

HELLO CYPRESS CREEK FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Cypress Creek Church is a praying church! We believe that we create the future through prayer, and in every situation, no matter what we're facing, we want you to PRAY FIRST.

In every situation, whether good or bad, we try to pray before we act. Many times, people act first and then want God to bail them out of that situation, but prayer should be our first response, not our last resort. But we don't only want you to understand the need to pray, we want you to look forward to the time you spend talking to God. So many people don't enjoy prayer because they have never been taught how to pray. That's where this simple prayer guide can help.

This booklet is a guide to help you pray, fast and read the Bible through the book of Proverbs. It's designed to bring joy to your time with God. When you discover the beauty of daily conversation with your creator, you'll experience the presence of God that will change your life.

Once you learn how to pray, prayer can become a part of your everyday life. And then you will experience what it truly means to PRAY FIRST...

Before you start your day,
Before you go to bed,
Before work or school,
Before you send a text,
Before you post on social media,
Before that big meeting,
Before you eat or travel.

Keep God FIRST in Everything!

Pastor David and Natalie Bamberry
Cypress Creek Church

KNOW GOD-FIND FREEDOM-DISCOVER YOUR PURPOSE-MAKE A DIFFERENCE

CREATING A LIFESTYLE OF PRAYER

Prayer is most effective when it isn't something we do every now and then, but when it's a lifestyle we cultivate. To help you get started, it's important to...

HAVE A CERTAIN TIME.

Jesus got up early in the morning to spend time with His Heavenly Father. Make a daily appointment with God – whether it's first thing in the morning, at lunch, or in the evening – and faithfully keep it. Start with 15 minutes a day and then you will notice it slowly increasing to 30 minutes or more.

HAVE A CERTAIN PLACE.

Jesus had a specific place He went to pray. Having a designated place to pray helps us remove distractions and frees us to worship and pray out loud. Jesus always made sure He would withdraw from everyone.

HAVE A CERTAIN PLAN.

As we pray every day, our plans for our prayer time can vary, maybe including worship music, Bible reading, quiet time to listen to God and writing down prayers to God. It does not have to look the same; it just helps when we have a plan for connecting regularly with God. To help you, we encourage you to participate in our 16 Day Bible Reading and Devotional that's inside this book.

**Knowing God should be our priority—not just
learning about Him or even serving others in His Name,
but spending time with Him, praising and worshiping, talking and
listening. The more we get to know Him, the more we want to know.**

PRAYER GUIDE

Praying to God.

Prayer is simply an outpouring of your heart to God and then making room in your life to hear back from Him in His Word and as He gets involved in your circumstances. God wants to have a conversation with you. He longs to hear what is really on your heart. He wants openness and honesty. He wants you to be Real.

We Believe Prayer Works.

Prayer has been more effective in our lives than human solutions. Time, and time and time again, we have seen that lasting change comes only through prayer. When we pray – release it into His hands – God accomplishes what I cannot do in my own strength. (James 5:16)

Praying Scripture.

The Word of God is one of the most valuable tools we have to build a dynamic daily prayer life. It brings power, truth, and encouragement to our prayer time. Throughout the Bible there are so many scriptures where we can claim their promises through prayer. You can make this as personal as you like. You will find the most benefit when you pray the Scriptures that God is showing you in His Word and that are connecting with you personally in your current season of life. Also, when you pray using scripture, you are praying according to God's Word. We give you an example below of how to pray according to the Word.

Example: As you read 2 Timothy 1:7 *"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind"*, you will then take the verse and personalize it. You will pray *"Father God, I know You have not given me a spirit of fear, but one of power, love and a sound mind. When my mind feels out of control or I have fear, I know God you will give me a sound mind and power to overcome. Thank you, God, for your love."*

Be Confident and Have Faith in God.

- The moment you pray, God hears your prayers. (1 Peter 3:12)
- God immediately goes to work on your behalf when you pray according to His will. (1 John 5:14)
- God wants to fight your battles for you. (Exodus 14:14)
- It is easy to know God's will when you pray the Word of God in your prayers. (Colossians 1:1-14)
- You can multiply your prayer power by getting someone to agree with you in prayer. (Matthew 18:19)
- Learning the power of perseverance will keep your prayers active until you see the manifestation. (Luke 18:1)

PRAYING DAILY

It is important that you write in a notebook or journal what you are praying and trusting God for. Writing out your prayer requests is a reminder for you to keep praying but also to be reminded how God answered your prayers. As your prayers are answered, mark it on your list and give thanks to God.

I COMMIT TO PRAY DAILY FOR SALVATION AND BLESSINGS FOR THESE FRIENDS AND FAMILY MEMBERS.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

I AM PRAYING AND BELIEVING GOD THIS YEAR FOR...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

**"... I have not stopped giving thanks for you,
remembering you in my prayers." Ephesians 1:15-17**

I PRAY FOR OUR GOVERNMENT.

