love becomes mere intellectualism and is often harsh, uncaring, and demanding.

Truth and love are essential to the Christian life. Truth is absolute and unchanging because it flows from God. Love is essential to the Christian life. Love is not some sentimental emotion but an attitude produced in our lives as a part of God's gracious working in us.

A grandmother overheard her young grandson being asked by one of his playmate, "Wouldn't you hate to wear glasses all the time?" "No," came the answer, "not if I had some like my Grandma's. She always sees when people are tired or sad, and she knows just what to do to make them feel better. One day I asked her how she could see that way all the time. She told me it was the way she had learned to look at things as she grew older." After thinking for a minute, the first boy concluded, "Yeah, I guess you're right. It must be her glasses." And what are these glasses like anyway? Let's look at what John tells us about Christian love.

Christian love is divine in origin (vs. 7-8). The commitment to love one another is an explicit requirement of the Gospel. This love "is of God," the result of allowing God to transform us into the image of Christ. This love for one another is a proof of truly knowing God (vs.7).

Christian love is based in God's having loved us and sending his Son to die for our sins (vss. 9-10). God's love is manifest by His action in sending His Son to pay the penalty for our sins. It is a sacrificial love that led Him to act for our well-being even at great personal cost.

Christian love is the fulfillment of a moral obligation (vs. 11). Gratitude is how we experience this moral obligation that comes from God's love for us. It is not something done grudgingly but gladly. Love for others is a response that God's love creates toward others.

Receiving the truth of the Gospel produces the response of love within us toward God and toward one another. If love for one another is not a habit of action, not a characteristic of our behavior, then we need to take a real hard look at our claim to love and to know God. Something is wrong and we need to find out what it is.

-Jim & Diane Price

LOVE YOUR FELLOW MAN

The theme “Loving God... Loving Others” is based on the Jewish Shema in Deuteronomy 6 and reemphasized in the passage in the 22nd chapter of Matthew where Jesus is asked by some Jewish legalists, “*What is the greatest commandment?*” Jesus replied, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*” He then went on to say, “*The second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself.*” It’s interesting to note that Jesus gave the legalists more than they asked for. But isn’t that just like Jesus? He always gives us more than we ask. In this case, however, the second commandment that Jesus mentioned goes all the way back to Leviticus 19. There is an entire list of items emphasizing love and good deeds for our fellow man- our brother and our sister. This shouldn’t have been a surprise for the lawyers. Jewish law itself emphasized love for others.

Another episode in the life of Jesus was when a young man came to Him and told Him he had kept all the commandments, asking what else was necessary for him to receive eternal life. Jesus’ reply was unexpected. He told the young man to go and sell all his possessions and give the money to the poor. The young man was not willing to do this. His possessions possessed him. He had no love for the poor or he would have done as Jesus told him. The young man would have known why Jesus said what He did if he had seen Him healing the sick and feeding the multitudes.

The apostle John understood the second commandment completely. His first letter, written to Christians near the end of the first Christian century admonished them to care for others. In fact, he said strongly that you can’t love God if you don’t love others. His strongest words are “*if you say you love God and don’t love your fellow man you are a liar.*”

I think John got it right. You can’t really love God without loving others. God Himself **is** love, and it’s that love that causes us to want to do for others what they cannot do for themselves. Based on John’s approach maybe we should flip the theme—“Loving Others...Loving God.” By doing so, others will see God in us.

There’s a lovely poem by Janet Leigh Hunt I keep pasted in the front of my Bible. It’s titled “Abou Ben Adhem.” It’s too long to print here, but it tells how Abou sees an angel writing in a book of gold. When he asks what the angel is writing, the angel replies, “*The names of those who love the Lord.*” Abou asks if his name is written there. The angel replies, “*Nay, not so.*” Abou then asks that his name be written as one who loves his fellow man. The angel returns and the poem ends, “*And showed the names whom love of God had blessed- and lo! Ben Adhem’s name led all the rest.*”

Do you want God’s blessings? Love your fellow man.

-Wylie & Mary Gross

GOD-HONORING LOVE

There is no topic that has been discussed more in music and movies than ‘Love.’ Country music alone reminds us that love is unconditional, crazy, fun, and hard to explain. In the midst of all the love we see portrayed, it is primarily a matter of emotional connection—we trust that God has worked through emotions for years to bring men and women to himself.

However, we are at fault when that emotion is all we trust. What do we do when the emotion of a moment is lacking? What do we do when we do not feel like loving? How about when we do not feel loved?

The New Testament concept of love moves beyond the sheer emotion of a moment. John tells us that God-honoring love begins with God, stating that it is not a matter of us loving God, but Him loving us first. It is so easy to overlook that clear-cut, biblical principle. God loves us. He pursues us to reconcile us to a right relationship with Himself through the sacrifice of Jesus. He loves us in ways that turn our deserved wrath to favor. As a result, he frees us from sin so we can love Him in return.

