

twenty
one.

Prayer and Fast

21 Day Guide

WHBC 2017

One.

DAY 1, October 1st

Read

Then Joshua said to the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.” Joshua 3:5 (ESV)

Reflect

Consecrate

1. To make or declare sacred

2. To devote to a purpose with deep dedication

God asks us to partner with Him in building His kingdom on earth. To do this, we must “associate with the sacred.” We must live *set apart* from the ways of culture and the world. This is our intentional act of worship, which sometimes requires saying *no* to things we want, to say *yes* to the things God wants.

God calls us to lean into Him, soak up His Word, digesting it daily. He also calls us to act in obedience, even when obedience requires sacrifice that feels like it is costing us everything.

The sacred is found in the sacrifice, and the wonder of God is found in the sacred. Let’s consecrate ourselves and then watch God do wonders among us.

Respond

How willing are you to say *no* to things you want to say *yes* to what God wants?

What is God asking you to sacrifice today that feels like it’s costing you everything?

One.

DAY 2, October 2nd

Read

10 And the Lord said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes **11** and be ready by the third day, because on that day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. **16** On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. **17** Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. **18** Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently. **19** As the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him. Exodus 19:10-11, 16-18

Reflect

God is coming to his people. But his people must prepare themselves and the preparation is more than just to sit and wait. Entering God’s presence was a big deal. The fact that Moses was given instructions shows that. Even though Hebrews 4:16 tells us to come with “confidence/boldness,” there is a huge difference between being confident and being arrogant or thoughtless. We must prepare as we draw near to God.

They had to cleanse themselves. Baggage had to be given up. They needed to change their clothes. The same thing is true for us. In this season, we are preparing ourselves to hear from God. To prepare we need to rid ourselves of any sins that we are ‘wearing’. If we don’t shed the un-holiness by asking for forgiveness, we will not be ready to enter the Lord’s presence.

It is encouraging to see the power God displayed when he showed up. The mountain shook with his presence. That is the God we are crying out to and preparing to hear from. As we prepare ourselves over these 21 days, don’t do it with arrogance or thoughtlessness. Prepare your heart. Give over to God the rags that you have dressed yourself in. Prepare your life to hear from Him.

Respond

What things in your life do you need to clean out so you can be ready to hear from God?

What big things do you need to cry out to God about? Remember, we serve a powerful God who can handle it!

one.

DAY 3, October 3rd

Read

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. 4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight... Psalm 51:3-4 (ESV)

Reflect

The first step toward regaining vitality is to recognize that we need God's mercy. David understood this when he penned the words of Psalm 51:3-4.

He didn't run from his choices, nor did he waste any time blame shifting. It was a time of coming clean before the LORD as the starting point for restoring his relationship with God. Isn't it time to be honest before the LORD? He longs to restore us to full power but waits for us to make the first step.

Respond

What sins are draining your spiritual battery today?

What benefits await you when you come clean before the LORD? Read Psalm 32:1-5.

One.

DAY 4, October 4th

Read

I love the Lord because He hears my voice and my prayer for mercy. 2 Because He bends down to listen, I will pray as long as I have breath! Psalm 116:1-2 (NLT)

Reflect

It is humbling to realize that the God of the universe would bend down His ear to listen to us. If you work with children you know this stooping position to bend down to listen to the words of children. You assume this position because it puts you at eye level with a child. When we look into the eyes of a child, they can know that we hear, that we understand and that we are present in the moment.

My heart swells with gratitude when I realize that God treats me the same way. I am His child and He bends down to hear my voice. God is never too busy, God is never asleep and God is never unaware of my concerns. He longs for me to trust Him with everything.

God asks us to pursue Him and trust Him with all things. If we seek God, He is ever faithful to be found exactly where we need Him—bending down, eye to eye, listening and present in the moment.

Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. Jeremiah 29:12-13 (NIV)

Respond:

What prayers do you need to bring to God today?

What changes can you make in your daily schedule so that you can pursue God as your top priority with all your heart?

One.