Pray for those in authority. (I Timothy 2:1-4)

PRESIDENT _____

NATIONAL LEADERS _____

STATE LEADERS _____

CITY LEADERS _____

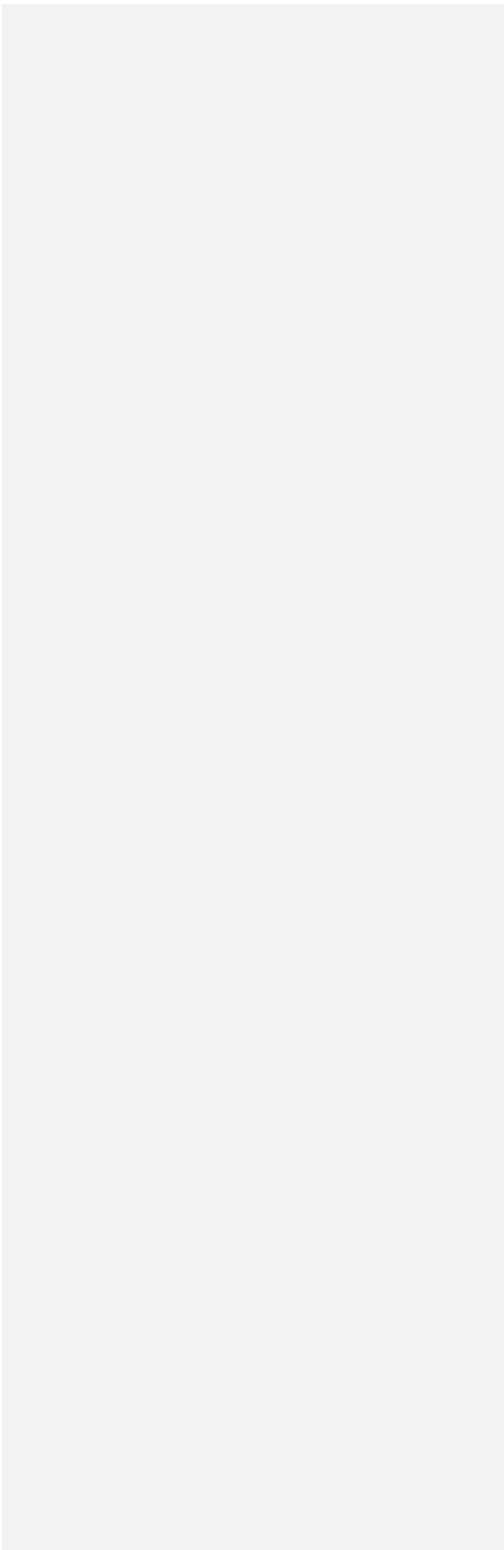
EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO PRAY FOR:

- Family Members or Friends to know God
- Direction for your life
- Protection
- Finances
- Forgiveness
- Healing for your Body, your soul and your mind
- Your job
- Your school
- To have peace in your life and not worry

“I tell you, you can pray for anything, and if you believe that you’ve received it, it will be yours.” Mark 11:24

“Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you.” Matthew 7:7

“Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.” James 5:16



FASTING GUIDE

Fasting is About Less of Us and More of God.

The purpose of fasting is to take our focus off our earthly concerns and listen to what God has for us. The Bible tells us to “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Matthew 6:33

Fasting is Biblical.

Prayer and fasting are practiced regularly through the Bible. We see God’s people in both the Old Testament and New Testament pray and fast to seek God’s face and what He is calling them to. Read more about this in Nehemiah 9, Esther 4, Matthew 4 and Matthew 6.

Types of Fast.

We have several ways to practice God’s command for us to fast. Pray about which one God is challenging you to do.

- **Water and Liquids Only fast:** While on this fast, you refrain from eating any food.
- **Selective Fast:** Abstaining from certain types of foods (meats, sweets, bread). Daniel Fast is a good example in the Bible—Daniel 10:3. This fast is good for beginners, or those with health needs, or restrictive diets.
- **Partial Fast:** Skipping one of your meals.
- **Soul Fast:** Set aside things that are polluting your soul (social media, TV, movies, gaming or news). With our growing dependency on media, we often do not allow for a time of disconnection or silence.

Prayer is Important During a Fast.

Fasting is empty without the main component of prayer. When we pray during a fast, we set aside our physical concerns and diligently seek the heart of God through life-changing prayer. Whatever you are fasting, replace it with times of prayer and meditating on God’s Word.

Establishing a routine of daily prayer with plenty of time to seek and hear from God is utterly essential during your fast. You may want to follow a book. Keep a fasting journal. We also recommend setting aside times to join with other people fasting for worship, prayer and encouragement.

After Fasting...How can I be sure that the effects of my fast become permanent?

1. Respond in worship to all the blessings you have received. You may want to voice the testimony of your fast in your small group, at our Sunday celebration, or on Facebook. Proclaim God's goodness!
2. Make a list of those blessings in a notebook or journal.
3. Persevere in the prayer routine that you have begun. Consider fasting once a month, once a week, or as the Lord leads you.
4. Finally, examine your life, seek counsel, and ask the Lord whether some of the foods or activities that you have gotten rid of during your fast should be put out of your life permanently!

