FORGING ETERNAL FRIENDSHIPS
THROUGH DAILY PRAYER

WRITTEN BY CLERGY AND LAY LEADERS OF
THE SOUTH CAROLINA CONFERENCE
Praying
for 5

Forging Eternal Friendships through Daily Prayer

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Written by clergy and lay leaders of the South Georgia Conference
Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart.
- Colossians 4:2
Dedication

To the honor and memory of G. Ross Freeman.

There are certain times when something happens words are inadequate to describe. We know it was special - everyone in the room senses it, but none of us can really fully articulate what happened. We say things like, “the magic happened”, “the room lifted and The Spirit fell”, “It was palatable,” “You could feel the energy shift and the momentum build.” When we wander into the will of God and His breath fills our souls, we know it, but just can’t fully explain it.

Something similar happened in the early 80’s when a group of United Methodists from the Southeastern Jurisdiction gathered at Lake Junaluska. The Spirit blew and the people caught a vision: a huge glorious vision of a million Methodists praying. Out of those gatherings, G. Ross Freeman from South Georgia, edited a book of daily devotions designed to be a practical tool for that vision to become a reality.

God has blown a fresh breath into our dry bones and has given us a renewed vision of a daily devotional for South Georgia entitled: Praying for 5. This simple and short practical tool provides a pathway to enable us to align our efforts in praying for our friends to come to know and follow Jesus.

May the faithful lives and fervent prayers of all the saints who have gone before us, like Ross Freeman, help us become pillars of prayer that support the presence of God in the lives of our friends.
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How to Find Five Friends

To me, Shelly just seemed like another young lady in my wife’s fitness class, but Kim, my wife, saw so much more. Before long, Shelly was having Thanksgiving dinner with my family and the next thing you know we were double-dating with her and the man who eventually became her husband. As we hung out and became close friends, we eventually saw her come to know Jesus Christ as her Savior. Several years later Shelly helped us plant a new church because she said, “I want my friends to come to know Jesus like I have.”

It’s as if Kim can see into people’s souls - somehow she is able to sense when people are receptive to God’s grace. When asked, she says she just sees it, but I think there might be more to it than that. Here are a few tips I have learned from watching her:

1. **Pay attention to the people around you.** Are new people entering your circle of influence? Is there anyone who you are suddenly “accidentally” bumping into more often? Every day God is bringing people into contact with you for a purpose. Start looking for who those people might be.

2. **Notice who is paying attention to you.** You interact with tons of people each day but occasionally you connect with one. You see them listening when you speak. They look you in the eye when you have a conversation. They respond to your questions and may even ask you a question in return. They may even reach out and shake your hand.
3. **Listen to their life.** Do their words or actions suggest they might be seeking something? They may not know what, but they seem to sense that something is missing. You may see them looking at you with an odd stare, suggesting they just can’t quite figure you out. They clearly enjoy being with you but can’t really figure out what it is that makes your life different.

4. **Hang out with them.** Spend time with them. Invite them to join you when you’re doing something you enjoy. Grab coffee. Eat lunch. Go shopping. Work out together. If they agree to go with you, that is a BIG step!

5. **Ask God to show you 5 people** in your life who He wants you to befriend. Write their names below. If you can’t identify five people right now, write the names of the people God has revealed to you and ask Him to show you a few more!

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_____________  ________________

_____________

It really is that simple to get started!
How to Have Meaningful Conversations with your Friends

What is your favorite TV show? Take a moment to get it fixed in your head. Picture a couple of the key characters and call to mind the basic story line. Have you ever had a conversation with someone else about that show? Have you recommended the show to other people? Or have you invited them over to watch it with you? Think for a moment. Was it difficult to talk to them about your show? Were you afraid to let your friend know you enjoyed the show? Why not?

Having conversations with our five new friends really isn’t hard - making these conversations “meaningful” is the tricky part. Meaningful conversations are about things that really matter; connections and interactions that impact and shape you both as individuals and as friends.

So here are a few helpful tips about “meaningful conversations” to help take your interactions to a deeper level.

1. **Don’t underestimate “small talk.”** During the formative stages of a relationship it is significant and meaningful to talk about things that might not be particularly personal or deep. Value the entry level conversations and pay attention to what your friend is saying. Remember that time spent together is important and that alone makes the conversation meaningful.

2. **Give yourself time.** Strength and trust are developed as you continue to spend time together. As you begin to
discuss topics that are more personal remember those conversations require more time. Set aside enough time to be fully present for these interactions.

3. **Friendships require attention.** You’ll be surprised at how much more your friends will respond when they know you are listening. Here is the interesting thing though; paying attention is more of an attitude than an action. People often find it MUCH easier to have meaningful conversations while they are doing something else. That means you don’t have to sit in the parlor and look into each other’s eyes while sipping tea to share your soul. Many of my most meaningful conversations have happened in the gym or even while riding down the road.

4. **The facts don’t matter.** Meaningful conversations are far less about facts than they are about the feelings behind the facts. Meaningful conversations are about hopes, dreams, fears and passion. They are about what you long for and what you miss. They are about why things are the way they are or why we do the things we do. Listen past the facts to discover the heart of the matter.

5. **You have nothing to lose!** Sometimes people are afraid to move the conversation beyond surface talk to something that really matters because they are afraid of losing the relationship. Think about it for a minute - if there is no meaningful interaction occurring in a long-time relationship and no hope any will develop, is there really anything to lose?

    **It is really worth the effort!**
How to Invite Your Friends to Hear the Story

Jamie works at the paper mill and drives race cars on the weekend. A friend from work invited him to come to a “Party at the Pond” one Saturday. To Jamie it was just a party at the pond where his kids could play and he and his wife could kick back and have some fun. For our church, the party was a chance to get to meet people like Jamie and his family. We laughed and joked at the party and it soon became clear Jamie didn’t hang out around church people much. He did, however, enjoy hanging out with us. He didn’t realize the “Party at the Pond” was a church event until Darrin invited him to church the next day. And guess who he met there? Jesus!

You probably can’t remember or perhaps have never been out of the church long enough to know how hard it is for a new person to come to church for the first time. Church people are scary! Most new people are not going to come unless they are invited by a friend. You hold the key to a great blessing for your unchurched friends but they are most likely not going to receive it unless you invite them.

So here are some helpful ways to invite your friends to church:

1. **Go to a good church.** If you are going to a church you really love then it shouldn’t be hard to invite your friends to come with you. If you don’t feel good about inviting your friends to your church, you have two options. One, help your church become a church where you feel great about bringing your new friends. Two, if your church
refuses to change, find another church. As a faithful follower of Jesus, not inviting your friends to plug into a body of believers is not really an option.