Secondly, God desires that we realize his place in every aspect of our lives. We see that in answering the young man’s question, he quotes from Deuteronomy, where Moses tells us that the command to love God should be taught in every life scenario, whether it be waking up, laying down, working, teaching your children...whatever. The love of God— the all-out, passionate pursuit to view God as ultimate and to delight in— that is the greatest commandment.

Finally, the love of God compels and empowers us to love humanity for God’s sake. Jesus quotes the Levitical command to love your neighbor. However, Jesus has given us a fuller understanding of the neighbor in the NT. The neighbor for us includes our enemies. Take a few moments to read 1 John 4:7-12.

In this, we are reminded of phrases from Christ that permeated the teachings of the early church — one of them being to ‘love one another.’ In this context, John is reminding us to love the body of believers simply based on what we all share — God’s love for us. That is foundational for our treatment of other believers-and those that we meet who may not know Christ. Why? Because we hope that God’s love would draw them in as well. As we love one another, God’s love is completed in us all — we are reflections of the relationships that God displays at Creation and we will see in eternity. When we are loving as Christ loves, we are, as Fanny Crosby says, ‘foretastes of glory divine.’

-Chad & Hope Poe

TRUE WORSHIP

And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"
-Isaiah 6:5

The greatest fear that is common to all mankind is the fear of speaking. One of the most dreaded classes that I had to take in school was speech. During one such course, the professor videoed our speech. After going through the grueling ordeal of being critiqued by classmates, we were instructed to go to the library and view our speech. I cringed as I watched and listened to myself. Do I really flap my arms around like that? Does my head actually look that strange? Does my voice sound like that? My struggle with the video was the fact that I have an image of myself that was not accurate.

True worship took place in Isaiah 6 when the prophet saw God for who He truly was. At the same time Isaiah saw himself as he really was. Often my idea of who God is does not match up with the God of scripture. At the same time, I often have an idea of myself that is inaccurate. I like to think more highly of myself. When I approach God for who He truly is with the idea of who I am really, I am amazed and led to praise and adoration of the Mighty God who loves me and gave His Son for me.

Read Isaiah 6:1-8. When is the last time we approached worship as a time of seeking out the true God of Scripture? Do we participate in worship as God sees us or as an imaginary image of ourselves?

-Tony & Lana Leonard

PREPARE FOR WORSHIP

Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.

-Psalm 95:6-7

This psalm directs us to come before the Lord in a joyous manner full of thanksgiving and humility because He is the Great God above all gods and we are His people. But how often do we become distracted by the most mundane things around us during corporate worship every Sunday morning? How often do we come into corporate worship with external things weighing us down or keeping our minds focused elsewhere?

Think of something that is important to you and what you do in anticipation of that event. You prepare. Athletes prepare by physical practice and mental focus before the big game. They envision making the big shot. Professional speakers practice their speech. Good sales people ready themselves for an important sales presentation. Attorneys prepare their final remarks before the end of a big trial. So it ought to be for us. Every Sunday morning we are coming before the Deity of the universe and we ought to be ready to do so.

How do you prepare for corporate worship? You prepare by practicing worship as an individual and as a part of a family throughout the week. We are told in Scripture to pray and to make joyful noises unto the Lord. We also ought to read and study His word. By participating in daily acts of worship, we prepare ourselves to do so communally on Sunday mornings.

-Michael & April Lander

A LIVING SACRIFICE

¹ Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

-Romans 12:1-2

What is worship? It can be a noun or a verb. But the kind of worship that Paul is referring to in verse 1 is definitely a verb. It's showing your devotion, respect and adoration to God by presenting yourself to Him as a living sacrifice.

Under the Law of the Old Testament, sacrifices were dead; slaughtered animals offered to God. Under Grace, which came through the sacrifice of Jesus, we are called upon to be holy and living sacrifices, presenting ourselves to Him to live our lives in His will.

How can we worship? There are many ways. There is group worship which takes place in churches all over the world every Sunday morning. That's the easy kind of worship because everyone else around you is doing it. But sacrificial worship takes much more effort. We are presented with opportunities to worship in this way each and every day. We just have to be aware of them and take notice and then action.

There have been several such opportunities presented to us lately but they have been obvious. Things like helping our local tornado victims, going on choir trips and mission trips. Participating in those efforts is the kind of living sacrifice worship that I am talking about. Those who took part gave up their time, resources, energy and talents to serve others and at the same time, they worshiped God.

But again, those were organized efforts. We should be on the lookout for chances to worship God every second of our daily lives. It doesn't take a natural disaster or mission trip to do this. It could be something as simple as letting someone into traffic, holding the door for someone or stopping to assist a stranded driver on the side of the interstate. These are all things that the world says don't do, your time is much too valuable. But, if we are to be obedient to God, they are things that we must do.

-Greg & Tyra Gray

WORSHIP—A MATTER OF ADORATION

Culturally, we have a misconception of what worship is. The word 'worship' is much like the word 'chicken'; when you say it, the thought it conveys is different based upon who is speaking and who is hearing. Some people like their chicken baked, others like it fried. Some like it in a pasta while others put it in a pie. However, at the core, you have a helpless yard bird that woke up one day looking for feed that is now on a plate in some capacity.