**Fasting is a time for purifying yourself before God.
As you empty yourself of your sinful habits, indulgent appetites, and
pleasurable distractions, you discover more of God's presence
and make room for more of His goodness in your Life.**

STUDYING THE WORD OF GOD

Devotions and Reading

Proverbs in 16 Days

The WORD OF GOD is
one of the most VALUABLE tools we have
to build a DYNAMIC DAILY PRAYER LIFE.
It brings POWER, TRUTH and
ENCOURAGEMENT to our PRAYER TIME.

Bible Reading and Prayer Guide

Day 1

Knowing God: Be God-centered

These daily devotions will be emphasizing Proverbs and how we can become wise. The theme verses of Proverbs (1:7) and Job (28:28) are the same, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (wisdom)”, but what does it mean to “fear the Lord”? There are three aspects of this that we’ll learn about in the first 3 day’s devotions which will increase our knowledge of God.

First of all, to “fear the Lord” means to put God first, to be God-centered. Isaiah 8:13 tells us, “You are to regard only the Lord of Hosts as holy. Only He should be feared; only He should be held in awe.” True wisdom begins as we esteem God above all else.

Read closely the above verses: “He is great.” “He is to be feared above all gods.” That is the basis for our reverence (fear) of God. “Let all the earth fear Him.” “Let all the people of the world revere Him.” And if we do fear Him, we will “hate evil.” This means that we are to love what He loves and to abhor what He abhors.

Does this happen automatically, magically as we believe? No, it comes as we enter into this friendship or relationship with Him. As we draw close to Him, He will confide in us and make Himself and His covenant known to us.

Jesus is God’s wisdom revealed to us (1 Corinthians 1:30). In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3).

Open your Bible and Read the Scriptures:

- Proverbs Chapters 1 and 2.
- 1 Chronicles 16:25—“For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; He is to be feared above all gods.”
- Psalm 33:8—“Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere Him.”
- Proverbs 8:13—“To fear the Lord is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech.”
- Colossians 2:3—“In Christ hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

Reflect:

- Do I follow the world’s wisdom, “I can live just fine without God.”?
- Is there anything that is keeping me from living a God-centered life?

Prayer:

Lord, awaken my heart to who You are, the Creator of the universe, the Sovereign ruler of all, the One who loves us and wants the best for us. But this only begins as we turn to You, as we recognize who you are and have a reverential fear or awe of You. Help me to center my life around You and nothing else. Amen.

Bible Reading and Prayer Guide
Knowing God: Respond to Grace

Day 2

We learned from yesterday that “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” If we’re to be wise, it begins by recognizing that Yahweh, the Sovereign God of the universe, is holy. We are broken people living in a broken world, but He is holy and wants to save us from all of that. We do that as we turn to Him and make Him the center of our lives.

We are guilty (Romans 1:18), “without excuse” (Romans 2:1), but God loves us and chose to reveal Himself to us by His grace (Titus 3:4-7). When we come to the realization that we are lost, separated from a holy God, but freely saved by His grace, it creates a joyful, awe-filled assurance of His saving love.

The heart of arrogance, hurt feelings, jealousy, self-pity, anxieties, and fear of the future, are at the root of bad decisions and flawed character traits. God is love, and grace is God’s love revealed to us through Jesus Christ. This is wisdom when we respond to His grace by inviting Him into our lives.

The truth of God’s word sets us free (John 8:31-32) from all the guilt we have been carrying around. We are freely forgiven, and this forgiveness results in an awe-filled assurance of His saving love, a respectful fear of Him.

The Lord is all-powerful and able to protect us, keep us untouched by any trouble. Through His grace we can rest contented.

Open your Bible and Read the Scriptures:

- Proverbs Chapters 3 and 4.
- Psalm 130:4—“But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared.”
- Proverbs 19:23—“The fear of the Lord leads to life; then one rests content, untouched by trouble.”
- John 8:31-32—To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Reflect:

- Does a misunderstanding of God’s grace, or my disbelief in it, lie at the root of many of my problems?

Prayer:

Father God, You were perfect in heaven, but separated from us, and we would not have known anything about You unless You chose to reveal Yourself to us. Thank you for Your grace, Lord, for revealing Your grace and mercy in Jesus, and for the forgiveness that You so freely extend to us. I do stand in awe of You. Amen.

Bible Reading and Prayer Guide

Day 3

Knowing God: Change Deeply

If we have given our lives to Jesus, we have been born again, saved from our sins. Jesus is our Savior, but He is also our Lord. He directs our lives, and because He is holy, He expects us to be holy as well.

Being saved means changing our way of life which is often a very profound change. Because we fear the Lord and want to please Him, we now want to avoid evil. Fearing Him requires a genuine hatred of wrongdoing, not because of the fear of punishment, but because of the appreciation we have of Him and out of joy to serve Him.