2. **Generate momentum for the conversation.** Don’t go overboard, but start communicating on social media about your church involvement. Post an Instagram shot of you with someone at worship and simply say “Had a great time together today at …..” Or put a post on your Facebook page with a comment about how the pastor’s talk this week helped you in a relevant way.

3. **Be prepared with conversation starters and responses.** The next time you see your friend, they will probably ask about your weekend or you might ask them about theirs. This conversation might normally go something like this, “So how was your weekend, Bob?” And you reply, “Same old thing. Yard work and chores.” This week when asked about your weekend try saying something a little different, “For the most part it was the same old routine, but I really had a great time at church on Sunday.” Or “It really was great. I got to hang out with some awesome people yesterday.” Then when they ask, “Really, where?” You have the opportunity to respond with, “Believe it or not… at church!” That’s it. You don’t have to do any more than that. But, be ready, because one of these days one of your friends is going to pass you in the break room and ask, “Got big plans for the weekend?”

4. **Don’t ignore their request.** By this time you will have been praying for your friend for quite some time and
God has been working in their heart. They’re probably waiting for you to ask them to go to church with you. In fact, if you haven’t asked yet, they may start to think you don’t want them to come to church with you! Don’t ignore the signs of receptivity. If you are waiting for them to just come up and ask if they can go to church with you, that might take another 40 days of praying!

5. **Shrink the gap.** If your church does some fun relational things outside of the church, that is a perfect time to bring your new friend with you to meet some people. Help your friend make connections with other people who are followers of Jesus. Grab a couple of people from church and invite one of your new friends to go out for dinner with the group on Saturday night. Then just say, “Hey we’re all going to the 11:00 service tomorrow, go with us!”

    **Invite. Invite. Invite. Invite. Invite!**
How to Share Your Story with Your Friends

Brian’s life was changed when he encountered God through the faith story of some normal guys. He started hanging around them and saw that in some ways they were just like him…but he noticed something was different. His friends shared their stories with him and his life was changed.

Have you heard the Good News? There really is a God! He knows you. He loves you. He wants a relationship with you. Many of you may be saying “Yeah I got it.” Well, great! Because once you’ve “Got the Good News” you have something good to say. God wants you to be willing to share your story with others.

GET IT – GOT IT – GIVE IT!

It can seem pretty scary, but once you understand how to do it you discover it is really pretty simple. Just complete these sentences within the context of your conversations:

1. Before I meet God my life was…..
2. I began to realize something was missing when…..
3. I discovered I was missing a relationship with God and started developing that relationship by…..
4. Since I started following Jesus my life …

You don’t have to have all the answers. In fact, it’s good to admit you don’t! Just share what God has done in your life. Don’t make it sound super spiritual or use fancy words. Just tell your friend about your other friend, Jesus.

Your story is more powerful than you imagine!
How to Pray for Your Friends

Praying can be hard so it might help to have a structure to guide your prayer life. Others may find a planned format too restrictive and prefer a more unstructured approach. Whatever your preference, the only wrong way to pray is not to pray. So here are some potential tips to help you pray for your friends:

1. **Schedule it.** Select a time and place to pray and put it on your schedule. This is particularly important at the beginning of this process. The regular routine and familiar atmosphere will help you move more quickly into a prayerful mindset.

2. **Prepare for it.** Put this book and anything else you might need at your prayer place. Some good supplies to have on hand: a Bible, a pen or highlighter, a prayer journal, or a note card with your friends’ name on it. And if your prayer time is first thing in the morning, you may also like to add a cup of coffee!

3. **Just do it.** Remember the only way you can mess up is not to do it, so just go for it! Simply sit back and let the prayer book guide your thoughts and prayers. Spend a few moments each day listening to what God might reveal to you about His love for you and your friends.

4. **Offer Grace.** We often think about offering grace to others or whether or not others are offering grace to us, but it’s really important to remember to give ourselves grace as well. At times you will oversleep. You may have to work late. Things will happen and you may miss your
allotted prayer time. Consider this- you occasionally may miss meals but that doesn’t mean you stop eating forever! Carve out 15 minutes later in the day or catch up tomorrow.

5. **Start now.** No, really. Do it now. Put your prayer time on your schedule and get up and stock the supplies you’ll need at your “holy place.” It may not seem like it is holier than any other place right now, but I bet you’ll see it in a new way in 40 days!

   **Let’s get started!**
Help me show grace because I have been shown grace.

Day 1: Saved by Grace

Ephesians 2:8 “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God….“ (ESV)

Twice in the space of three verses the Apostle Paul repeats the phrase “by grace you have been saved.” How important those words are! Grace is God’s unmerited kindness, yet Paul knows one of the biggest problems we have is accepting God’s acceptance of us. So we keep reminding ourselves of this great truth “by grace you have been saved.”

As a young child I went into a neighbor’s garden and pulled up his tomato plants. Another neighbor saw what happened and told on me. That night the gardener called my grandmother and threatened to notify the police if I did not replant the garden immediately. My grandmother would not let me go; instead, she went in my place and restored what I had destroyed. The grace that my grandmother showed me grows more powerful with every passing year. I was saved by her grace that night.

Dear Father in Heaven, help me remember anew the grace you have shown to me. As a result of the memory of my own grace stories, help me remember to show grace to others because I have been shown grace. Amen.

- Bishop Lawson Bryan, Macon
Help me show grace because I have been shown grace.

Day 2: Grace upon Grace

John 1:16, “And from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” (ESV)

Oh, how beautiful and amazing is God’s grace! Those who have been saved can testify to its limitlessness and power to cover every sin. It isn’t just a one-time gift to be received, it’s an ongoing, bottomless well that never runs dry. God doesn’t just offer us grace, but lavishes us with grace upon grace. In the same way, we’re called to extend grace to those around us. Not just when it’s convenient or serves our purposes. And not just when we have the emotional energy or feel they’ve earned it. We are to offer grace to others in the same way we have received it – grace upon grace. Unconditionally, radically, and without bounds, in situations where we see no gain or benefit for ourselves and in circumstances when others have done nothing to deserve it; because that is the way God gives grace to us... grace upon grace.

Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for your gift of amazing grace. Help me continue to be awe-struck by the gift of the undeserved favor you have shown. I pray my friends will be touched by Your boundless grace. Provide me with the opportunity to extend your grace to them so they can experience a glimpse of your love through me. Amen.