DAY 5, October 5th

Read

He (Asa) commanded the people of Judah to seek the Lord, the God of their ancestors, and to obey his law and commands. 2 Chronicles 14:4 (NLT)

Then Asa cried out to the Lord his God, "O Lord, no one but you can help the powerless against the mighty! Help us, O Lord our God, for we trust in you alone..." 2 Chronicles 14:11 (NLT)

Then they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord, the God of their ancestors, with all their heart and soul. 2 Chronicles 15:12 (NLT)

...Yet even with the severity of his disease, he (Asa) did not seek the Lord's help but turned only to his physicians. 2 Chronicles 16:12 (NLT)

Reflect

King Asa provides a good context to think about the subject of consecration and seeking God in the Present Tense. Early in his reign he commanded Judah to "seek the Lord" and to obey the Word of God (14:4). When confronted by an army much larger than his, Asa cried out to the Lord with his trust in God alone. God responded by defeating the enemy army. After this victory, Asa led the people to enter into a covenant to seek the Lord with all their heart and soul.

However, 20 years later, when confronted by another enemy army, Asa put his trust in a human king instead of in the Lord his God (2 Chronicles 16:7-8). The spiritual decline continued to be evident. When Asa experienced a serious illness, he did not seek the Lord, instead, he put his trust only in his physicians (2 Chronicles 16:12). Asa's life illustrates the truth that seeking God is a Present Tense matter.

When you look at the places where "seek" and "sought" are used in Scripture, two things emerge. Seeking involves listening to God through His word and inquiring of God through prayer. Seeking God is a lifetime experience always in the Present Tense and in need of frequent renewal.

Respond

How does your present commitment to seek God with all your heart and soul compare to your commitment in previous years/seasons?

What are some of the benefits from seeking God? What do we forfeit when we are not seeking God with all our heart and soul?

One.

DAY 6, October 6th

Read

16 Rejoice always; 17 pray without ceasing; 18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NASB)

Reflect

Three great verses! If you need to start a scripture memory program, start with these. Two words, three words, four words, and a reason; it's easy to remember... but hard to live out.

In each of these verses we find an all-inclusive word or phrase. In verse 16, you see the word "always", in verse 17 it is "without ceasing" and in verse 18 it is "in everything". There is no time left out of "always", there is complete effort in "without ceasing", and nothing excluded from "in everything". These words and phrases are descriptors of our relationship with the LORD God.

Christians sometime feel their relationship with God takes place on Sunday mornings. I call that dating. If you really have a relationship with God, it's a 24/7 thing. Your sleep at night, when you awake in the morning, breakfast, the commute, work, lunch, the drive home, dinner, family time, leisure, IT IS ALL IMPORTANT in your relationship with God. Why? Because God cares. When you look for His hand ALWAYS, when you ask His direction WITHOUT CEASING, when you thank Him IN EVERYTHING, **IT IS LIFE CHANGING!** God wants a 24/7 relationship with you, do you want that with Him?

So, you ask, "Where do I start?" Here is a suggestion, memorize these verses. It's simple, put them on a card and place it where you will see it regularly (refrigerator, mirror, by your computer, on the dash of your car, in your purse). Make it the screen saver on your computer or smartphone. Remember that God is ALWAYS listening, directing, and giving. It's a 24/7 thing!

Respond

Make a list of 10 reasons why you are thankful to God.

Over the next 7 days, practice having a running conversation with God in prayer throughout the day, as if He were physically present with you in your daily activities.

One.

DAY 7, October 7th

Read

4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them... 7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 1 Corinthians 12:4, 7 (NIV)

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. 1 Peter 4:10(NIV)

Reflect

Oscar Wilde once said, "Be yourself, everyone else is already taken." What a supreme thought. God made you and me to do some extraordinary things that no one else can or will be able to do quite like us. That is, *if you are actually being you and I am being me*. But if we focus our minds and hearts on this world, on others around us and their opinions of us, we will never know what God intentionally made us to be. And we certainly will not be able to offer those gifts to a world of hurting people.

God gifted each of us with incredible spiritual gifts, but if we don't discover who we truly are in Christ, our purpose in this life will never be fulfilled. Paul reminds us of this truth in 2 Corinthians 2:14 (NKJV), "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place." Jesus has given each of us His fragrance to diffuse to this world in a way no one else can. *No one can be you but you. People are desperate for real in a world of imposters. If you will not be you, then who will be?*

Respond

What spiritual gifts has God gifted you with? For help discovering your spiritual giftedness, ask one of our pastors about the Spiritual Gifts Inventory.