Our heart, however, is often divided. We serve two masters. Thus, the psalmist asks for help, as should we. "Teach me Your way...give me an undivided heart." As we change, we will grow closer to Him, fearing Him even more.

Here are the three aspects of "the fear of the Lord" that have been covered in the last three days. In the light or knowledge of His holiness, we desire to be God-centered (centering our lives around Him). Receiving His love enhances our joy through the miracle of God's grace and forgiveness as we see our sins having been atoned for by His blood. This results in true life change.

Open your Bible and Read the Scriptures:

- Proverbs Chapters 5 and 6.
- 1 Peter 1:16—"Be holy because I am holy."
- Proverbs 16:6—"Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for; through the fear of the Lord evil is avoided."
- Psalm 86:11-12—"Teach me Your way, Lord, that I may rely on Your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear Your name. I will praise You, Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify Your name forever."

Reflect:

- Is my heart divided?
- Do I refrain from sin because of the consequences or because it grieves and offends a holy God?

Prayer:

Father God, I want things in my life to go right. I want to make wise, godly choices that will benefit me and my loved ones. To do that I need to start learning what it means to "fear You", to have a reverential respect for You, to center my life around You. You want me to have an abundant life, and that is why You graciously sent Jesus. Thank you for accepting His death on the Cross as payment for my sins and thank you for forgiving me. Help me to make the changes in my life that I need to better serve You. Amen.

Bible Reading and Prayer Guide Knowing Wisdom: Through Discipline

Day 4

What is wisdom? The Hebrew word for wisdom occurs 45 times in Proverbs. To be wise means to be “skilled in godly living.” It includes making the right moral choice but goes well beyond that. It also means to be knowledgeable (book smart) and experienced (many years on the job). It’s not just for intellectuals; it’s available for the “simple” as well. It’s how you get through daily life.

The proverbs are “for gaining wisdom and instruction...” (Proverbs 1:1-2a). The word for instruction means “discipline”—training with strong accountability, like a drill sergeant (always in your face). A disciplined person is not given to impulsiveness, but to clear thinking and self-examination. They are resilient, poised, and resourceful after coming through hard times.

A close follower of Jesus should develop spiritual disciplines, such as daily Bible reading, prayer, generosity, fasting, confession, worship, forgiveness, submission, fellowship, hospitality, frugality, and chastity, just to name a few.

An athlete becomes competitive only after rigorous training. In the same way, wisdom is not something we gain automatically by just getting older. It takes discipline and hard work.

Open your Bible and Read the Scriptures:

- Proverbs Chapters 7 and 8.
- Deuteronomy 4:5-6—“See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’”
- Psalm 19:7—“The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.”

Reflect:

- Am I disciplined?
- Has God used difficulties to make me wiser?

Prayer:

Father God, thank you for the new life you have given me in Jesus, but You don't want me to remain as I am now. You want me to mature in the faith. Help me, Lord, to not slip back to my old way of living, but to pursue You, to draw near to You, to become a more faithful follower of You. Help me to become more disciplined in my life, leading to a life of greater wisdom and understanding. Amen.

Bible Reading and Prayer Guide

Day 5

Knowing Wisdom: Through Discernment

To gain wisdom, we need to not only be disciplined, but we also need to have discernment. Discernment, or insight, means having the ability to notice distinctions or slight differences where others see none. To most of us, the pitches of a professional baseball pitcher look pretty much the same, but to a discerning batter, they look much different. Good batters watch the pitcher's motion closely. They look closely at the ball as it comes toward them to see how it spins to tell if it's a fastball coming straight, if it's a curveball, or if it's maybe a slider or a knuckleball.

Those who are wise bring this insight or discernment into the skill of daily living. Hebrews tells us that some believers are slow to understand. They should be further along in the faith, but instead need to be taught again the basic principles. They need milk instead of solid food. Without discernment, the ability to distinguish good from evil, we are easily deceived or led astray.

The wise will recognize multiple courses of action where others see only one or two. They discern the multiple dimensions to the character and motives of people who are often not just "good" or "bad." Rather than just right or wrong, we sometimes must distinguish between good, better and best.

As our love for Jesus grows and our love of self-diminishes, our diminished ego allows us to notice and be sensitive to others.

Open your Bible and Read the Scriptures:

- Proverbs Chapters 9 and 10.
- Proverbs 1:1-2—"The proverbs...are for understanding words of insight."
- Philippians 1:9—"And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight."
- Hebrews 5:14—"But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."

Reflect:

- Has God enabled me to see fine distinctions I didn't see before?

Prayer:

Father God, I am often too absorbed in my life to recognize what is happening to those around me. Yes, I know the Golden Rule, and that the 2nd commandment is to "love your neighbor as yourself", but I selfishly fail to do so. Help me to realize all the ways You have blessed me and help me to desire to bless others as well. Help me to take an interest in the lives of others, discerning what needs they may have, that I might grow in wisdom. Amen.