- Anne Bosarge, Brunswick
Help me show grace because I have been shown grace.

Day 3: Just Love Them

I John 4:19, "We love because he first loved us." (NIV)

As I opened my Bible to ponder this scripture, my eyes were drawn to a bookmark that’s been in my Bible for 30 years. The Ten Commandments are printed on one side and the name and address of George Hicks are scribbled on the other. The irony of this strikes me. George was a camper one year in my cabin at Epworth by the Sea. He had no interest in following rules. He was a holy terror, minus the holy. On the last night of camp, I found George crying in the bathroom after worship. I prayed with him, and he accepted Christ, right there in the bathroom.

All I did was love him that week and respond when he was ready to receive Christ. Why did I love him? It wasn’t because he was so good. He wasn’t. It wasn’t because I was so good. I wasn’t. I loved him because God loved me first, when I didn’t deserve it. Our friends don’t need our judgment. They need us to love them, as they are. We can do that, not because we are so good, but simply because God loved us, as we were and as we are now, still in need of grace.

God, help me resist the temptation to try to fix my friends. Instead, help me show them love and acceptance as they are, because you first loved and accepted me. Amen.

-Jeff Hanson, Macon
Help me show grace because I have been shown grace.

Day 4: Grace, Grace, Marvelous Grace

Romans 3:23-24, “All of us have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory. But God treats us much better than we deserve, and because of Christ Jesus, he freely accepts us and sets us free from our sins. (CEV)

God’s grace is His unmerited and unearned favor, kindness, mercy, and forgiveness. God’s greatest demonstration of grace was through the gift of His Son, Jesus, who gave us a roadmap for how we are to live our lives. In His time on earth, Jesus taught us many things: to love one another, be humble, care for one another (especially the least of these), serve one another, forgive those who have hurt us, and so much more. For me, some of these commands are difficult to follow and I fall short of living out Jesus’ teachings. When I admit I have fallen short of doing the things He has called me to do and seek His forgiveness, I know time and again He showers me with His grace. Through His forgiveness, my sins are washed away and my record is wiped clean! To God be the glory! Thank you, Lord for your marvelous grace!

Gracious and loving Lord, grant that my friends might experience your marvelous grace today. May they feel your presence in their lives in a real and mighty way. Amen.

- Bill Hatcher, Statesboro
Help me show grace because I have been shown grace.

Day 5: The Right Time and the Right Place

I Corinthians 15:10, “But because God was so gracious, so very generous, here I am. And I’m not about to let his grace go to waste. Haven’t I worked hard trying to do more than any of the others? Even then, my work didn’t amount to all that much. It was God giving me the work to do, God giving me the energy to do it.” (MSG)

God has placed each of us in our current location at this time because He has a job for us. He has called us and equipped every one of us. He gives us the strength and the energy to complete the task at hand. We must take on the job to which we have been called and work in His grace. Think about the five friends for whom you have been praying. God’s grace has brought you together. You are called to show them the same grace God has shown you. Even if the job seems too hard, overwhelming, or impossible, God’s grace is bigger than our needs and is more than sufficient for our friends’ needs too. God never wastes his grace on anyone. Where you are and what you are doing matters to God.

Gracious Father, As I pray for my five friends, give me the strength I need to show them grace as generously as you have shown me. Help me to know I am in the right place at the right time to do your work. Amen.

- Jodie Lamon, Rincon
Help me become the person I was created to be.

Day 6: His Good Pleasure

Philippians 2:12-13, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” (NKJV)

Isn’t it great to know the God who created us, whom we serve, doesn’t leave us to flounder in this life? All we need to be who we were created to be is supplied by the very One who created us. That truth is a wonderful comfort in my journey to live as a child of the Most High God! Our aim always falls short, but it is God who works to bring about our transformation. It is God who knows who we can be. It is for His good pleasure, not ours, that God works to help us become that person. Paul urges us to work out our own salvation, not someone else’s, in fear and trembling - in reverent awe to the greatness of God. That is His good pleasure.

Loving God, thank you for the love and mercy I’ve received through Christ Jesus. Enable me to have the same mind as Christ - to be humble, obedient, and other-centered. Open my eyes to the opportunities you provide for me to share you with my friends so they too can feel your love. Amen

-Paula Lewis, Hawkinsville
Help me become the person I was created to be.

Day 7: Transformed Into His Likeness

2 Corinthians 3:18, “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” (NIV)

“Stop doing that! You know your face will freeze that way if you keep making that face!” If my mom said that to my brother and me one time, she said it a thousand times - usually when we were fighting over some trivial toy or arguing some irrelevant point. We were fairly sure her threats were unsubstantiated but always complied, just in case. In our teenage years, I remember the constant reminders from her to “sit up straight" and " smile when you meet someone new, “You'll never have a second chance to make a first impression.” Sage advice for sure. As I reflect upon this scripture, I wonder to myself, “What do others ‘see’ in me? What do my co-workers see? What do my friends see? What do my wife, my children, and my grandchildren see?” I hope they see grace. I hope they see kindness. I hope they see love.

Lord, I am grateful for your grace, your kindness and your love. I pray that through my transformation, I become a reflection of your glory and a witness to others so they too may be transformed into your likeness.

- Jeff Barker, St. Marys
Help me become the person I was created to be.

Day 8: Begin with the End in Mind

Romans 12:2, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will.” (NIV)

In Stephen Covey’s book, “7 Habits of Highly Effective People,” the second habit is to begin with the end in mind. Isn’t this the beauty of God’s sanctifying grace? He sees His plan, His purpose and our potential. What a powerful cause and effect Paul shares in this scripture. Through the renewing of our minds, we will be transformed and be able to test and approve God’s will for our lives. Just how do we go about renewing our mind? I think Philippians 4:8-9 (MSG) says it best, “Summing it all up, friends, I’d say you’ll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. Put into practice what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realized. Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies.”

Heavenly Father- Thank you for moving us on to perfection! Help us recognize your sanctifying grace at work in us as we strive to become all you have created us to be! Amen.

- Allison Lindsey, Douglas
Help me become the person I was created to be.

Day 9: God’s Still Working on Me

Philippians 1:6, "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (NIV)

The song "He Who Began a Good Work in You" by Steve Green is a beautiful song based on this scripture. It reminds us that God's grace was already working in our lives when we began our faith journey. As we go through difficult times of battling with sin, fighting temptation, and longing to be more like Jesus, let's remember God's promise to us. He started this work in us, and He is continuing to work in us until that work is completed.

