

FOUNDATIONS

A 52 DAY DISCIPLESHIP CHALLENGE

*“The wall was completed in fifty-two days”
Nehemiah 6:15*

Introduction

“Foundations” is a 52-day discipleship challenge based on the essential doctrines of the Christian church. It is inspired by the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem when the Jewish exiles returned from captivity in Babylon. If the exiles could rebuild the walls of Jerusalem in 52 days, then we can certainly rebuild the doctrinal foundation of the church in the same period of time!

The purpose of this study is to present a coherent yet comprehensive overview of basic Christian doctrine for the common believer. It is designed around the seven classical theological categories (the academic terms are in parenthesis).

God (Theology Prime)

Human Beings (Christian Anthropology)

Jesus (Christology)

Salvation (Soteriology)

The Holy Spirit (Pneumatology)

The Church (Ecclesiology)

The Last Days (Eschatology)

Each of the seven sections consists of seven days (7x7=49) and is preceded by two days of preparation and one day of follow-up to make 52. For church-wide use, it is best to begin Day 1 on a Friday, Day 2 would be Saturday, and then each Sunday would launch a new topic for the week. An individual study can start on any day.

Some people begin shutting down when they hear the word “theology,” having believed the lie that theological study is for seminary students. Others secretly crave the deeper things of God and have come to know that there is more to the gospel than what they have been taught. The term “theology” is based on two common Greek words, “theos,” which means “God” and “logos,” which means “word.” Theology is simply “words about God,” and so the term should not be intimidating. Nor should theological reasoning be reserved for the clergy! God wants everyone to grow into spiritual maturity and become fully knowledgeable of his activity and purposes. My hope is that this study would provide the framework for this to happen.

May God bless it for this purpose.

John Longmire

Day 1 - Rebuilding the Wall

The wall was completed in fifty-two days, on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul. When all our enemies heard this, all the surrounding nations were intimidated and lost their confidence, for they realized that this task had been accomplished by our God. (Nehemiah 6:15-16)

When the Israelites returned to Jerusalem from captivity in Babylon, they found that the city had been decimated and the wall had been pulled down. They knew that the wall of a city defined its boundaries and protected it from invasion. The Book of Nehemiah describes how the exiles rebuilt the wall. Everyone had a job to do, and each family took responsibility for rebuilding a section. Some did the work while others stood guard. When the surrounding nations who opposed the rebuilding of Jerusalem saw that the wall had been completed in 52 days, they realized that God was indeed with the Israelites and gave up their resistance.

The doctrines of the church are like the walls of a city. They define our beliefs and shape our practices. They also protect us from those who would invade and use the church for their own purposes. Every generation is given the opportunity to build, adding to the labor of those who have gone before them. Now is a time of rebuilding! So let's do this work together.

Lord God, we lament that the walls of our city have been broken down. Inspire us to rebuild the doctrines handed down to us from the apostles and from the saints gone before us. Bless our work so that the church might be, as Jesus Christ has said, a city on a hill.

Life Application: Christian Meditation, The Main Tool

To grow spiritually, each of us must learn the practice of meditating on God's revealed truth. The practice of Christian meditation is not hard or laborious, but easy and delightful. Meditation is the practice of focused thinking on a particular truth while we allow it to penetrate the depths of our soul. Meditation is not a passive activity, such as watching the television or surfing the web. It is deliberate work! You must take the attitude, "I am now going to do some work in my soul!" Meditation is not merely an intellectual act, but one of intimate fellowship with God. Meditating on God's Word brings us close to God, which is a joy both to us and to God.

The pattern of Christian meditation is simple. God offers his truth to us by revealing it through the Holy Spirit. The means of this revelation is often in something we do, like reading the Bible or reflecting upon the circumstances of our lives, but God uses our actions to reveal specific truths. God will reveal spiritual truth at his own pace, according to our ability to understand. This is why you might read a passage a second time and find new truth. But we must then be receptive to the truth God has offered us and allow it to penetrate the depths of our soul, which takes time and reflection. God's truth will begin to transform the way we think, feel, and act. Once the truth is allowed to permeate our soul and do its work, we should then return worship to God and offer Him our thanks.