Bible Reading and Prayer Guide
Knowing Wisdom: Through Discretion

Day 6

To help teach us about wisdom, God has given us the guidelines of discipline, discernment, and discretion. While discernment gives us insight (in how to notice distinctions), discretion (or prudence) gives us foresight, the wisdom to plan and live strategically, which is the meaning of the Hebrew word for “prudence.” It gives us not just a vision of an action to take, but where and how to anticipate problems without becoming overconfident (acting too quickly) or overcautious (not acting at all).

Luke 16:1-13 tells us of Jesus’ parable of the dishonest manager. The manager had been squandering his master’s possessions, and so he was fired. But this manager was shrewd. Before his departure, he planned for his future when he would no longer have a job. He went to each of his master’s debtors and lowered their bills, which thrilled them. In turn, they helped him after he was fired.

Even though he was dishonest, his master commended him for “acting shrewdly.” Jesus’ point? The dishonest manager used worldly wealth to make friends, planning for his future. We should do the same. We should be generous with our money, sharing the gospel so that people would be saved and welcome us when we get to heaven.

We need to learn to look ahead with discretion (prudence, foresight) to act wisely. For example, don’t go to our neighbor’s house early in the morning raising a quarrel. That is not the way to make friends.

Open your Bible and Read the Scriptures:

- Proverbs Chapters 11 and 12.
- Proverbs 1:1, 3-5a—“The proverbs...are for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young—let the wise listen and add to their learning.”
- Luke 16:8—“The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.” (Read Luke 16:1-13)

Reflect:

- Was there a time when I had the discernment to know what to do, but not the discretion to know how to do it?
- Did I learn anything from that experience?

Prayer:

Lord, I desire to be wise, not foolish; mature, not immature. Help me to grow in wisdom by taking my relationship with you seriously. Help me to be more disciplined in my spiritual life. Help me to be more disciplined, and to use discernment (insight) and discretion (foresight) that I might become wiser and more pleasing to You. Amen.

Bible Reading and Prayer Guide

Day 7

Knowing Wisdom: How Do We Become Wise

Proverbs 2-4 shows how wisdom develops within us. It grows within us as we read God's word, words of wisdom such as these in the Proverbs. And we become wise as we listen to wise counsel, the thoughts and experiences of others.

In Proverbs 2:1-6, we are told to "accept" and "store up" God's commands; "listen" to wisdom; seek it by "crying aloud" for it; "look for it" and "search for it" just as you would for riches. It is only then that you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God that you desire.

But wait, we're told that "the Lord gives wisdom" (Prov 2:6). Are we to go out and search for it or sit back and wait for God to give it to us? Is this a contradiction? No, it is a partnership. We partner with Him to become wise.

This is explained in Philippians 2:12-13. We are to "work out our own salvation." Salvation is a process that begins as we are "born again" but continues as we grow in Christ. With "fear and trembling" we are to work at this, but "God is also working in you." He is doing His part, enabling us so that we will not only desire to do His purposes, but carry them out and do them.

The theme of James is maturity, and this maturing process, described in James 1:2-5, can be summed up this way: The goal is to be mature and complete, lacking nothing, which equates to wisdom, and if we lack wisdom, we should seek it by asking God and it will be given. How do we get it? It is a gradual process which comes about as our faith is tested, resulting in endurance. As we gain wisdom and see the fruits of a life that was tested, and that God was faithful through it all, we will gain more wisdom and great joy will be the result.

Open your Bible and Read the Scriptures:

- Proverbs Chapters 13 and 14.
- Proverbs 1:1-2—"The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: for gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight."
- Proverbs 1:5—"Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance."

Reflect:

- Am I pursuing wisdom as I should (crying aloud for it)?
- Am I being patient as I should, watching and listening for the Lord's guidance?

Prayer:

Lord, I have made a mess of things by going my own way, assuming I was making wise choices, but I wasn't reading your word and listening to You and others who could have helped me. Humble me, Lord. Break me of my self-reliance. Help me to understand that I need You to make wise decisions that will make my life here better and prepare me for the life to come. Amen.

Bible Reading and Prayer Guide

Day 8

Knowing Wisdom: Six Marks of a Wise Person

Within these verses are the six marks of a wise person and the means for growing in wisdom.

Proverbs 3:5-12—"*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones. Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first-fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine. My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline, and do not resent His rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, as a father the son He delights in.*"

Proverbs 3:27-28—"*Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, 'Come back tomorrow and I'll give it to you' when you already have it with you.*"

- 1. Trust in God** We might believe in God, but trust in something else for our security or happiness, thus distorting our vision and clouding our judgment.
- 2. Submit to God** We must submit to God and His word, not our own reason and intuition. The Bible can guide us in all ways, even when it doesn't address a particular situation.
- 3. Be Teachable** Be willing to listen to others; to see things through the eyes of friends, critics, other races and classes of people, and the Bible. With the assurance of God's love, we can face our flaws.
- 4. Be Generous** A love of (and confidence in) money blinds us. To break money's power over us, give it away.
- 5. Learn from Adversity** Bad things will happen. Accept it and use them to drive you toward a greater love of and dependence on God rather than allowing them to harden your heart.
- 6. Be Concerned for Justice** Help neighbors when they're in need. This isn't just a charitable act, but what they're "due." It's our duty to help when we can.