'Worship' is similar because, at its core, 'worship' is a declaration that we make to God out of immense adoration for Him. There are many uses of the word. For us, the most common use of the word is related to our 'worship gathering.' When we come together in a worship gathering, we praise God for what He is doing and has done in our lives and the lives of others. We also plead with Him in prayer and hear His voice as we pray, and we learn God's vision for our lives and how to participate in that vision through the study of His Word. All of these help us to see that worship is a matter of adoration, not obligation.

Corporate worship is declared vitally through response. When we gather, we listen to revelations from Scripture through music and teaching, and respond not only with our voices, but with our lives. When our lives do not respond, our voices are hollow shells of what is intended. As we worship as a church, Ridgedale Baptist is dedicated to providing opportunities to worship and to respond to God's Word.

-Chad Poe

AMAZING POWER & STRENGTH

As my thoughts focus on God, I reflect on a kind and loving Heavenly Father who knows my every thought, sees my every flaw, and loves me anyway! I think about the One who has promised in His Word to never, ever leave me, to be my Comforter and Guide, my dearest Friend. There is, however, another aspect of God's character I must never forget -- His amazing power and strength! With only the spoken word, God created the earth and everything in it. With a strong and mighty hand He parted the Red Sea so His chosen ones could cross over unharmed. With tremendous power He sent fire from Heaven consuming not only the offering the prophet Elijah placed on the altar, but also the wood, stones, dust and water that filled the trench surrounding the altar. With great authority, and through obedience from His people, He caused the walls of Jericho to crumble into mere pebbles allowing His children to gain a great victory over their enemies. What an awesome and powerful God we serve!

According to Webster's dictionary, *WORSHIP* is to regard with great, even extravagant respect, honor or devotion. 1 Chronicles 16:25-29 says, "*Great is the Lord! He is most worthy of praise! He is to be feared above all gods. The gods of other nations are mere idols, but the Lord made the heavens! Honor and majesty surround him; strength and joy fill his dwelling. O nations of the world, recognize the Lord, recognize that the Lord is glorious and strong. Give to the Lord the glory he deserves! Bring your offering and come into his presence. Worship the Lord in all his holy splendor.*" Spend some time today in the presence of this awesome, mighty God we serve, offering Him the respect, honor and devotion He so greatly deserves. He is an amazing God!

-Larry & Debbie Bramlett

UNEXPECTED BLESSING

A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.

-Proverbs 22:9

Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

-Luke 6:38

This is a simple devotion but is very big in the eyes of a father.

The other day my son came in with wide eyes of amazement explained a situation that happened to him the day before. He told me he had stopped at a store and a man came up to him explaining that he was a minister at a church in Georgia and his car had broken down and he needed money to buy a belt to get his car working to get back to Georgia. He hesitated, but gave him the last \$10 dollars in his pocket and went on his way. The next day he was given unexpected money from two different people, which was a lot more than what he had given to the man who needed help. I asked him if he thought giving the money was the right thing to do for the man and he said that God would use it how he saw fit.

He came to me with the story not to boast about what he had done, but was in amazement how God blessed him by doing just a little thing and helping someone else in need. It is a joy to see how God works through people and blesses them. As a father it is a blessing to me to see my son experience God's blessings and the wonder of his works.

-Tim & Kae Kelly

PRESS ON THROUGH THICK & THIN

The cold rain beat down on my windshield, making it hard for me to see the familiar road leading to my church. As I drove alone in the darkness, my thoughts were as dreary as the weather. Life had taken so much out of me lately. A stressful job, struggling finances, family illness, raising our children, caring for aging parents and the list goes on.... We all seem to get discouraged at different times in our lives. As I walked slowly toward the door of the church, I was seeking shelter from the storms outside and in my life. As I went inside, I was greeted by a handshake, a warm smile, an embrace, and then some kind words. All of these melted my emotional facade.

The message that day was what I desperately needed to hear — that God’s power would help me “Press On.” (Phil. 3:13-14) I felt God’s loving presence and knew his strength would lift me up when I was weary. I was also deeply touched by the love and concern of my Christian friends. Through thick and thin we have laughed, cried, prayed, and served our Lord together. You see, no one really wants to face life’s challenges alone. (And I can’t even imagine what it is like for the unsaved). What a blessing I received by coming to worship! Let us be reminded to give that handshake and say those kind words, because you never know who needs them today. Infuse each other with faith --- Persuading One Another to “Press On.”

-Larry & Judy Wiedenbenner

DESIGNED BY GOD

It was [God] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. -Ephesians 4:11-16

Equipping and Empowering – It’s one of the most important things the church does – especially for the purpose of **Loving God (and) Loving Others!!!** In fact, according to the Ephesians passage above, that is the purpose of the equipping and empowering of the church, of its being built up to become fully mature in Christ.

God gave to his church – to us who are believers in and followers of Christ – certain “offices” to be filled with people whom he has gifted to 1) prepare us for works of service – serving others, loving others, and to 2) help us really know Jesus – the Son of God who taught us how to love God and love others.