Ponder the truth from this verse over your life today:

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

One.

DAY 8, October 8th

Read

5 If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. 6 But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. 7 Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. 8 Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do. James 1:5-8

Reflect

Everyone experiences occasions when they're not sure what to do. Everyone! How do you feel when you don't know what to do? Bewildered? Confused? Disoriented? Perplexed? Lost? Uncertain? Worried? What do you do when you don't know what to do? Fake it? Panic? Give up? Cry? Do anything, even if you know it's wrong? Is there a better way to respond when you lack wisdom?

The Bible teaches us a better way to wisdom begins with a personal admission that you don't have wisdom, and need it. For whatever reasons, some people find it difficult to admit their need of wisdom. It really is okay to admit to yourself and to God that you need wisdom. Socrates said: "The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing."

A better way to wisdom includes a petition (praying for your needs) with a prerequisite. When we petition God we humbly ask Him to give us the wisdom we need. The good news is God is all wise and the only wise God (Romans 16:27)! When we ask God for wisdom we are asking we are confident that God is generous - He enjoys giving His children wisdom and He never runs out of it. God only requires that we believe Him when we ask for wisdom. Our faith must be in God alone. In Matthew 21:22 (NLT) Jesus reminds us: "You can pray for anything, and if you have faith, you will receive it."

A better way to wisdom includes a 2-fold promise from God. God promises to give you the wisdom you need and He will not rebuke you for asking. When some people help you, they have a way of making you feel bad about asking them for help. God will make you feel good about asking because it acknowledges your total dependence upon Him. Rely on God's promise and begin asking for wisdom today.

Respond

How has unbelief hindered you from receiving God's wisdom in the past?

In what areas of your life do you need to ask God for wisdom today?

One.

DAY 9, October 9th

Read

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, 4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 (ESV)

Reflect

In the city of Corinth, knowledge was something of value. If you were an educated person then you held a lot of prestige. Yet, Paul struck a compelling contrast to the church at Corinth. He declared that he did not come with “lofty speech” or in “plausible words of wisdom” but he came “in weakness and in fear and much trembling.” He came in this manner so the Corinthians would see that real and captivating faith rests not “in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”

Often, we turn to those whom our society has deemed the most knowledgeable about any given subject matter. Yet, there are moments in our lives where even Google does not hold the answer. We find ourselves at a loss when we are faced with “I do not know” from those who are supposed to know. It is at this moment that God says the power is not in what you or anyone else knows but the power lies in Him.

God is calling us to lean into Him, ask His Spirit for discernment, and seek His Word for guidance. While this is not a call to ignore the intellect and knowledge the Lord has blessed us with, He does call us to ultimately make our decisions through the lens of His word and with reliance on His wisdom.

Respond

In what ways are you relying on your own power or wisdom apart from God's? I plead with you to take a few minutes and confess that before the Lord.

What are some ways you can seek the Lord's wisdom first and foremost?

One.

DAY 10, October 10th

Read

Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm. Proverbs 13:20

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. James 1:5

Reflect

Each of us wants to make wise choices. Wisdom comes from God. That is good news to most of us. Many people think that intelligence and wisdom are the same thing, but there is a big difference. Intelligence means implementing the gained knowledge wisely. It can be learned by gaining more experience in a field. Wisdom is something that doesn't come automatically with age. Even a child can be wiser than an adult or mature person. Wisdom is given to those who ask for it. Look again at what James 1:5 says.

Proverbs 13:20 says another way you gain wisdom is from the friends that are around you. If you are around people who make dumb choices, guess what? You will make them too. If you are always around people who make wise choices, you will start to make wise choices.

The Bible says: *The one who gets wisdom loves life; the one who cherishes understanding will soon prosper.* Proverbs 19:8 (NIV)

Respond

What is stopping you from asking God for wisdom? Do you desire the wisdom that comes from God?

Who do you spend time with? Would you consider them wise? Do you need to make some changes in the friends that you surround yourself with?

one.