When we feel discouraged God's answer is "I'm not done with you yet." We're not finished - God is always with us, watching over us, and helping us become the person we were created to be. May He be faithful to complete His work in us.

Our Father, Thank you for your good work in our lives. Help us remember your grace as we go through each day. May we understand you are not finished with us yet. Keep us on the road you have planned for and help us become the people we were created to be. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

- Gloria Morgan, Dublin
Help me become the person I was created to be.

Day 10: God Can Change You

1 John 1:9, “But if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from everything we've done wrong.” (CEB)

God's ability to accomplish "behavior modification” in our lives is amazing! In my own life His mercy and grace helped remove an undesirable habit. That allowed me to be more effective in service to Him. Excessive daily use of alcohol was a wrong turn I made in my life. Eventually I realized I could not serve two masters at the same time - one of those was creating family problems and encouraging unacceptable behavior. In 2001, I asked God to take away my desire to use alcohol. This appetite has now ceased to exist and alcohol is no longer a part of my life. This change has enabled me to be a better husband, father, and servant to the Lord. As a result of living a life free of alcohol, I have discovered God’s call on my life and am using my gifts to serve Him and to serve others. To paraphrase Joyce Meyer, "I'm not the man I want to be, but thank God I'm not the man I used to be!” I'm on my way and that's OK! Praise God!

Holy Father, thank you for your mercy and grace that produce changed lives and the desire to serve you more. Work in the lives of my friends and help them discover the freedom I have found in You.

- Carl Childs, Jr., Fort Gaines
Help my friends know there are people who care.

Day 11: People Matter to God

Philippians 2:4, "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." (ESV)

"People Matter to God." This simple but profound idea shapes the life of our community. It has become one of our church's core values. It influences how we view one another, how we think about hospitality, and how we live God's mission in the world. If other people matter to God just as much as we do, then we should treat them like they matter. We should welcome them as if they are Christ himself. Whether we are feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, welcoming the stranger, or sharing in Christian community, we communicate to others they are valuable to God and to us. Paul teaches the Philippian church to not only consider others’ needs but also to put those needs ahead of their own. The model we are to follow is Jesus, who humbled himself for our sake. Miraculously, when we take the focus off of ourselves and place it on others, we discover a unity that encourages us to become more like Christ. At the heart of Christian community is the sense of holy belonging, that God is among us, loving, redeeming and transforming us by his grace.

God, help me see others the way you see them, as people who matter. May the way I treat others reflect a desire to both be like Christ and welcome others as if they are Christ. Amen.

- Andy Lamon, Rincon
Help my friends know there are people who care.

Day 12: No Judgment, Just Jesus

Ephesians 4:2, “Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love.” (NLT)

The Serenity Prayer starts with “God grant me the serenity to accept things I cannot change.” (Niebuhr, R.) Have you ever really considered what that means? We are not called to change others in order to make them more like us. The Lord made all of us different for a reason. How boring it would be for everyone we come in contact with to be exactly like me or like you! Being a Christian means refraining from passing judgment on people because Jesus accepts each of us just as we are. Jesus told us to love our neighbors - all neighbors, not just the ones with whom we have something in common. Don't allow your personal preferences to steer others away from Christ. When dealing with each other’s differences, how good is it to know that despite all our imperfections, God still loves us fully and completely!

God, it’s hard to accept people who are different. Grant us a curiosity of others so we may understand their differences. Grant me courage to enter into their lives, so they can see You in me. Please grant me the serenity to accept things I cannot change because I know that You can. Amen.

- Nicole Walker, Macon
Help my friends know there are people who care.

Day 13: Love One Another

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

Can anyone imagine the peace and wholeness our fragile world would experience if we followed this commandment? Is it really that difficult to love someone just because they are a child of God? It’s easy to love those who mean a lot to us, but unfortunately as human beings, we do not always demonstrate the agape love that is supposed to identify us as a disciple. It’s difficult to love someone who mistreats us, who demeans us, ignores us, or causes us to experience hurt. But this commandment is crystal clear: "Love one another; even as I have loved you.” Sometimes we are not very lovable, so that is where we must start in order to be able to love others as He commanded us to do. Each day we must endeavor to demonstrate that unconditional love by our words and actions.

Dear Lord, Our prayer is that by our words and deeds we demonstrate to those around us we truly are disciples of Jesus Christ and that we follow His commandment to love one another as He loves us. Amen.

-Joel Willis, St. Simons Island

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Help my friends know there are people who care.

Day 14: Friendship: A Call to Humility

1 John 3:16, “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.” (ESV)

On the night of His arrest Jesus himself said, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” The very next day He proceeded to do exactly that! God humbled Himself to the point of death on a cross because He loves His friends; because He loves you. Think for a moment about what unmerited love He has shown us to even allow us to be friends of God! And how much more glorious is that friendship when you understand what it cost Him?

Christ’s love for his friends is unconditional, and so it should be with our friends. Christ showing us this love required great humility, and so it should be with us. If you want to show your friends you love them, humble yourself. Extend grace to them. Consider their needs above your own. Serve and encourage them when they do not deserve it. Quite literally, live in a way that shows them you would die for them.

Lord, humble our hearts to see our immense need of your grace, even within something as fundamental as our friendships. Help us take the initiative to love our friends in a more Christ-like way. We call upon your name, Jesus, trusting that You will only ever further conform us and our friends into your likeness. Amen.

-John Roquemore, Milledgeville
Help my friends know there are people who care.

Day 15: Never Actually Alone in the Wilderness

Luke 15:20, "So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him." (NIV)

All my life I've been surrounded by a support system of people who cared for me. But this last season for me has been one of wandering in the wilderness, away from my support group and at times feeling lost and alone. Looking back, this season of wandering was good for me. After all, how strong are ideas and beliefs if you never question them? Test them? Struggle with them?

I met with some of my support people the other day, and shared my struggles and feelings of loneliness with them. As I shared, I realized I was never on my own—my support people were in my corner the entire time—rooting for me and praying on my behalf. What started as a season filled with wandering and questions has turned into a deeper understanding of myself, God, and my support people who are with me even when I can't feel them. Like the prodigal son, I returned home to a new and better understanding of who my Father is.

Lord, I pray in the midst of our wandering You will surround us with a support system to help us sense Your presence in a real and tangible way. Let us become more like you. Amen.