As these people help prepare us, it is also our responsibility to study and equip ourselves (2 Timothy 2:15 and 4:2, 1 Peter 3:15) to be prepared to live before others as God wants us to live.

The benefit of being equipped by others and equipping ourselves is that we become empowered to maturely live Godly lives, undistracted from things that would keep us from fully following Christ. Couple that with the empowering of the Holy Spirit in us (John 14:26 and 1 Peter 1:3) and we end up supporting and loving each other and loving God as he deserves to be loved, and we accomplish the work for which God has created us.

Equipping and Empowering. Loving God...Loving Others. It’s a great combination designed by God!

- Michael & Ruth Ann Johnson

SEE WHAT'S IN FRONT OF YOU

“Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’” “Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’” The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’”

-Matthew 25:34-40

One of my favorite vacation spots is the beach. It doesn't really matter what beach, just the beach. Recently my family went to Panama City. Each morning my mom and I would get up early and go sit on the beach and watch—we watched the water, the fish, the birds, people. I came to really enjoy this time. Not only was it time for just me and my mom but it was time for me to reflect and observe.

One morning a group of women were walking down by the water. They all stopped and began to stare straight down at their feet. They stood there for quite some time while I watched. They were so intent on whatever it was that they missed a most beautiful sight. Some 40 yards away fish were feeding on the waves. You could see them twist and turn as the wave would swell and then begin its decent. The light would reflect on their skin giving them such a beautiful glimmer.

And isn't that how we sometimes are in our own lives? We are so focused on a problem, kids, finances, goals, pleasures of life that we fail to see what is right in front of us. We fail to see someone who needs a listening ear, a kind word, a good meal. We are so consumed with our own lives that we do not even notice those who might be right in front of us who have never shared the joy of knowing Christ. And then I wonder, what if God was so focused on one little spot and He didn't have me in His sights? What if God knew I had needs but was so busy with the rest of the world that He didn't have time for me? What if...But thanks be to God He does see my need. Thanks be to God He does have His sights set on me and on you. I have been blessed beyond measure. Luke 12:48 says, *“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”* Count your blessings. Now look up from where you are and see that that is required of you. Quit staring down at your feet and see the opportunities God has placed before you...they are just on the next wave waiting for you to notice.

-Charles & Carol Goss

FIRM FOUNDATION

But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss.

- 1 Corinthians 3:10b-15a (NIV).

As I patiently await the repairs and construction to wrap up on my house, I have been reminded several times of this passage. From time to time, as we removed damaged parts of the floor or wall, something is revealed that just wasn't built quite right. Maybe it wasn't up to modern standards and codes, or perhaps (and more likely) a corner was cut and the builder pocketed the savings in the late fifties. So we tear it out, fix it, and start building again. This is the same home I have lived in for years now, and so many memories have been made here. But for all that, something was very wrong with the very structure of the thing we count on the most. Maybe without the tornadoes we would have never noticed, but they have been tested, and found wanting.

So it can be in our spiritual lives as well. We cover, patch, fake, and hide all the things we don't want to deal with or want others to see. God forgives us, for certain, but the problem with this habit is when we bring others into our homes and lives. Not just guests, but our very families are taking shelter in these spiritual homes we have made. Is the floor built on good joists of unconditional love? Are the walls made of strong timbers of faith? Is our roof built with grace and mercy toward others as God has shown to us? Christ is our perfect model for building spiritual homes, and our only standard for how we live. Let's not wait for a disaster to fix our foundations firmly in Christ. Pray for healing now, so we can be strong for others.

-Tim & Jennifer Allen

BUILD EACH OTHER UP

One of the most important missionaries of the New Testament era is the apostle Paul. What a change God made in Paul's life. As Saul, he had been a hater of the early Christians and the church. Only God's transforming power changed Paul's life and empowered him to become the pillar of the early church. Paul's life mission was changed from trying to totally destroy the church to a mission of empowering and teaching others how to ensure the church continue to grow and prosper.

Paul tells the Corinthian Church, *"Even if I boast, somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I shall not be ashamed of it"* (2 Corinthians 10:8). Paul was not concerned that some said he was brave while he was away, and was weak when he was in Corinth. Paul's main goal for the Corinthians was to encourage and build them up, not to destroy or put them down.

Which group do you wish to be associated with, the detractors or the empowering and equipping saints like Paul? What a difference our personal lives and the life of our church would be if we all worked to build up the church and each other.

-Mike & Tammie Rogers

KEEP IT SIMPLE

As the father of a 16 year-old young man, a 13 year-old young lady and another young man who is 12, I often find myself wondering if it is too late for me to have a genuine influence on my children's spiritual lives. Being only 37 myself, I wonder if I am simply too young to have the appropriate life experience to pass on to my children who are quite a bit older than the children of many of my friends.