DAY 11, October 11th

Read

At that time, Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. *Matthew 11:25 (NIV)*

But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. *Matthew 6:6 (NIV)*

While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work for which I have called them.” *Acts 13:2 (NIV)*

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. *Acts 14:23 (NIV)*

Reflect

How difficult is the work of prayer at times, and how desperately barren I feel of wisdom and concentration! Yet, I know blessings will come from the effort! Perhaps it is then, that I am like the little ones to whom God revealed the hidden mysteries of His grace and wisdom. Jesus said that when we pray and fast personally, we are to be alone with the Father, in secret with no thought of attention from others.

In worship and prayer as a church, we cannot find a clearer example than that of the early church. The apostles did many miraculous works because of the prayers of the people as one. Twice, in Acts, Barnabas and Paul received wisdom and leadership from the Holy Spirit after the church prayed for them.

Paul wrote that we, the church and as individuals, are to be alert to the needs of prayer for all the saints on every occasion, especially in-light of spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:18).

Dear Reader, we close with David’s prayer of thanksgiving for wisdom: Surely You desire integrity in the inner self, and You teach me wisdom deep within. (Psalm 51:6)

Respond

Who might be three key individuals or groups to be lifted daily in prayer for encouragement and wisdom?

One.

DAY 12, October 12th

Read

20 Wisdom shouts in the street, She lifts her voice in the square; 21 At the head of the noisy streets she cries out; At the entrance of the gates in the city she utters her sayings: 22 “How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded? And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing And fools hate knowledge?” Proverbs 1:20-22 (NASB)

Reflect

Our attitude as we approach a situation often dictates our response. If we believe that a conversation is going to go poorly with a coworker or family member, we tend to see the negatives in the interaction rather than if we believe the best of the situation or the person. This is often true when it come to our expectations of God.

God wants those who have placed their trust in Christ to have confidence in Him and His character. One of the areas God wants us to know we can have confidence in Him is in His provision of wisdom. Proverbs 1:20-22 let’s us know that wisdom is available to those who want to find it.

When we are seeking God’s wisdom for direction or for a decision we have several resources to help us discover this wisdom He wants to provide us:

- The Bible – God has shared so many things about Himself that can help inform our decisions and choices.
- The Faithful – Those Christ followers who have followed Him faithfully in the past.
- The Community – Those who are following Christ today.

Respond

How have you seen God provide wisdom for you in the past?

What is your attitude toward God regarding wisdom for you personally? For our church?

Thank God that He has provided wisdom for us personally and for us as a church.

Pray that we as a church will listen well to God’s guidance in the decisions we have to make.

One.

DAY 13, October 13th

Read

10 Do not say, "Why were the old days better than these?" For it is not wise to ask such questions. 11 Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun. 12 Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: Wisdom preserves those who have it. Ecclesiastes 7:10-12 (NIV)

Reflect

Some of us have this unwise habit of convincing ourselves that the "old days were better than our current days."

If I spend all my time bathing in the nostalgia of the past, *wisdom* says, I will miss what God is up to in the present.

Wisdom reminds us that God is here with us, amongst us, alive and breathing. God is working now and holding our hands as we walk with Him into the future of our lives, our families, our church, and our community.

And as we walk into the future, God wants to grant us His wisdom – it is for our benefit. It is our shelter. It is our preservation. And it is His gracious gift to us to help us live lives that are pleasing to Him.

Respond

How might looking to the past cause you to miss what God is doing in the present?

What does wisdom look like for you in this season with your finances? Your work? Your family? Your church commitments? Your schedule? Your hobbies?

One.

DAY 14, October 14th

Read

Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path. Psalm 119:105 (NASB)

Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. 26 Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall. Matthew 7:24-27 (NASB)

Reflect

Have you ever jumped all in to a project, quickly realizing you've made a huge mess and no progress? It's only hours later that you discover these pieces of paper included in the box that read at the top of the first page, "Read the entire instruction book before assembling". You read them through (mostly), and then begin putting it together (after you disassembled what you had previously tried to assemble). And in no time you have completed the project.