-Summer Hanson, Brunswick
Help my friends know God is near

Day 16: Come to Me

James 4:8a, “Come near to God and he will come near to you.” (NIV)

“I feel so alone—even in the midst of a crowd,” I wrote in my journal. I had spent the evening with friends who loved and supported me through the surprising loss of my husband. We had done life together for years, they had walked with us through my husband’s illness, and now were helping me find my “new normal.” And yet, sitting around the fire, my loss suddenly became palpable. We all felt it.

At home, I pulled out my journal and opened my Bible that was full of sticky-notes marking reminders of my Father’s love and care - reminders I was never alone. In those moments with my journal, Bible, and heart wide open, God helped me recall the ways He had been with us through this journey, day by day, moment by moment. Peace and comfort washed over me as I heard Him say, “I’m here, just as I always have been. Come to me.”

Dear Father, You have promised to never leave us or forsake us. We are so grateful You are always near and we can live in Your Presence. We thank You for Your Word that reminds us of Your love. Give us wisdom and faith to draw close and walk with You daily, no matter what our feelings are. In You we will find our strength. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

- Claudia Schneider, Brunswick
Help my friends know God is near.

Day 17: And Remember…

Matthew 28:20, “and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (NRSV)

Do you find it difficult to say goodbye? I know I sometimes do! I hug and kiss my children each day as they leave for school and tell them the things I most want them to remember throughout their day, “Be kind; do your best work; have fun; I love you.”

As Jesus was leaving his disciples, He had to decide what He most wanted them to remember in His absence. He chose to leave them with a “goodbye” message of comfort and reassurance, “and remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” What a comfort it is to know that nothing can separate us from God’s love and that He is with us throughout the day. There is not a circumstance in our life where He is unavailable to guide us. How reassuring to feel the presence of God with us throughout our lives! We are called to share this good news with our friends, so they too can discover that God is always near.

Dear Father, You are an amazing God! Help me to feel your presence and to seek out and act upon opportunities to show my friends that You are indeed always near. Amen.

- Meredyth Earnest, Bainbridge
Help my friends know God is near.

Day 18: Philip “found” Nathanael!

John 1:45, “Philip found Nathanael and told him, ‘We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’” (NIV)

Who was your “Philip”? Who is the person who introduced you to Jesus? It could be a parent, pastor, friends, teacher, co-worker, or someone else. Maybe, like Philip, their message to you was explicit and direct or perhaps their message was more subtle. It could have been a kind word, an expression of praise, an “Amen” in conversation, a word of thankfulness to God, an expression of empathy, or even just quiet attentiveness. You heard it. You felt it. It made a difference. It was a whisper of Christ’s Love expressed to you… for you. It was personal. Or maybe it was simply in the example of how they lived their life. Jesus “found” Philip in verse 43, and Philip “found” Nathanael in verse 45. We are called to “find” our friends right where they are. How will you express the Good News to the “Nathanael” in your life? How will you express the Good News so they may find Jesus too?

Heavenly Father, help me be mindful of my friends so I may be more compassionate and reflect your love to them. I lift up my friends, that you will be at the forefront of their minds, and that I may reflect your love to them. Amen.

- Jay Jordan, St. Mary’s
Help my friends know God is near.

Day 19: You Gotta Have Faith

Psalm 34:18, “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” (NIV)

Mark 10:48, “Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” (NIV)

In scripture it’s clear the Lord is caring and compassionate. Over and over in scripture we see His provision in the lives of so many people. He says to take His yoke; be not dismayed; He will give us rest; His power is made perfect in our weakness; He is close to the broken hearted. We see in the second passage, we are called to shift our focus toward the Lord in these broken seasons of our lives. We are only made whole through our relationship with Him. The blind man, who had discovered this compassion first hand, was not concerned with what those around him were saying. Instead, he had faith in the one true God. He was focused on the Savior. Once we realize that faith in God and in His provision is the only way to find healing and comfort, then we must go after Him and pursue Him fully. We must ignore what those around us say and trust in the fact that He is near.

God, I acknowledge you are Lord of all creation. I believe you care for me. Give me the strength to have faith in you in tough times. Help me to see that you are near.

- Sam Martin, Pooler
Help my friends know God is near.

Day 20: Do you Know How Close He Is?

John 1:14, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (NIV)

In a local Salon, I overhead the stylists answering phone calls from customers who had gone to the previous location, read the "moved" sign and were searching for the new location. With each call, the stylists would throw out new landmarks, "Do you know where Angel's Café is? Orlando's Mexican Restaurant? Doctor's Lab? Grandy's?" Several times, after the stylist went through the same spiel, she said incredulously, "Are you in the parking lot?" The clients navigated the way, searched for the destination, but didn't know they were so near their desired location.

Most of us are searching for something (For me, it's usually the sunglasses that are right on top of my head). Is it possible you are searching for something that is already here? He is near enough to sit in the passenger seat and guide us, and even to sit in the driver's seat if we allow him to "take the wheel."

Father God, Thank you for drawing near to us. Help me look closely, listen intently, and to be still long enough to see how near you are. Travel with me, guide the way, and provide opportunities for me to invite others into the vehicle, so they may experience your nearness. In your name we pray, Amen.

- Elisabeth Ruff, Jekyll Island
Help my friends know God is for them.

Day 21: Who Can Be Against Us?

Romans 8:31, “What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?” (KJV)

I love watching college football's historic Army/Navy rivalry. Army entered last week's game determined to break Navy's 14-year winning streak. With Navy four points behind, the camera panned to Navy's kneeling Chaplain, fervently praying the Rosary. Army at last triumphed, ending the painful losing streak. As he repeated the Rosary, I wondered what he prayed as Navy faced the inevitable loss. I hope he thanked God for the joy every fan shared just watching and participating in such an exciting, historic game. Even when the world tells us we are losing, it is our faith in God that allows us to see and experience the deep, rich, victorious story of the Kingdom of God. His Kingdom is ever-present, always transforming, and forever revealing that which is truly joyful and meaningful in life. With God, life isn't defined by the numbers the world uses to declare winners and losers; life is defined by the beauty and grace God allows us to see and experience in the gift of His Kingdom!

Heavenly Father, though the world leads me to failure, it is you and you alone that brings hope and peace. Bless my friends with the knowledge of your eternal hope for a new and blessed day! Amen!

- Rick Lanford, Macon
Help my friends know God is for them.

Day 22: God is For Me

Psalm 56:9, “Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call. This I know, God is for me.” (ESV)

God is for me. What a wonderful truth! Through the good and bad, we can rest assured knowing the Lord has our best interest in mind. When life is overwhelming and we can’t seem to find any good in our situation, we can find peace in the hope of knowing the God of the universe is on our side. He sent his blameless Son to be humiliated, abused, and killed in order to save sinners like you and me. He made the ultimate sacrifice for us, proving He is for us for all eternity. So why do we doubt His presence through the day-to-day struggles?