Compounding this wonder of mine, I came to know God relatively late in life. I was 22 when I was saved. Fortunately, the church home I chose at that point in my spiritual life was geared toward ensuring its members really knew how to rightly divide the "Word of Truth" and stick with the basics.

I am, by no means, claiming to be a Bible scholar only 15 years after coming to know Jesus. What has worked for me is to keep things simple. The Word of God is meant to be understood by a child. By keeping things simple, I am better equipped to pass the Word onto my children and, at the same time, further my knowledge of the Bible. In some cases, my children and I are learning together.

This week, my church is having Vacation Bible School. I popped on Facebook earlier today and decided to have a look at my daughter's page. She is helping out with the recreation portion of VBS. Here is what I found:

"Had fun hangin' out with my grandparents this morning! love y'all! cant wait for VBS tonight! This week my prayer is that with our actions or words we bring at least one little kid if not many closer to God."

I am always very proud of my children, but this ranks up there at the top of the list of "proud daddy moments." Besides there being legitimate proof of my plan of working, her statement was simple as was the concept behind it. When I think about how to simplify the concept of God, is it not just about continually getting closer to Him? We can do this in so many ways. We can talk to Him, we can talk about Him, we can do kind things and we can say kind things. By the Grace of God, other people will see and draw a little closer to Him themselves.

-Andy & Melissa Barber

OUR FRIEND-THE HOLY SPIRIT

³¹ “So I tell you, every sin and blasphemy can be forgiven—except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which will never be forgiven. ³² Anyone who speaks against the Son of Man can be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven, either in this world or in the world to come. -Matthew 12:31-32 (NLT)

And there they are; two verses that struck fear deep within my heart as a child. Being raised in a hellfire and brimstone church like I was meant always associating God with a strong element of fear; but hearing that there was something unforgiveable scared me to death.

After hearing these verses I never spoke, mentioned, and really tried not to think much about the Holy Spirit, and for fifteen years I pretty much stayed that way until I began to really grow in the Lord. It was my love for Jesus and His Father that took me straight back to encounter the Holy Spirit whom I really just feared. But who is the Holy Spirit? I really didn't know.

It was only then that God helped me truly understand His loving plan. God would no longer hover over the Ark of the Covenant once a year and visit with the High Priest in a tabernacle. Instead, He gave us who are believers the precious Holy Spirit to reside in our hearts which are now His new Holy of Holies. Our bodies have been transformed into a temple for God.

Jesus told His followers that He must leave so a Gift from the Father, His Holy Spirit, could come to us. This is very hard to understand. Who on Heaven or Earth could be more precious than Jesus, who died for us? It could only be the Holy Spirit; the tender most loving part of God. The Holy Spirit is our connection to God allowing each of us a direct relationship with God Himself.

These things have helped me understand just what God meant in Matthew 12. In the Holy Spirit, God has revealed His deepest most intimate part of Himself. This is just like when a married couple intimately share themselves mentally, physically, and emotionally with one another. A bond is made. A trust. But when a husband or a wife violates that trust a deep hurt is inflicted. In Jesus and the Holy Spirit, God has given Himself to us. Thanks to God's teachings, I have grown to love the Holy Spirit so much and know that He is my very best friend in this world and the next. Oh, let us pray today that we can love God back just a tiny portion as much as He loves us, and let Him fill us with His Holy Spirit.

-Rick & Jill O'Daniel

WAIT FOR YOUR OWN BALL

While online yesterday I was amused by a video MLB had posted of a boy at a Giants game who had missed catching a foul ball. Two men in front of him had wrangled for a ball that the boy must have felt was coming straight at him. One guy came up with the ball and gave it to a woman sitting beside him. The game commentators kept coming back to watch the boy throughout the game. He was not happy about that foul ball and it was apparent by the scowl he kept on his face and his crossed arms.

“In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.” - Isaiah 30:15

The Lord reminded me of this verse and the video this morning after I wrote in my journal about a friend of mine that I admitted to the Lord I was envious about something she has gotten. It bugs me that she has something that I want. The Lord gently reminded me that I was like the boy who sulked over the ball someone else got but he wanted. He brought to mind the end of the video when the boy was brought a ball by a Giants representative.

God was telling me to stop worrying about what others have and to rest in his arms in quietness and trust. The Lord will give me my own ball, the best ball I could ever have at His appointed time. Until then he will strengthen (empower) me and equip me for what he has for me this day to complete. The Lord doesn't want me to be like that boy who sulked throughout the entire game until he got the ball. He wants me to enjoy this game called life and do the work he has for me to do in the daily moments. My eyes are open as I live each day for Jesus because I know a ball is heading my way!

-Joy Flynn

HUMILITY

“So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.’” -John 13:12-15

The message Jesus is sending here is clear. The way to be happy in this world is not to “Lord” over the world, but to serve the world. Think about what Jesus said: *“Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”* -John 13:16-17

Jesus was teaching us about the importance of humility. Think about it. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords washing the feet of those who knew him for the Lord He was. The only other event where I remember that kind of humility in the Bible was on Palm Sunday when Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the Prophet Zechariah’s promise that our Savior would come to us, *“lowly, sitting on a donkey.”* (Zechariah 9:9) Indeed, humility was one of the Lord’s greatest qualities and one that we should want others to see in our lives.