Open your Bible and Read the Scriptures:

- Proverbs Chapters 15 and 16.

Reflect:

- Can I see these "six marks" in myself? Can others see them in me?
- Which of these do I need to work on (or to work on first) to grow in wisdom?

Prayer: *Father, I know there are things I must change in my life to grow in wisdom. Help me to change. Amen.*

Bible Reading and Prayer Guide

Day 9

Knowing the Heart: Understanding Its' Desires

In the 1800's, Conestoga wagons wore a path as they traveled westward, and the path became easier and easier to follow. It is the same for us. Our actions lead us down a path that becomes easier to repeat. "Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny."

Our actions can shape our feelings. Even if we do not feel loving, act loving anyway. Jesus taught us to love and pray for your enemies and to follow the golden rule. Take the path of doing acts of love and your heart will follow.

The path of righteousness leads to light, righteousness, and self-awareness. We learn more about God and ourselves, admitting the worst about ourselves. The path of the wicked leads to darkness, self-deception, and living in denial causing us to stumble.

In the book of Joshua chapter 7, what was Achan thinking? Verse 21 says, "I saw...I coveted". Not only can our actions shape our feelings, but our desires and feelings can influence our heart which can shape our actions. "What the heart loves, the mind finds reasonable, the emotions find desirable, and the will finds doable."

The heart is the key. We are primarily a spiritual being with a soul that lives in a body. God speaks to us through our spirit. To avoid going down the wrong path we must look to Him and covenant with Him, "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a young woman." (Job 31:1). Connect with God. Think and dwell on His thoughts and godly actions will follow.

Open your Bible and Read the Scriptures:

- Proverbs Chapters 17 and 18.
- Joshua 7
- Psalm 90:12—"Teach us to number our days carefully so that we may develop wisdom in our hearts."
- Proverbs 4:14-15—"Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evildoers. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way."

Reflect:

- Is there someone in my life who is hard to love? What could I do to love them better?
- Ask a friend, "Is there a character flaw of mine that others see, but I don't?"

Prayer:

Lord be with my thought life. Help me to think godly thoughts by surrounding myself with godly friends, music, and books. Help me to have a heart like Yours and might this loving heart shape my actions and feelings. Amen.

Bible Reading and Prayer Guide

Day 10

Knowing the Heart: Re-ordering Its' Desires

Wisdom recognizes that our desires can trap us. We must reorder our desires so that we can make wise choices.

To set our heart on anything weakens our power to assess it properly: "It must be had!" The thought can pop into my head, "Boy, would I like to get a blizzard at Dairy Queen", and very quickly, that's all I can think about! (Proverbs 13:19)

So how do we desire God above all things? Remember from yesterday that our actions (Conestoga wagon; loving our enemies) can affect our thinking, leading us down a particular path. This could be either good or bad. It's the same with our thinking. Bad thinking (Achan from Joshua 7) can lead us to bad actions but dwelling on the Lord and our future hope (Proverbs 23:17-18) can lead to good actions.

Our desire for approval, to be comfortable, or to have power and control over others can trump our desire to please God. That's why we're told, "Above all else, guard your heart...", for it is the seat of our deepest trusts, loves and commitments. Everything else flows from it.

Open your Bible and Read the Scriptures:

- Proverbs Chapters 19 and 20.
- Proverbs 4:23—"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."
- Proverbs 10:24—"What the wicked dread will overtake them; what the righteous desires will be granted."
- Proverbs 11:6—"The righteousness of the upright delivers them, but the unfaithful are trapped by evil desires."

Reflect:

- Am I guarding my heart?
- Are my actions moving my heart toward God or away from Him?

Prayer:

Lord, I admit that I don't always desire You as I should. I see things of the world that I want, and I can often put them ahead of You. Help me to open my eyes to see You more clearly, to re-order my desires, and to put You first in all things. Amen.