I suggest that we often follow this pattern with life issues. We try to do things our way, thinking that we've got this figured out. Then when disaster comes, when the outcome is unexpected, we go to God and say, "What should I do?" He tells us to read the directions. The Bible is rich in instructions to follow and principles to apply if we only choose to do so.

There are really two sides to this coin. One side is looking for those instructions that might apply to the challenges you face today. God provides those. On the other side, we are challenged to study ahead. As you read the Bible, look for principles that might apply to future situations you might face. Make a note in the margin; commit yourself today to follow instructions when the time comes. It will guard you from pitfalls.

Respond

What are you wrestling with today for which you need to start seeking God's instructions?

What instructions are you reading today to help you with future challenges?

one.

DAY 15, October 15th

Read

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, 6 so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 15:5-6 (NIV)

Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in the spirit and of one mind. Philippians 2:1-2 (NIV)

10 I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. 17 In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. 18 In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. 1 Corinthians 1:10; 11:17-18 (NIV)

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:26, 28 (NIV)

Reflect

What a blessing it is to pray for, and do the church's work in sweet fellowship and harmony! It's even more important in the gathering of saints of different ages, careers, ethnicities, cultures and needs. Paul prayed for the believers in Rome and in Philippi, two very different places. He promised the Spirit of unity when they lived in harmony with tenderness and compassion.

Paul implored the saints in Corinth to agree with each other, perfectly united in prayer and thought. They needed to be careful of their own opinions when seeking God's will for the church. Later, he chastised them. He had heard that when they met together, they had harmful divisions among themselves and he believed the reports.

Do we remember all are equal in the Father's sight? We must keep this truth in our minds and hearts, for prejudices cause great strife. Social standing, racial differences, or whether one is man or woman matters not to God. Praying and living as His children by faith proclaims unity.

Respond

List the many areas in our church needing prayer to continue the work in unity.

One.

DAY 16, October 16th

Read

4 Then they said, "Come, let's build a great city for ourselves with a tower that reaches into the sky. This will make us famous and keep us from being scattered all over the world." 5 But the Lord came down to look at the city and the tower the people were building.

6 "Look!" he said. "The people are united, and they all speak the same language. After this, nothing they set out to do will be impossible for them! 7 Come, let's go down and confuse the people with different languages. Then they won't be able to understand each other." Genesis 11:4-7 (NLT)

Reflect

In Genesis 9:1, 7 God told Noah and all who survived the flood to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth. In other words, they were to scatter out and inhabit all the earth. Instead, the people decided to cluster and build a great city and a tower in Babylonia (Genesis 11:2 NLT). They united around a purpose that was not God's purpose. Their unity was so powerful it caused God to take notice from heaven. What did God see? He saw a group of people who were united and spoke the same language. What was God's assessment of their unity? Nothing they set out to do would be impossible for them!

It was a powerful example of unity around the wrong purpose. What can happen when people unite together around the right purposes – around God's purposes? The same is true. Nothing they set out to do will be impossible for them! Winston Churchill once said: "When there is no enemy within, the enemies outside cannot hurt you".

Satan is the adversary of every Christian and he knows the power of unity. It explains why Satan works overtime to cause division among people (in a family, in the workplace, in a church, in a country). He knows that a house divided against itself cannot stand. Satan knows that "together we stand, divided we fall". The world needs to see the power of unity in your family and in our West Hampton church family. Will you stand united with us?

Respond

What pillars of unity do healthy families commit to?

What are God's purposes for WHBC that we can unite around?

one.

DAY 17, October 17th

Read

20 My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 23 I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. John 17:20-21, 23 (NIV)

Reflect

Today, let us consider unity, coming together as one, a common union. What strengthens our witness and the power of Christ's love? When we as followers of Christ are "ONE"; one in prayer and one in purpose. Christ prayed for us to be ONE in John 17:21a. Why? He knew the power of coming together for the same reason, a powerful witness to the reality of God's love.

To live in unity as ONE, does not mean we agree on everything. There will be many opinions and points of disagreement. But we must agree on our purpose in life – to work together for the fulfillment of God's will. So, as we pray and seek God for direction in leading us, our outward expression of God's love will reflect our inward unity of purpose.