-David & Michelle Apps

ME FIRST!

Being a servant is often a characteristic which is looked down upon by those in the world. Today’s society is very much a “me-first” world in which the population is only looking out for themselves. If someone sees a person acting as a servant to someone else, they are scorned and considered weak. This characteristic of Christianity is yet another way Christianity differs from the ways of the world. Christians need to realize that every time they act as a servant to someone else they are possibly opening the door to share God with others. Being a servant is one way a Christian can be a light in this dark world of sin.

Here are a few scriptures to consider when studying the concept of being a servant:

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.
-Mark 10:45:

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.
-Galatians 5:13:

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

-John 13:3-5:

-Anonymous

MIRROR THE LIFE OF CHRIST

What is the purpose of our life? Why were we created? Is what we do today really going to matter? As we live our lives, we often wonder what we should have done differently today. When we think back on missed opportunities to share or to step up to serve, we each have countless opportunities. Imagine where our country would be today if each Believer did for someone else every day!!! It is our responsibility to do for others. We are to live like the PERFECT EXAMPLE of Christ's life. The ultimate gift back to our Savior, is to live for Him as He would live, doing for someone else every day. Can you imagine a world full of people trying to out give each other?

Have you ever heard it said, *"If you see something that needs to be done, don't wait to be asked."* Take the initiative and do it like a faithful servant, like a true follower of Jesus Christ. Jesus came to do for others and our lives are to mirror His life.

As a married couple, we had a wonderful Sunday school teacher, and he said on numerous occasions, *"The secret to a successful marriage is to try to out give each other daily."* As the bride of Christ, imagine the relationship we would have with our Lord, if we lived every day to out give Him? As impossible as it is to achieve, to out give God, think of what our family life, career life, and church would be as we each strived daily to out give God!

"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above your selves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality." -Romans 12:9-13

-John & Emily Garrett

PUT CHRIST FIRST

When we, as followers of Christ, think of service, often times the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 comes to mind. It sounds so simple, help the helpless. Yet how many of us actually are serving others the way it was laid out for us? Christ was the ultimate Good Samaritan and laid out for us the plan of how we are to serve others, even if it's not comfortable to us, and bring them to Him. He never said, go, do this simple little thing I've shown you, and we'll all be happy. He merely gave us this gigantic responsibility, *"Go, Make disciples of ALL nations, Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."* The great thing about this vast responsibility is that Christ followed the Great Commission with, *"And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* (Matthew 28:16-20) Although Christ promises us this, do we take comfort in it and use it to enable us to go without fear or reservation?

None of us want to see those around us without Christ. Often times we are not willing to put ourselves aside and put Christ and others first. If we don't, then who will?

And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. -Matthew 24:14

-Hunter & Chara McLaughen

SERVING FROM THE HEART

From now on if you listen obediently to the commandments that I am commanding you today, love God, your God, and serve him with everything you have within you, he'll take charge of sending the rain at the right time Deut. 11:13-14 (MSG)

Repeatedly, the Bible says to "serve the Lord with all your heart." God wants you to serve him passionately, not dutifully. People rarely excel at tasks they don't enjoy doing or feel passionate about. God wants you to use your natural interests to serve him and others.

How do you know when you're serving God from your heart? The first telltale sign is enthusiasm. When you're doing what you love to do, no one has to motivate you, or challenge you, or check up on you. You do it for the sheer enjoyment. You don't need rewards, or applause, or to be paid, because you love serving in this way.

The opposite is also true: When you don't have a heart for what you're doing, you're easily discouraged. One characteristic of serving God from your heart is effectiveness: whenever you do what God wired you *to love to do*, you get good at it. Passion drives perfection. If you don't care about a task, it is unlikely that you'll excel at it.

Remember, the greatest things in life are not things. *Meaning is far more important than money.* The richest man in the world once said, "*A simple life in the fear of God is better than a rich life with a ton of headaches*" -Proverbs 15:16

Figure out what you love to do—that which God gave you a heart for—and then do it for His glory!

-Anonymous

WE SERVE GOD BY SERVING OTHERS

"You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love." (Galatians 5:13)

Many people have the misconception that being "called" by God is something only missionaries, pastors, nuns, and other church leaders experience. But the Bible says everyone is called to serve God by serving others. We are not saved by serving, but we are saved for serving. The Apostle Paul gives three insights related to this:

First, the basis for serving others is salvation. Paul says, "*You were called to be free.*" You cannot serve God until you've been set free by Jesus. It's the prerequisite for serving. Until you experience the transforming power of God's grace in your life, you're too enslaved by your own hurts, habits, and hang-ups to think much about others.

Second, the barrier to serving others is selfishness. Paul warns, "*Do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature.*" The No. 1 reason we don't have the time or energy to serve others is that we're preoccupied with our own agendas, dreams, and pleasures.