Knowing the Heart's Seven (7) Deadly Sins from the Book of Proverbs

- 1. Anger** 14:29—"Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly."
15:18—"A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict, but the one who is patient calms a quarrel."
29:22—"...a hot-tempered person commits many sins."
Reflect: What actions or words do I most regret? Were they done in anger?
- 2. Envy** 14:30—"A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones."
27:4—"Anger is cruel; fury overwhelming, but who can withstand jealousy."
Reflect: Do I desire the life of someone else? Is that diminishing my happiness?
- 3. Pride** 13:10—"Where there is strife, there is pride, but wisdom is found in those who take advice."
15:25—"The Lord destroys the house of the proud, but He protects the widow's territory."
Reflect: Has pride hurt my relationships? Is there anyone I look down on? Do I allow others to correct me?
- 4. Gluttony** 21:17—"Whoever loves pleasure will become poor; whoever loves wine and olive oil will never be rich." (consumes them immediately)
21:20—"The wise store up; olive oil, but fools gulp theirs down."
Reflect: Do I avoid immediate pleasures which could lead to greater satisfaction and happiness?
- 5. Sloth** 21:25—"The craving of a sluggard will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work."
20:4—"Sluggards do not plow in season; so at harvest time they look but find nothing."
Reflect: Do I have go-to excuses when I don't want to handle a hard task? Has laziness led to more work?
- 6. Greed** 11:28—"Those who trust in their riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf."
15:27—"The greedy bring ruin to their households, but the one who hates bribes will live."
28:25—"The greedy stir up conflict; those who trust in the Lord will prosper."
Reflect: Do I trust money for security? Am I generous or cheap?
- 7. Lust** 5:3-5—"For the lips of the adulterous woman drip honey...but in the end she is bitter as gall...her feet go down to death..."
6:23-25—"This command is a lamp...keeping you from your neighbor's wife...Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes."
Reflect: Think of the ways that sex outside of marriage is like eating honey rather than enjoying a full meal.

Open your Bible and Read the Scriptures: Proverbs Chapters 21 and 22.

Prayer: *Father God, help me to meditate on these verses and determine if one or more of these areas in my life are a problem, and how I can change. Thank you. Amen.*

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Bible Reading and Prayer Guide

Day 12

Knowing Others: The Marks of a Good Friend

Proverbs 18:24—“One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”

We are social beings, and so our friendships are important. To have friends, we must be a friend. Below are four marks of a good friend:

1. Constancy

Proverbs 17:17—“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.”

Proverbs 20:6—“Many claim to have unflinching love, but a faithful person who can find?”

Reflect: How can I be more intentional about deepening friendships, giving more time to them?

2. Transparency

Proverbs 27:5-6—“Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.”

Reflect: Can it be scary, even painful, to be transparent? Is it necessary?

3. Sensitivity

Proverbs 25:20—“Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on a wound, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.”

Proverbs 27:14—“If anyone loudly blesses their neighbor early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse.”

Reflect: Do I know the friend I’m talking to well enough to not speak inappropriately?

4. Counsel

Proverbs 27:9—“Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of a friend springs from their heartfelt advice.”

Proverbs 27:17—“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”

Reflect: Do I have a close friendship with someone in which we can comfortably counsel and critique one another?

Open your Bible and Read the Scriptures:

- Proverbs Chapters 23 and 24.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, You were the friendliest person who ever lived. You had all of these marks of a good friend. Help me to cultivate a few close friendships, and to be this kind of friend. Amen.*

Bible Reading and Prayer Guide
Knowing the Spheres of Life: Marriage

Day 13

Proverbs 2:16-17—"Wisdom will save you also from the adulterous woman, from the wayward woman with the seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God."

Our words are important. We will be judged by them (Matthew 12:37), so it is a serious matter when we make a covenant. This includes the marriage covenant: a legal bond solemnized by vows. Adultery breaks that covenant.

We keep this covenant as we fulfill the promises that were made to each other. What is involved in marriage? What are the duties of a spouse and how are we to act towards one another? Below are four points of how we should be with our spouse:

1. Lovers

Proverbs 5:18-19—"May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer—may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love."

Reflect: There are joyful benefits of faithfulness in marriage. Will you make a commitment in your heart to be faithful to your spouse always?

2. Friends

Proverbs 17:9—"Whoever would foster love covers over an offense, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends."

Reflect: Is your spouse your best friend? (At least in the top 10?)

3. Gracious

Proverbs 11:16—"A kindhearted woman gains honor, but ruthless men gain only wealth."

Reflect: Are you gracious to one another? Do you repent, forgive, and move on?

4. Not quarrelsome

Proverbs 21:9, 19—"Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife...Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and nagging wife."

Reflect: Do you offer respectful criticisms or just nag?

Open your Bible and Read the Scriptures:

- Proverbs Chapters 25 and 26.

Prayer: *Sovereign God, Thank you for my spouse. Help me to be faithful to the covenant we have made with one another. Might we always be the best of friends, gracious, encouraging, supportive in every way, never taking each other for granted, and might our marriage be a model for others to follow. Amen.*

Bible Reading and Prayer Guide
Knowing the Spheres of Life: Money

Day 14

Proverbs 8:18—"With me (wisdom) are riches and honor, enduring wealth and prosperity."

Proverbs 10:22—"The blessing of the Lord brings wealth, without painful toil for it."

Even though wealth can be a dangerous thing in the hands of some, used correctly it is a good thing. Following all of wisdom's advice can result in financial blessings, without working 70-80 hours a week. There are four factors that result in prosperity:

1. Hard work

Proverbs 12:24—"Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in forced labor."

Proverbs 14:23—"All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty."