Day 2 - Our Pattern of Learning

In this study, each day's work is laid out in three parts: a passage of Scripture, a prayer, and a spiritual activity to engage in. The reading and the prayer should not take long, but spiritual work requires time. Meditation is the appraisal of divine truth, and an appraisal takes time and thought. It is like standing in a gallery before a great work of art. You don't want to rush it. I would suggest setting aside at least half an hour for each day's activity. It might also be good to take some personal notes. Consider these verses on Scripture, prayer, and spiritual work:

All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching (or "doctrine"), for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

If my people, who bear my name, humble themselves, pray and seek my face, and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14)

"For just as rain and snow fall from heaven and do not return there without saturating the earth and making it germinate and sprout, and providing seed to sow and food to eat, so my word that comes from my mouth will not return to me empty, but it will accomplish what I please and will prosper in what I send it to do." (Isaiah 55:10-11)

So there is work that God wants to do within our souls, and there is spiritual work for us to do in concert with God. Great things can happen when we look to God as our teacher, for God has already laid out a plan for our spiritual development!

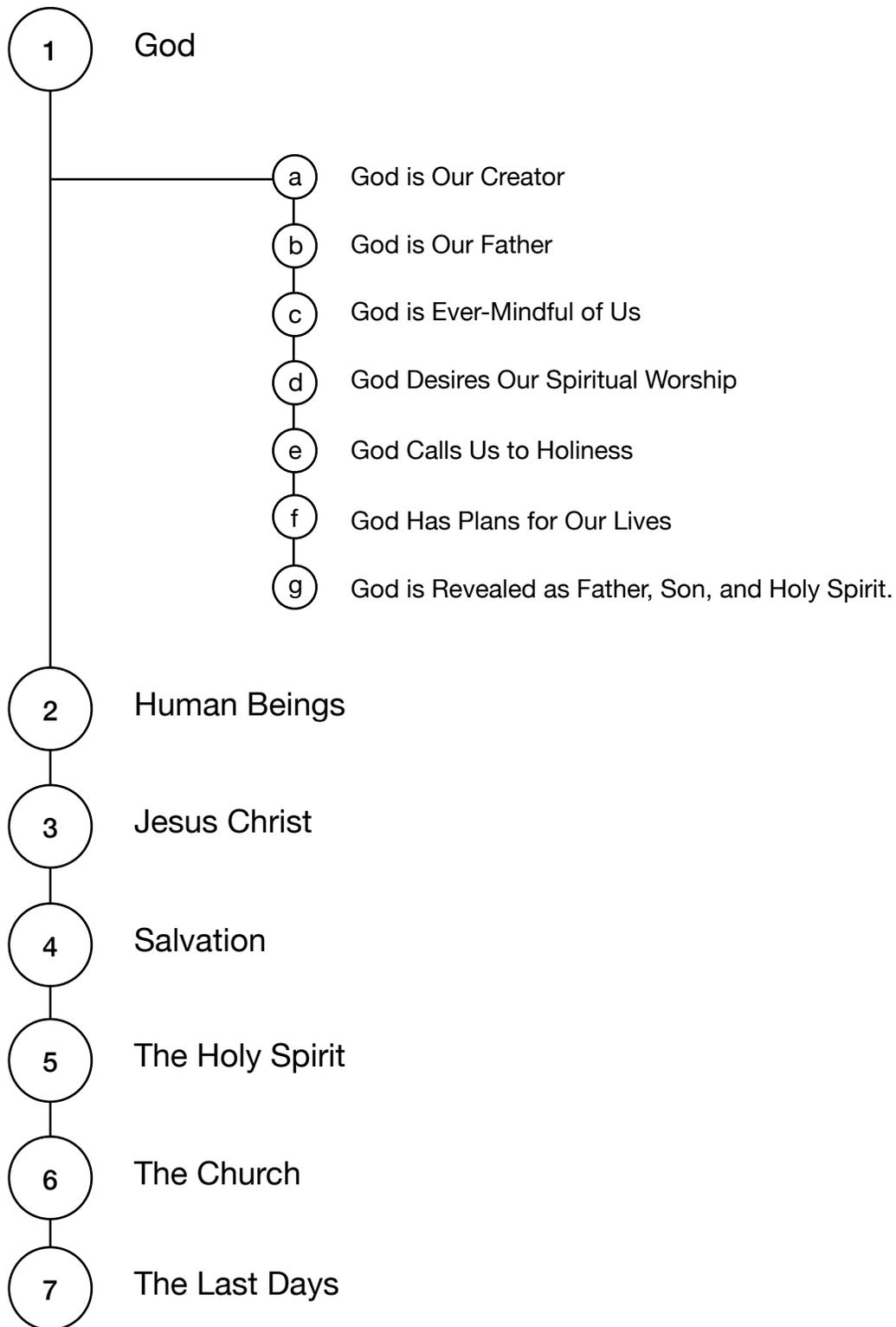
Lord, instill in all of us the desire to grow into spiritual maturity. Enable us to respond to your Word under the guidance and direction of your Holy Spirit. Then we will no longer be led astray by human craftiness, but our faith will rest on the solid and eternal doctrines of your holy church.