Third, the motive for serving is love. Paul says, "*Serve one another in love.*" This is an important key to building community: 1 Corinthians 13:3 records, "*No matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.*" (MSG)

God is far more interested in why you serve others than in how well you serve them. He's always looking at your heart, serving willingly and eagerly out of love for Jesus and gratitude for all he's done for you.

You are most like Jesus when you're serving others. After washing His disciples' feet, Jesus said, "*I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.*" -John 13:14-15

-Anonymous

SERVICE - THE KEY TO ABUNDANT LIFE

Then the King will say, "I am telling you the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me – you did it to me." -Matthew 25:40

Can service be the secret of “abundant life”? Maybe so. As God’s children we have the promise of abundant life. Our earthly minds quickly jump to the abundance of things and maybe peace and serenity. A life which is all roses and all our problems melt away. A better viewpoint may be that abundant life is through service. Jesus set the example of giving to others through His teaching and healing. He rubbed elbows and trained ordinary people whom He called to do extraordinary things. These things were so captivating that the disciples abandoned the life they knew and took up full time service with God. Jesus’ ultimate gift to us came on the cross when he laid down his life that we might have eternal life. He clearly taught that the greatest commandment was to *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind,”* and the second to *“love your neighbor as yourself.”* These two commandments may be the key to abundant life. Not one that delivers an abundance of things but one that provides the peace and joy of being in His will and making a difference. As we serve others, we forget about ourselves and find joy in giving of ourselves to others and suddenly understand the meaning of “abundant life.”

What does that service look like? It is clearly different for each of us. Jesus in Matthew 25 commends the “blessed” for their service to others. He says that *“Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me – you did it to me.”* No matter what the need – sickness, hunger, thirst, clothing, stranger or prisoner, as the “blessed” met the need, they were commended. It’s interesting that the ones meeting the needs are referred to as the “blessed.” As they opened doors with their kindness and blessed others they earned the title of “blessed” from the Savior. In a practical sense, God may call us to meet needs in our day, which may look like the ones referred to in Matthew 25 but they also may look very different. It may be being a friend to the friendless, it may be taking the gospel to the lost, and it may be providing hospitality to the homeless. It may be using basic skills of cooking, cleaning, repairing or just plain old befriending someone overlooked and forgotten. It may be using our developed talents of our work or profession in business, medicine, or a trade to advance the cause of Christ to meet the needs of those we encounter in our journey. Let’s open our eyes to those around us that we bless others and in so doing find blessings for our lives. Find your area of service and you may also find that elusive “abundant life.”

-Richard & Nancy Franks

INVITATIONS & DISCOVERING

Y*ou can stop it with your face, but that’s probably not the best way,”* Coach Steve said to me at my first soccer practice way back in first grade. He was trying me out at goalie and I wasn’t doing so great. My best friend, Michael, had invited me to play on his soccer team and I was excited, but it turns out I wasn’t very good with my hands so being goalie wasn’t for me. Although when they put me up front I could outrun almost everyone so I was getting better! Sure I looked weird like I was being chased by a mountain lion, but at six that’s more coveted than catching a ball with your face.

I ended up playing soccer for the next 25 years and, to my wife’s chagrin, I still wake up at 4:00 AM to watch a World Cup match while other people sleep. Without my best friend inviting me to practice I might never have discovered my passion and love for soccer and I wouldn’t be who I am today. The same can be said for my parents taking me to church. What if I hadn’t been in church and Michael had invited me to church instead and I had discovered my passion and love for Jesus Christ because of him. A lot of times it can be something as simple as inviting someone to something that can ignite a passion in them; how great would it be if you were that person who did the inviting?

I challenge you to invite your coworkers to Sunday School; your neighbors to an Outreach Event; your kids’ friends from school to Upward Basketball... who knows you might be the one to help ignite in them their love and passion for Jesus Christ.

“Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.” -Mark 16:15

-Kevin K. Lewis

YOU'RE ALREADY INVITED

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. -John 3:16

A few years ago as I was planning my wedding I received an invitation to a wedding shower for me that I was already invited to. This seemed strange to Kevin. "Why would they send you an invitation?" he asked. I explained to him that it was "just a girl thing." They sent it to me because they wanted me to see what it looked like and because girls like to keep things as souvenirs and because it is just good manners. They didn't have to send it, they just did.

Every Sunday morning Brother Bill and other preachers end the service by giving us an invitation to come down front and invite Jesus into our hearts and it makes me think of getting that shower invitation. In the same way I was already invited to the shower, we've already been invited to heaven too. Jesus says "*whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life*" with God in heaven. We are extended an invitation to come at the end of the service but we don't need one because Jesus already extended us the invitation. All we have to do is embrace it.