Trust in the Lord through all life’s twists and turns. Circumstances are temporary; don’t let them blind you from God’s eternal truth. God has overcome sin and can turn our tragedies into something life giving!

Dear God, thank you for being for me both now and forever. Help me believe you are on my side, even when troubles strike and my faith in you wavers. Lord, I pray You would give me confidence in You despite my circumstances, and use that to show others You are for them as well. Amen.

- Sumner Carlton, Macon
Help my friends know God is for them.

Day 23: Deep Roots

Ephesians 4:17-18, “Then Christ will make His home in your hearts as you trust in Him. Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high and how deep His love is.” (NLT)

How amazing that God saves us and embraces us as His children! The roots He plants in our lives grow deep into our hearts and bless us with His strength and forgiveness. However, these gifts are not limited to us; we are tasked to spread the good news among our friends and family. This is the power we have to share the joy God has given us with the people around us.

As a 8th grade student, I am exposed every day to people who don’t know the Lord. This provides me with a great opportunity to share these blessings with my peers. In school, work, and daily life we all have the chance to change someone's life forever and help them know God is for them.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for blessing us with strength and forgiveness, and for giving us the opportunity to share these same blessings with the people around us. We ask for the courage to step out of our comfort zones and reach out to our friends who may not know You so we may spread Your name. Amen.

-Jacob Bosarge, Brunswick

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Help my friends know God is for them.

Day 24: A Constant Father

1 John 4:4 “Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” (ESV)

As children we relied on our parents to help us out in life. When we were hurting, we clung to our parents for support and comfort. We need to do this as adults in our relationship with our Heavenly Father as well. When we are in seasons of struggle or strife we tend to think God isn’t with us or is mad at us. This is far from the truth.

God is always for us and wants what is best for us. That doesn’t mean He will make our lives perfect and happy all the time. There will be hard times in life that will challenge and hurt us. The beauty of God is with us in the middle of all of it. He will be there through the suffering and the struggles. He wants us to rely on Him for strength and to heal us. Through it all, God is always for us.

Dear God, When I feel the world pushing against me and I have no place to stand, help me lean on you. Remind me you are for me and love me so. With you, Lord, anything is possible. Father, help me realize You are so much more than anything this world has to offer. Thank you for loving me and blessing me more than I even realize. Amen.

-Jacy Robertson, Brunswick
Help my friends know God is for them.

Day 25: Even Better – God is for Us

Lamentations 3:22, “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end.” (NRSV)

I stood in his carport as he battled the tears. His daughter had languished in a coma for months, and hope was hard to come by. "All I know," I said feebly, "is that God is with you." He shot back with the fiery rage of a grieving father, "Is that the best you've got, preacher?!" After nearly 26 years in ministry, I've come to believe despite what John Wesley said on his death bed, there may be something even better than knowing God is with us. I think we need to know God is actually for us. And so do our friends. After all, if God is with us but not for us, what comfort is that? Our friends need to know we have a God who is completely and thoroughly for us. Not a God who is out to get us, but a God who desires the best for us. A God who works relentlessly for our good, whether we know it or not. A God who delights in us. A God whose love for us is steadfast, whose mercies never end. Unbelievable? Maybe. But still true. God is for us.

Loving God, forgive us when we live like we believe you're out to get us. Help us trust your steadfast love and the new mercies you offer each day. Teach us how to show our friends the God who is for us, so they might let you love them. Amen.

- Lynn Meadows-White, Midland
Help my friends know forgiveness is possible.

Day 26: Good News: You Are Forgiven!

1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins to God, He can always be trusted to forgive us and take our sins away.” (CEV)

Some may wonder, "Is forgiveness possible for someone like me who has hurt so many people by my sin?" They may even think they are beyond forgiveness because of what they did. The good news Jesus brings is that you are already forgiven! God loves you while you are still a sinner. God loves you and is waiting for you to ask for forgiveness. He does not want to hurt you. God loves you! The sinful choices you have made have hurt you and God is eager to heal that hurt and restore you to a right relationship with Him and with those who have been hurt by your sin. Ask for forgiveness and accept healing God's love.

Loving Heavenly Father, help me to let my friends know how much you love them and how eager You are to forgive them and restore them to a right relationship with you. Help me love them as you love them - fully, deeply, and unconditionally. Amen.

- Dave Hanson, Brunswick
Help my friends know forgiveness is possible.

Day 27: Finding Forgiveness

Luke 5:20, “When Jesus saw their faith, he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.” (NIV)

What is the most important thing you could do for a friend? There is nothing greater than bringing them to Jesus! In Luke 5:17-26, we find the story of the paralytic man whose friends lowered him through the roof to get him to Jesus. Whose faith did Jesus see—the four friends’ or the paralytic’s? These men had to find a way to bring their friend to Jesus. How often do we give up on others when it becomes inconvenient or uncomfortable for us? The friends of the paralytic showed patience and persistence in bringing their friend to Jesus. They put aside what others might think of them in order to bring their friend to the Lord. They knew their friend had problems only Jesus could fix. We too have friends who need Jesus. Because we know Him, we must be the kind of friend who will overcome every obstacle in order to allow our friends the opportunity to also find His forgiveness.

Dear Loving Father, thank you for your gift of forgiveness. Help me never lose sight of your forgiveness in my own life. Give me opportunities to develop friendships that will lead others to You, so they too might find your forgiveness. Amen.

- Brian Roberson, Leesburg
Help my friends know forgiveness is possible.

Day 28: Overwhelmed or Overjoyed

John 8:10-11, “Jesus stood up and spoke to her. ‘Woman, where are they? Does no one condemn you?’ ‘No one, Master.’ ‘Neither do I,’ said Jesus. ‘Go on your way. From now on, don’t sin.’” (MSG)

Overwhelmed. That’s how I feel most days. The balancing act of life can be almost too much to bear. I live in a delicate dance of time where everything needs me and needs me equally. And that’s when I come face to face with my sin. When I’m down, I get kicked again with the gross reality that I’m not perfect, and my thoughts and actions are less than desirable and far from God’s. But then I remember Jesus’ words to a woman caught in adultery. He sees her in her lowest state, overwhelmed by her sin and surroundings. He sees her, and He lets her go. He takes her troubles, and He sets her free. Isn’t that how He is with us? He takes our trouble. He removes our burden. He lifts our spirit. He forgives. That’s what is possible when we see Jesus. That’s when we trade overwhelmed for overjoyed because I know He forgives.