Life Application: Look to the Holy Spirit as Your Teacher

Think about how dependent you have been on human teachers and how easily they can go astray. Remember how Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would teach us all things and guide us into the way of all truth (John 14:26). Consider how excellent it would be to learn everything you need through direct communion with God through his living Word and Holy Spirit! God wants to relate to you for this very purpose. As you read each day, give time to allow the Holy Spirit to guide your thoughts, affections, and will. Keep a notebook and write down what you learn.

God

(Theology Prime)



DAY 3 - God is Our Creator

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...God saw all that he had made, and it was very good indeed. (Genesis 1:1 and 1:31)

God is the Creator of all things and has made this beautiful world to reflect and resonate His glory. God is our Creator, so each of us is made with love and purpose. God desires to be in a relationship with each one of us in deep fellowship and communion of the soul. Our awareness of God as Creator is an open door to a new way of life: a life filled with wonder and awe.

Almighty God, Creator of all things, what a joy it is to be immersed in your creation. What an all-surpassing joy to know that you have made me for yourself and opened my mind to know you. You are my Creator and I am your creature; I am grateful that you have made me and given me life! Let this gratitude be the foundation of my life, and let me walk each day in close fellowship with you.

Life Application: Return Thanks that You are God's Creation

Each of us must recapture the practice of meditating on God's Truth. The practice of meditation is not hard or laborious, but easy and delightful. Meditation is the practice of focused thinking on a particular truth while we allow it to penetrate the depths of our soul. But meditation is not a passive activity, such as watching the television or surfing the web. It is deliberate work! You must take the attitude, "I am now going to do some work in my soul!" Neither is meditation an impersonal or intellectual act, but one of intimate fellowship with God. Meditating on God's Word brings us close to God, which is a joy both to us and to God. Here's how you might meditate on the truth that God is our Creator.

Set aside a time. Go to a quiet place. Tell God you are ready to commune with Him. Think about the beauty of God's world and tell God how you appreciate it. Now think about how God has made you as His creature and offer your thanks to God that you belong to Him. Allow this joy to flood your soul. Take as much time as you need. Remain in the joy until it begins to fade.

Congratulations! You have taken your first step into a wonderful new world: the inner life of the soul. Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). Soon you will find that your inner life is larger than your outer life. God is in the center and waits for you to commune with Him. He is always available. Once you have meditated on a truth of God, you can return to it anytime and anywhere! Each time you meditate, the truth grows stronger and is reinforced. Each time you meditate, you will grow closer to God.