-Ashley Lewis

GOD'S LOVE LANGUAGE

My wife calls herself a life long learner. She loves to read books and listen to self improvement CDs. John C. Maxwell is her favorite. I'm not nearly the student of advanced knowledge which explains her three advanced degrees to my one. Often on long road trips, Deb will insert a CD and say, "I want you to hear this because I thought it was great". A good radio station or miles of quiet reflection are more my preference but I mostly submit to her enthusiasm for knowledge. On one particular trip, she plops in Gary Chapman's CD book called "The Five Love Languages". Gary's premise is that everyone responds to a particular love language. In other words, each person has a particular preference in how they feel love from another person. The core love languages include: personal touch, quality time, words of affirmation, acts of service, receiving gifts. As it turns out, I feel most loved when Deb spends quality time with me and she feels love most when I perform acts of service for her.

I got to thinking, what is God's love language? Is it when I give him a gift, spend quality time, offer words of affirmation, perform an act of service, or through personal touch. As I thought about how to let God know that I truly love him, these words came to mind: "*The King will reply, Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me*". Matthew 25: 37-40.

That was my answer! God feels my love most when I perform acts of service to others. When I love others, I am loving God. Sounds simple but discipleship is never as simple as it seems. If loving others is as easy as loving good people like Charlie Goodgame, then I'm all in. The reality is that loving others is not always easy. The guy in the check-out line at Lowe's who is straddling two cashier lines so that he can pick the first open spot is not easy to love in my book nor is the person who's value system is the exact opposite of my own. So how do we love others when it can be so difficult? I've been trying to make a concerted effort to find the good in people, to understand their place in this world, and to remind myself that they are just as important to God as me. By doing this, I am more able to frame my perspective of them so that I love them, not necessarily what they do. God loves me unconditionally, so why should I make my love of others conditional. I think this is our "Highest Calling" at Ridgedale Baptist Church. Corporately, we are to love others as a demonstration of our love for God.

Oh, God just reminded me that love is not a passive thing- I've got to demonstrate it. One way is to reach out to others, embrace them as they are, and invite them to fellowship with us. When I do this, not only do other's feel my love, so does God. That part is simple.

-Deb & David Bailey

JUST ONE SMALL SEED

³⁵ “Do you not say, ‘Four months more and then the harvest?’ I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. ³⁶ Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. ³⁷ Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. ³⁸ I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.” **John 4:35-38 (NIV)**

While having dinner with a co-worker on a business trip, I mentioned during the conversation that I was reading a book titled “Purpose Driven Life”. This was during the period our church was focusing on this particular book. There didn’t seem to be much interest in the subject, so about all I said was that I thought it was one of the best books I had read in a long time.

The next week he went to a book store to buy a gift for his girlfriend (soon to be wife). When he entered the bookstore, a table of books caught his eye. It was a display for “Purpose Driven Life”. Having recently heard something of this book (a mention at the dinner), and then seeing the display, he purchased a copy. As soon as his girlfriend read “It’s not about you” on the first page she was hooked. She quickly read the entire book. In fact they took turns reading it to each other.

She grew up in a dysfunctional home and as is often the case, she bore many emotional scars, debilitating depression being one. After reading “Purpose Driven Life”, the Holy Spirit spoke, and she fell to her knees, alone in the middle of a field, and gave her life to the Lord.

Since that event, she has not suffered from the once chronic depression. Not once. After getting saved she and her husband have been on a mission of helping the poor and not only taking children from the rough parts of town to church on a regular basis, not only making sure they are fed, not only making sure they have the basics like shoes and school supplies, but making sure that they know the Lord.

This once emotionally damaged person, in a lifelong downward spiral that was almost guaranteed to have a very unhappy ending, has turned into a witnessing machine. In fact, because of her past, she is well prepared to reach people that most of us raised in mainstream, middle class, “go to church 3 times a week” America will never encounter. We feel uncomfortable getting close to the down trodden, where this new Christian goes out of her way to help them on a one-on-one basis. She is doing Christianity’s “heavy lifting”. She has also discovered that she has an incredible gift of communicating with children. Children are continuously drawn to her, and she, at the appropriate time, tells them about Jesus.

All of this started by a brief mention of a book. Isn’t it wonderful what kind of harvest God can produce from one small seed?

-Greg & Terri Renegar

DO IT FOR ME

I grew up poor and my family didn’t have what a lot of my friends had as far as a house and new cars and our clothes weren’t very nice. We didn’t have a washer or dryer in our house and I remember going to the laundry mat to do our clothes every Saturday. It was a chore because we basically had to haul every piece of cloth in our house down there. We had all of our sheets and all of our clothes and all of our towels. We did it on Saturdays because Mama wanted us to be clean on Sundays for church. It might sound cliché but we didn’t always get baths every day, but we did on Saturday. We were all clean and slept in clean beds and went to church in clean clothes.

On Sunday mornings we got lots of hugs from the ladies at church and it meant more than they knew because throughout the week as our outfits got dirtier and we got a little sweatier we certainly didn’t get as many hugs.

This makes me think of how I treat people now and how we treat people as a church. I can’t help but think of Matthew 25 when Jesus is telling the parable of the sheep and goats and he says in verse 25, “*The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’*”

I hope I embrace everyone in the way that pleases the King and I hope that we as a church embrace all in a way that pleases the King.

-Anonymous