Respond

What are some preferences that you have which hinder our unity of purpose?

How can you reflect God's outward expression of love to others?

What do we at West Hampton Baptist Church want to be known for? How are we demonstrating this?

Pray that we can demonstrate UNITY through our words and actions.

one.

DAY 18, October 18th

Read

*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. **32** Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:31-32 (ESV)*

Reflect

Forgiveness is hard. The Christian family is made up of imperfect people who often say and do the wrong things. Yet, the Bible says to forgive each other “as God in Christ forgave you.” When we forgive, we are recognizing that God forgives us, and that we are united with God and with each other only because of God’s grace. Forgiveness is what all believers have in common, and it connects the members of the church together in unity so that God may work in marvelous ways through his people.

In the culture we live in, self-gratification and pride are valued above all else. A forgiving and sacrificial church is completely unique to the world and displays the glory of God for all to see. Instead of strife and bitterness marking the people of God, the church is defined by grace and mercy. As we fast, read God’s word and pray together during this season, let us meditate on God’s loving kindness in pardoning our sins so that we may find peace and unity as we show kindness and patience with one another.

Respond

How has God’s forgiveness brought you peace and contentment?

Who do you need to forgive today to stand in unity with your brothers and sisters?

one.

DAY 19, October 19th

Read

12 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.

14 Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15 Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 1 Corinthians 12:12, 14-18 (NIV)

Reflect

1. God created us to be interdependent, not to be independent. Ultimately, we need each other to be successful. (1 Corinthians 12:12)
2. You do not need to become someone different to belong. There is great value in our differences. God has uniquely made each of us to make significant contributions to the whole. (1 Corinthians 12:14-17)
3. Our differences are designed to complete us not defeat us. What we decide to do with differences will ultimately divide us if we judge others, or unite us if we value others. (1 Corinthians 12:18)

Respond

How can you choose to see the beauty of God's design in those who are different from you?

What keeps you from valuing one another's differences? Make a commitment today to consider how to value others differences rather than judge them. (Matthew 7:1-5)

one.

DAY 20, October 20th

Read

18 But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. 19 How strange a body would be if it had only one part! 20 Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. 21 The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you." 22 In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. 23 And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, 24 while the more honorable parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. 25 This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. 26 If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad. 1 Corinthians 12:18-26 (NLT)

Reflect

If you have ever broken a finger or a toe, or even received a tiny paper cut on your hand, perhaps you can relate to just how important even the smallest, seemingly insignificant parts of our bodies can be. It would be ridiculous for us to shun one body part over another. In fact, 1 Corinthians 12:22 states that sometimes the seemingly weakest and most insignificant parts are actually the most necessary. We are uniquely designed to serve God in tandem.

In David Platt's book *Radical*, he stated that, "The message of biblical Christianity is not God loves me, ... but rather the message of biblical Christianity is God loves me so that I might make Him – his ways, his salvation, his glory, and his greatness – known among all nations." If our church is to come together to make His name great, it will require all of us working in unison to make His name great – not our name great. It means sometimes I might need to be silent while others talk, defer to the wisdom of someone else, do a task for which I will get no credit, delight in the worship of others even if it is not my preferred style, and most of all be delighted if someone else is successful in making His name great.

Respond

In what ways have you been guilty of pursuing your own renown instead of God's renown? Is there anything you need to ask God and/or a person in our church to forgive you for in this regard?

How can you support someone else in his/her efforts to serve God? How can you validate someone who you see serving God effectively even though some may perceive their efforts to be insignificant?

One.

DAY 21, October 21st

Read

Behold, how very good and pleasant it is when family live together in unity! Psalm 133:1

Reflect

What comes to mind when you think of the word, “Behold”? Personally, I think of something so rare that I must take a moment and enjoy it. To behold something is to value something.

In this text the author informs us that unity is both pleasant and very good.

As a church, unity is so worthy of our prayer and pursuit. The reason is simple. A church committed to unity will be a source of great goodness and pleasure to all who encounter her. Unity will force the world to look our way and ultimately to God because unity is such a rare commodity in our world today.

Respond

What difference would a unified church make in the world today?

What do you believe is the greatest enemy to our church being unified?