Day 4 - God is Our Father

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. (Romans 8:14-17)

God is your Heavenly Father and wants you to know how much you are loved. The love of a parent for a child is the world’s closest example of God’s amazing love for us, and so God invites us to call upon Him as Father. This is such an amazing privilege that it is hard for us to believe at first. To help us, God has sent his Holy Spirit to bear testimony to our spirit that we are indeed children of God. None of us are naturally-born children; everyone who sits at the table of the Lord is adopted. But God’s house has many rooms, and God’s table is long enough. Everyone is invited!

How grateful I am, Loving Father, to be adopted into the household of God! I have wandered on my own for far too long. I have tasted of the world’s corruption and become corrupted myself. But now you invite me in! I have a place at your table and a room in your house--places prepared just for me! Let me never wander again, but let me grow to spiritual maturity under your watchful direction and care.

Life Application: Reorient Yourself to the Household of God

As an adopted child, your first lesson is to become receptive to the unfailing love of God. There is no need to test the boundaries of God’s love, for His love for you will never fail. God always remains faithful to us, even when our faithfulness fails. When God opens His heart to you, He will never go back on His decision, so you are free to love God in return.

The second lesson is to begin to orient yourself to your new way of life as a member of God’s household. The ways of the kingdom of God are the opposite of the ways of the world, and so your reorientation will take time and effort. You will need to be patient with yourself as you learn. God understands how difficult this process is and will give you all the grace you need. You will also have to be patient with the other members of God’s household as they likewise learn. Everyone in God’s house is an adopted child in a process of reorientation. Express to God your willingness to learn the ways of the kingdom.

Day 5 - God is Ever-Mindful of Us

Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I stand up; you understand my thoughts from far away. You observe my travels and my rest; you are aware of all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, you know all about it, Lord. You have encircled me; you have placed your hand on me. This wondrous knowledge is beyond me. It is lofty; I am unable to reach it. (Psalm 139:1-6)

God is always thinking about you. If you want an intimate relationship with God, He already desires this with you and has done everything necessary on His end. God watches over you each moment and is continually focused on your good. God is able to do this with you and each of his children because of His eternal nature and divine power. When our minds are opened to see God as our Creator and Father, we are invited into a relationship of profound intimacy. God intends for us to live in perpetual communion and harmony with Him at all times and in all places.

Heavenly Father, it is a glorious and humbling thing to know that you are ever-mindful of me. You are focused on my good at all times and in all places. In response to your mindfulness of me, teach me to be ever-mindful of you. Show me how to live in constant awareness of your presence and power. Enable me to walk on the new path of spiritual life that you have set before me. Reveal to me your purposes and your plans. Let me always rely upon the spiritual wisdom and strength you are ready to supply.

Life Application: Become Ever-Mindful of God

If God is ever-mindful of us, then we can become ever-mindful of God. This mindfulness is not our intuitive nature, for we are fallen creatures; it must be learned and practiced. Practicing the presence of God is not difficult, but simple. All that is required of us is our time and attention. Practicing the presence of God opens new possibilities for us. It enables the growth of our spiritual life, sets our souls at ease, and brings different outcomes. You can begin by choosing specific times and places to open yourself to God. Also, you can learn to pause throughout the day to center yourself in God, simply reminding yourself of God's presence and love. Remember, God is already fully disposed toward you. Each moment that you turn to God, you will find Him fully available.

Day 6 - God Desires Our Spiritual Worship

Jesus told her, “Believe me, woman, an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth. Yes, the Father wants such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and in truth.” (John 4:21- 24)

God desires our spiritual worship. This is why he has given us his Holy Spirit to awaken and commune with our spirit. Our spirit is the faculty of the human soul that enables us to commune with God. In our natural condition, the spirit lies dead and dormant until the Holy Spirit awakens it. This is what it means to be born again. Once our spirit is awakened, we can commune directly with God. Although to some measure our external expressions of worship may be pleasing to God, he is seeking something deeper. So should we.