Dear God, Help me know You will take my burdens when I look to You. I pray my friends will know You and know the forgiveness You share. Help me be one who is an example of Your forgiveness so others will know what You provide. Amen.

- Carter Akins, Brunswick
Help my friends know forgiveness is possible.

Day 29: Let it Go

Psalm 103:10-11, “He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear Him.” (NIV)

“Let it go, let it go.” If you have a child under the age of 10, you more than likely sang the words you just read. As a mom to a 3 year old Disney princess-in-training, the lyrics to the popular song from the movie “Frozen” play on repeat. Sure, it’s a catchy song, but if you listen carefully, you’ll notice it’s a song about forgiveness. Forgiveness can be a tough thing to ask for and a difficult thing to give. But the verse above reminds us we have nothing to fear in asking for forgiveness from Jesus. The Bible tells us His love for us is so high and so great, that He doesn’t treat us as we deserve. Instead, He forgives us and loves us regardless of our sin. He “lets it go”. And when we accept that love, He gives us the power to forgive others. When we choose to let go of hurt, we allow our hearts to be open in a holy way that is pleasing to Him. Is that an easy thing to do? Definitely not, but I am so thankful that Jesus’ love makes it possible.

Jesus, thank you for loving me even though I don’t deserve it. Forgive me for holding onto worldly things like anger, bitterness, and hurt. Help me forgive others and love them as you do. Amen.

- Paige Madden, Brunswick
Help my friends know forgiveness is possible.

Day 30: All Are Justified Freely Through Grace

Romans 3:24, “and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” (NIV)

One of the most often quoted passages of scripture is Romans 3:23, “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God”. I have found as a pastor it isn’t hard to convince people their lives are filled with bad decisions and self-destructive behaviors. When we realize God knows our hearts we have a tendency to despair. It’s sometimes hard to convince broken people they can experience grace. Thankfully, Paul doesn’t leave us wondering for long. The very next verse, Paul starts with “and all,” a completion of his first thought. Just as all have sinned, so all can be justified. Being justified simply means to be put in right standing with God through the grace offered us freely by Jesus. No person, soul, or circumstance is beyond the goodness and grace of our God. We have no need to despair because God’s grace is greater than all our sin.

Father, Thank you for the grace you have shown me. Help me to love and invest in the people you have placed in my life. Help me to point people to you in all I say and do. May I be a living demonstration of your grace to forgive.

- Matt Hearn, Pooler
Help my friends know they have a place where they belong.

Day 31: Belonging Before Believing

Ephesians 2:19, "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." (NKJV)

I wasn’t completely surprised when Ron showed up at my office. But I was surprised by what he said. “I like Harvest and I want to join but I have a question for you.” And then he said it, “How important is it that I become a Christian in order to join the church?” … and the question… just hung… in the air. I was a bit shocked, but when I recovered I chuckled a bit and said, “Well Ron, that’s kinda the whole thing man! So, it’s the most important thing in the world!” He enjoyed belonging. He just didn’t believe. I told him he was very welcome at Harvest. “But let’s hold off on the membership question,” I said. “I want you to be in heaven, not just have your name on a roll, and that takes a relationship with Jesus.” A few weeks later my phone rang and the person on the other end shouted, “I believe! I don’t know how it happened but I believe now.” Not long after that Ron was baptized and a few months later, he died. Ron belonged before he believed. I hope I have the opportunity to introduce you to Ron…when we all get home.

Lord, please help our belonging lead to believing and our believing lead to belonging. All in Jesus. Amen.

- Jim Cowart, Warner Robins
Help my friends know they have a place where they belong.

Day 32: Chosen to Love

1 John 3:1, “Look at how great a love the Father has given us that we should be called God's children. And we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it didn't know him.” (HCSB)

My wife and I have two very rambunctious boys. Every once in a while we get the question all parents dread, "Which one of us do you love most?" There seems to be something within each of us that wants to know where we stand in relationship to each other. So, how do you explain the concept of love to someone?

John explains God’s love in this way – God expressed His love for us by choosing each of us to be His children. In addition to each of our two boys, my wife and I have been part of a foster care ministry. One of the most rewarding parts of this ministry is to see the look on children's faces as they realize they are chosen! I once heard an adopted child say, "Being chosen means I am loved." The greatest gift we have received is being chosen as children of God. How do we model this love for others? By choosing to love others because we were first chosen. Loving others is one of the greatest ways we can demonstrate our love for God.

Lord, thank you for choosing to love me and calling me your own. Help me to love others the way that you love me. Encourage my friends and help them know they are loved and belong!

-Jarrod Middleton, Dublin
Day 33: That Person

Acts 2: 44-45, 47, “All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need…praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” (NIV)

In this day and age it’s easy to get wrapped up in the hustle and bustle of life. We get so focused on our “own” little worlds that we slowly lose sight of God’s “bigger” world. We fail to see His purpose for us and the opportunities He has provided. Think about the people in your life who need to know God. How will they come to know Him if they have never seen or experienced His love and mercy? Who will show them? You! You are that person! Imagine what the world would be like if we all stepped up to be “that person,” stepping out of our “own” world and wholeheartedly into God’s world, working together for His purpose and becoming the disciples He has called us to be!

Dear heavenly Father, I pray for all those in need of You, Lord, who need a place to belong. Help me not to get so wrapped up in my “own” world and lose focus of who you’ve place in my life. Help me to see the opportunities that You provide for us to show Your love to others. Help me be “that person.” Amen.

-Natascha Clark, Statesboro
Help my friends know they have a place where they belong.

Day 34: A Friend Like Jesus

Ephesians 4:16, “He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.” (NLT)

When I stop and think about friends who have been so dear to me over the years, one characteristic describes them all: invested. When someone is invested in anything, whether it’s a job, hobby, or relationship, they put time and effort into making it flourish. They work at it, no matter how weary they may be, and it ranks high on their list of priorities.

Paul reminds us in order for the body of Christ to fit together, two things must be present. The first is Jesus, and the second is unique contributions done by each part of the body. When I think about the body of Christ, I often think of the church, but I’ve realized our friendships are also representative of the body of Christ. True friends communicate with, pray for, and spend time with those closest to them. They are selfless, accountable, and encouraging, always showing grace and love. Let us not forget to be the friends we were called to be as the body of Christ.