Proverbs 16:26—"The appetite of laborers works for them; their hunger drives them on."

Reflect: Does work bring joy to me?

2. Integrity

Proverbs 28:19—"Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies will have their fill of poverty."

Reflect: Do my business practices involve being stingy, deceptive, or do they exploit the vulnerable?

3. Realism

Proverbs 26:10—"Like an archer who wounds at random is one who hires a fool or any passer-by."

Proverbs 27:23-24—"Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds; for riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all Generations."

Reflect: Have I seen realism practiced and rewarded?

4. Being skillful

Proverbs 22:29—"Do you see someone skilled in their work? They will serve before kings; they will not serve before officials of low rank."

Reflect: Is my work done wholeheartedly, or is it just about earning money?

Open your Bible and Read the Scriptures:

- Proverbs Chapters 27 and 28.

Prayer: *Lord, Just as You work, You have called us to work, from the moment You created us. Help me to enjoy my work, to work hard as though I was working for You, and to use my earnings to bless others. Amen.*

Bible Reading and Prayer Guide
Knowing the Spheres of Life: Justice

Day 15

What does it mean to be righteous? To the Hebrew mind, it meant to disadvantage yourself in order to advantage others. Many in our nation complain and even protest against the rich, but here we see that when the righteous prosper, grow in numbers, and rise to the top, they aren't resented. In fact, those in the city rejoice for they understand that the entire city will benefit.

The relationships of the righteous are just and fair; their business dealings are integrous; they are generous; they're good neighbors; they're peacemakers; they're not vicious politically.

The Bible gives us a reason for believing in human rights, for we were all created in God's image and should not be exploited. We should be treated fairly and come to the aid of those who can't speak for themselves.

There is much poverty in the world. Some is due to unjust social systems resulting in unjustly low wages, excessive interest, social prejudice against immigrants and minorities, and a legal system that favors the wealthy (Proverbs 13:23; 18:23). Some is due to misfortune (Proverbs 17:5). And some can be due to a lack of self-discipline (Proverbs 10:4) or addictions (Proverbs 21:17; 23:20-21), but often these factors (oppression, calamity, responsibility) are intertwined.

Open your Bible and Read the Scriptures:

- Proverbs Chapters 29 and 30.
- Proverbs 11:10—"When the righteous prosper, the city rejoices; when the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy."
- Proverbs 31:8-9—"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."
- Proverbs 16:8, 19—"Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice. Better to be lowly in spirit along with the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud."
- Proverbs 19:1, 22—"Better the poor whose walk is blameless than a fool whose lips are perverse. What a person desires is unfailing love; better to be poor than a liar."

Reflect:

- If I prosper, are people joyful because they know that some of it will flow to them?
- Do I speak for those who can't defend themselves?
- How do I feel compassion for the poor? Is there a need I could be meeting?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, You said that the poor would always be with us, but You showed by example that we are to care for those around us. Help me to be more concerned with others and less with myself. Amen.*

Bible Reading and Prayer Guide

Day 16

Knowing Jesus

For the last 15 days, we have been chasing after wisdom as we prayed and fasted, and now we see that this wisdom has been personified in Christ Jesus.

For many the Cross is foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18). The way up is down? To lead is to serve? To get happiness is to seek it for others? To be rich, give your wealth away? That is foolish! Yet that is the example that Jesus gives us.

Nike chose the “swoosh” as their company symbol. Nike is a Greek word meaning victory. What a great symbol to increase the sales of athletic shoes. And what is the Christian symbol? The Cross, which represents death. Hmmm? So those in the world ask, “Victory or death; which should I choose to follow?”

Truth be told, the way of the Cross (to put the welfare of others ahead of ourselves, to die to self) is the narrow path that leads to life, but those who put self ahead of others are on the broad road that leads to death. So again, “Which path should I choose to follow?”

Choose life! Choose Jesus! As we conclude this time of prayer and fasting, it is important to ask, “Now what? How can I remain committed to seeking Him?” Very simply, decide to love God and seek Him. That’s right...decide. Decide to chase after God and not the things of this life that quickly distract us from Him. Give Him your whole heart, daily. It will take intention, effort, desire, and time. But it will be so worth it as your relationship with Him grows, develops, and you will fall more and more in love with this amazing God.

Open your Bible and Read the Scriptures:

- Proverbs Chapter 31.
- Mark 6:2—“...Where did this man get these things? What’s this wisdom that has been given to Him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?”
- Colossians 2:3—“In Him (Christ) are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”
- I Corinthians 1:30-31—“It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

Reflect:

- Will I pray for a hunger and a thirst to chase after God and seek His presence?
- Will I commit to seek God daily?

Prayer:

Father God, thank You for these last 15 days of focusing on You. Thank You for the promise that You will be found when I seek You. Thank You that You don’t hide from me but that You constantly draw me near to You. I ask that You put a hunger and a thirst in my life for You, Lord. You are such a good, good Father. And I am deciding to chase after You with all my heart from this day on. Amen!