Lord, as you have awakened my spirit, teach me to worship you spiritually. Help me to see that even the most glorious external expressions of our adoration cannot begin to compare with the humblest act of true spiritual worship. Teach me to worship you in the manner that is most pleasing to you. Draw me day-by-day into a closer walk with you, for your glory, and the joy of my soul.

Life Application: Learn to Worship God Spiritually

All of us must learn to worship God spiritually. Because we are material creatures, we are easily distracted by external things. The great cathedrals of Europe are wonders to behold, designed to fill people’s senses with beauty and inspire a sense of awe. In the modern era, we seek the same sensory fulfillment with stunning visuals and glorious sounds. All of this can indeed be magnifying of God and joyful for us, but Jesus told the woman at the well that God was seeking something else. God seeks our spiritual worship, the communion of our soul. God always draws near to those who humble themselves. To worship well, we do not need glorious external things that satisfy our senses. The simplest of prayer offered by someone who is poor in spirit is accepted and blessed by God.

Day 7 - God Calls Us to Holiness

But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy. (1 Peter 1:15-16)

Holiness is a necessary characteristic of all those who would follow after God. There are two basic meanings to the idea of holiness. The first means “different” or “set apart,” just as a temple or church building is different from a common home and set apart for a special purpose. So the people of God are to be set apart for God’s special purposes. The second meaning of holiness is “moral purity.” Our thoughts, words, and actions should all match our profession of faith. Living in holiness means that there is to be no inconsistency between our profession of faith and our thoughts and actions. The whole of our life should be glorifying to God.

Lord God, your call to holiness is right and good, for you want those who bear your name to reflect your character. You desire that there would be no inconsistency in our words or actions, nor any love for sin hidden in our thoughts. I confess that sin has invaded every area of my life, and so I ask for your help. By your Holy Spirit, move me decisively from a life of duplicity and sin to a life of holiness and blessing.

Life Application: Pursue Holiness

God knows that we cannot fulfill his call to holiness by our own power or strength. This is why he sent his Son Jesus Christ, first to set us free from the power of sin through his atoning death on the cross, and then to empower us for holiness by giving us his own Holy Spirit. God also knows that the movement toward holiness is a long and arduous process, one that we will work on throughout the courses of our lives. But each day we can take a step forward! As we listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit himself will show us which steps God wants us to take. So keep your spiritual ears open to the voice of God’s spirit. When God reveals something he wants to be changed, make the change right away! Joy and peace will follow shortly.

Day 8 - God Has Plans for Our Lives

For I know the plans I have for you”—this is the Lord’s declaration—“plans for your well-being, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. You will call to me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart. (Jeremiah 29:11-13)

God has plans for your life and they are good plans indeed! But God’s plans can be realized only when we seek God’s will with all of our hearts. At the time of Jeremiah’s writing, the people of Israel had fallen away by seeking other gods. God enacted a judgment against them and they were about to be sent away into exile for 70 years. But through Jeremiah, God declared his unfailing love and promised their restoration. God’s good plans are always available to us. It is we who go astray, and by going astray we suspend God’s plans. To reenact them, we need only repent of our sin, turn from our ways, and begin to seek God with our whole heart.

Lord, show me how to seek you with my whole heart. I confess that I have loved the ways of this world rather than your ways. I confess that I have sought my own plans rather than your plans. Teach me now to love your kingdom and hate the corruption of sin. Let me lay aside my plans and trust in your plans, plans that will lead me to the abundant life you intend for all your children.

Life Application: Embrace God’s Plans

God wants us to seek him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and as a result of our seeking, God will reveal his good plans for us. This is what Jesus meant when he said, “Seek and you will find” (Matthew 7:7). But let’s be clear about this, we should be seeking God above all things; the blessings that follow are nice but irrelevant. Sometimes we get this backward and begin to seek the blessings as a primary goal. So let’s be clear: God will not bless a life that relegates him to a secondary role. If we set our relationship with God first, we will soon see a new pathway emerge and God’s plans will begin to materialize. So don’t worry so much about the stuff of this world and stop trying to use God to obtain earthly blessings. Invest all your energy into seeking God, and He will be your great reward! Surrender your worldly plans and embrace God’s heavenly plans. Everything else will follow.