Dear Jesus, Please help me to be intentional about the effort I put into my friendships. Mold me to be a friend that can be trusted and leaned on. Help me to be a friend modeled after You! Amen.

- Ashley Mills, Gray
Help my friends know they have a place where they belong.

Day 35: An Adopted Life

John 1:12, “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” (NIV)

Most Saturdays I look for an excuse to visit a shopping complex that includes a pet store that has animals up for adoption. Many of these animals, mostly dogs, have been discarded and they seem unlovable. But something happens when the cage is opened, a leash is attached to their collar, and they are lifted and placed in the arms of a person. Life returns via adoption—they belong! In a much larger cosmic sense, John’s gospel depicts what God does for humanity through adoption. In a world of darkness and brokenness, where people are discarded and yearn for identity, there is a light. Not just any light—the true light that is life itself. Into this world Jesus, the light, shines into every realm of darkness. He is light and life. Just because some fail to recognize this work of God doesn’t change the fact that the light shines. It shines because God desires it and it shines for all persons. But those who see it, behold it, long for it, and believe in it, are given the right to become children of God.

O God of Light, who shines and expels our darkness, thank you. Continue to shine until every person sees the depths of your love in Christ Jesus. Thank you for welcoming us into your family. Amen.

- Shane Green, Columbus
Help my friends and me keep growing in Christ.

Day 36: Into Their Homes, Into Their Lives

Acts 18:26, “Apollos began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.” (NIV)

We live in an instant access, status update world. Social media makes it seem as if relational transparency is the rule of law. But this is deceptive - the scene is often staged for the cameras. Social media can portray a world of wishful thinking. While posting the ideal, people are desperately drawing the curtains tight, keeping peering eyes from seeing into their darkness. In this passage, Apollos was a zealous new Christian who had mastered the basics of the faith. Friends noticed and invited Apollos into their home to explain the faith. Certainly Priscilla’s and Aquila’s hospitality of home and heart spurred Apollos to become one who welcomed many others to the kingdom of God. This passage challenges me to open my home and, by extension, open my life in an authentic way as I grow in Christ with my friends and family.

Gracious God, you sent your Son into our world and life. Send us, by the power of your Holy Spirit, into our community to invite others into a deeper life with you, so that together we may learn your ways more adequately.

- Baxter Hurley, Macon
Help my friends and me keep growing in Christ.

Day 37: Craving Jesus

1 Peter 2:2 "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation."

Babies crave milk. They have to have it and they have to have it multiple times a day. If they don't get it, they cry and wail until they do. However, they don't crave it just to crave it; they crave it because they need it to grow. As a mother offers her milk for her baby, God offers us "spiritual milk" for our growth. If we want to grow in our relationship with Christ, we must take what He is offering. When we spend time in His Word, our knowledge of God grows, and so does our love for Him. We must spend time in prayer, communicating to God that we desire for His will to be done in our lives. We are also called to be a part of a community that desires for us to become like Christ and holds us accountable in a grace-filled way. Friends, that is God's "milk" for us - but do we crave it? Do we crave to know Him more, to be in a deeper relationship with Him? The only way to grow in our faith is to long for it as a baby longs for milk.

Dear Lord, Thank you for giving me ways to know you more. Help me to continuously desire all you have to offer. I pray that my friends desire the same and long to know you more. Amen.

-Drew Childers, Valdosta
Help my friends and me keep growing in Christ.

Day 38: Shine for Jesus

1 John 2:6, “The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.” (NASB)

“Shine for Jesus!” I call this out to my two young children every day as they jump out of the car at school. Every day, I want them to always know that to us, that is the single most important thing. When they are kind, respectful, obedient, compassionate, and generous…they are shining for Jesus. Each day brings new challenges and opportunities, and every day we get to make the choice to be like Jesus. It’s not a one-time decision. How do we do this? By abiding in Him. The Lord wants our hearts, and so we need to evaluate our priorities. When we make time with the Lord a priority, we see evidence of Him in our lives – in the manner in which we walk. God is trustworthy and faithful, and His grace knows no bounds. Each new day is a fresh start. By having a daily quiet time, we grow in our relationship with our Creator. Surrendering to Him and allowing His love to flow through us can transform our lives and others’ as well.

Loving God, thank you for being my Light and leading me through every circumstance of life. Help me to reflect that light to others. Increase my faith in You. Enable me to surrender each part of my day to You, so You can accomplish great things through me. Amen.

- Lindsey Buck, Valdosta
Help my friends and me keep growing in Christ.

Day 39: Maximizing Our Daily Opportunities

Colossians 4:5-7, “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” (NIV)

As a Christian, it always encouraged me to see that my employer kept a well-worn copy of his Bible on his desk at our local accounting office. He told me once that he purposefully left it there to encourage others to broach the subject of God. After 23 years of working with the same partnership, I realize that most of our clients leave our firm, with tax papers in hand, discussing spiritual matters or upcoming church events. I have spent my professional life assuming faith to be an "ordinary" part of the business world.

By opening the door to conversations of Jesus' love for us in situations outside of traditional church, we can make an impression on non-believers in the most subtle manner, planting seeds of faith where and when people least expect it and are less resistant. Evangelism doesn't require a plane ride or a group activity - it happens any day, in any place. Even at work, if we chose to take God with us, we can make the most of our time.

Dear Father, please help us recognize and seize every opportunity to share The Gospel with joy and excitement. Help our actions encourage others to grow closer to you. Amen.

-Lee Bush, Bainbridge
Help my friends and me keep growing in Christ.

Day 40: Bearing Spiritual Fruit

Galatians 5:22-23, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” (ESV)

Have you ever read this verse and thought, “I need to be more patient,” or, “I ought to be more joyful.” You’re not alone! This verse reads like a just-out-of-reach “To Do” list for a Christian’s character - one more thing God says I ought to do, but at which I am failing. {sigh} Look closer though - the verse DOES NOT say, “The fruit of your effort is …” God is revealing to us that the fruit of allowing His Spirit to dwell in us is more love, more joy, more patience, more kindness, and more gentleness. We don’t have to try hard to be more loving or joyful. It comes as we devote ourselves to living in His Spirit. Fruit is the result of health, just as it is in plants and trees. A healthy tree bears good fruit. A healthy Christian, alive in God’s Spirit, will bear this type of fruit.

Holy Spirit, Your work in my mind and soul bears fruit. Keep my attention focused on how I can live in You, and recognize You alive in me. Surround me with companions who will share my life both spiritually and socially. Use me to help others stay alive in You. Use others to help me stay alive in You. Amen.

- Derek McAleer, Macon
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