Day 9 - God is Revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

The Trinity explains how God has chosen to reach out to His creation. The Father is Spirit, the God who created the material universe and loves human beings as His children. The Son is Jesus Christ, God in the flesh who became fully human and walked among us. The Holy Spirit is the same Spirit that was in Jesus Christ and can dwell within us. The Holy Spirit works to restore us to God’s original design and purpose. Jesus instructed his disciples to baptize others in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, recognizing the activity of each manifestation of God in the redemption of the human soul.

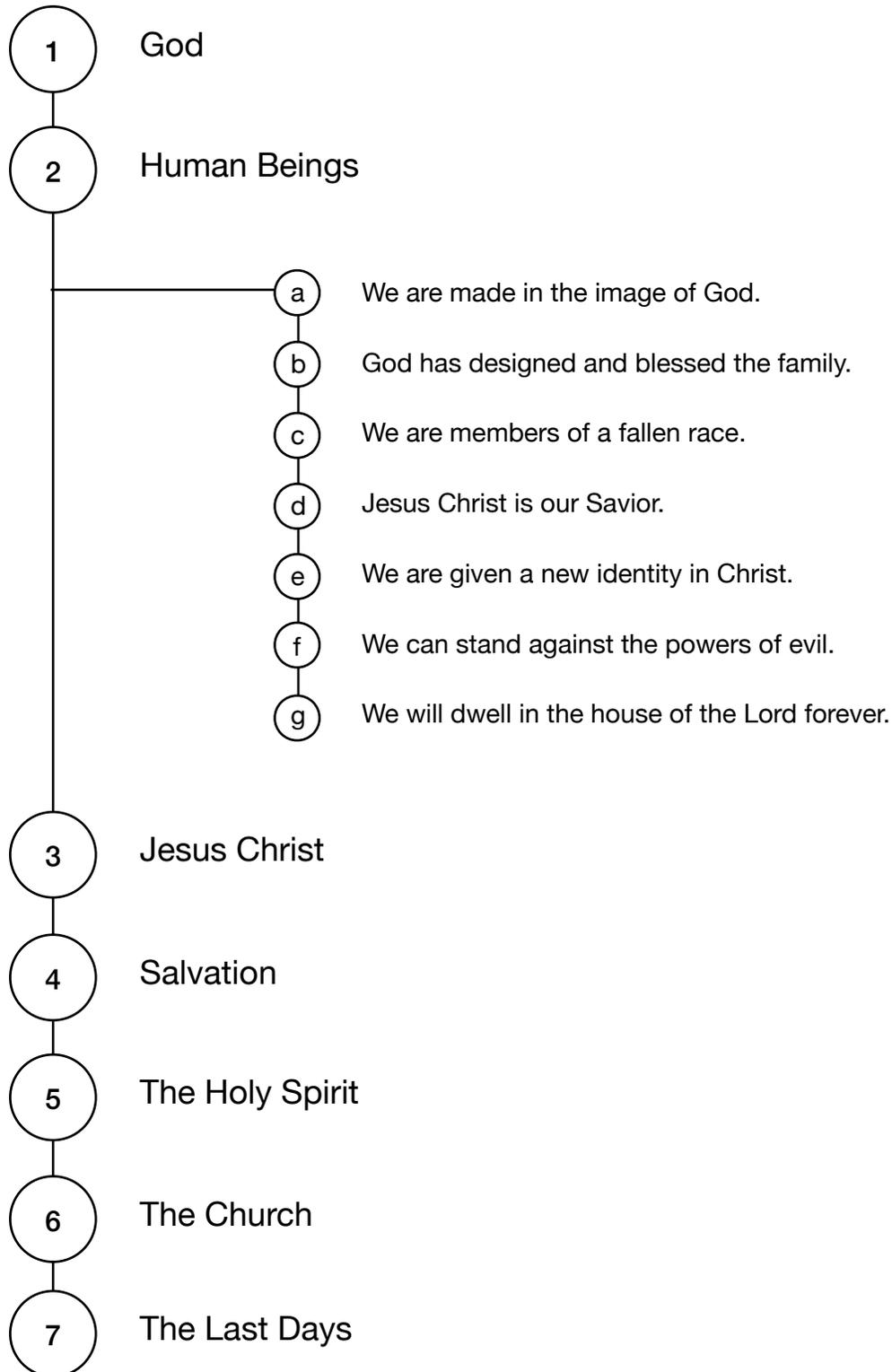
Heavenly Father, you are our Creator and have made us as an expression of your love and grace. Lord Jesus Christ, you came down from heaven to teach us the ways of God and to redeem us through your death upon the cross. Holy Spirit, you have taken up residence within us to repair the damage of sin and restore us to the life God intends. Holy Trinity, restore us fully to yourself, fill us with your love, and claim us as your people. Let us live in the joy of our redemption and in hope for the eternal kingdom you have prepared.

Life Application: Worship God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Each person of the Trinity shows us how we can respond to God. Our daily devotional worship can follow a trinitarian pattern. First, we can express love to God as a good heavenly Father who has created us and watches over us. Second, we can give thanks for the redemptive work of Christ, commit ourselves to live as his disciples and pledge our allegiance to his kingdom. Finally, we can invite the Holy Spirit to open our minds to God’s truth and follow His direction. Through worshipping the Trinity, we can enjoy a rich, beautiful, and intimate relationship with the God who has created us, redeemed us and resides within us.

Human Beings

(Christian Anthropology)



Day 10 - We Are Made in the Image of God

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.” So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female. (Genesis 1:26-27)

God has made human beings in His own image, both in the formation of our soul and the role that we have in God's world. First, God has made human beings to bear his attributes. As God has a mind, a heart, and a will, so do we. With our mind, we can understand the world the way God understands it. With our heart, we can love the things that God loves. And with our will, we can make choices in alignment with God's purposes. God has also made us to share in His characteristics, the sum of which we call “holiness.”

The image of God qualifies us to serve as stewards of God's creation. We own nothing ourselves but are entrusted with great treasures and profound responsibilities. Even our own lives do not belong to us, but to God. If we serve well, God will commend us and bless us with greater responsibilities. All this is preparation for the kingdom yet to come where we shall reign eternally with Christ.

Almighty God, you have created us in your image to serve as stewards of your creation. This stewardship is a profound responsibility and a great joy. Teach us to serve well with each responsibility you give. First, help us to turn our eyes inward so that we might tend to our soul and seek the attributes of holiness. Then turn our eyes outward to consider all you have entrusted to us as blessings to be used for your purposes and for your kingdom.

Life Application: Become a Steward of God's Possessions

You were made to rule! As you seek the ways of God, God will begin to entrust you with various measures of responsibility. If you serve well, God will entrust more to your oversight. If you are negligent, even what you have will be taken away. Take time to consider the responsibilities that God has given to you. First, reflect inwardly and realize that God has given you responsibility for your own soul. As you tend to your soul, it will become a place of beauty where God will store spiritual treasures such as love, joy, peace, and kindness. Then turn your attention outwardly and see the many external responsibilities that God has entrusted to your care. Every relationship you have is a gift and one that can prosper under God's guidance. Your work is a gift through which God can bring blessings to you and to others. Everything you possess materially is also God's gift to be used for God's purposes. Consider everything through the lens of stewardship and use what you are given, whatever it may be, for the glory of the God who gave it.

DAY 11 - God Designed and Blessed the Family

“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that he who created them in the beginning made them male and female, and he also said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.” (Matthew 19:4-6)

In this passage, Jesus is quoting Moses’ description of the human family found in the Book of Genesis. The Israelites had been practicing a policy of “divorce for any reason” and wanted to justify themselves. Their coldness of heart angered Jesus who began his answer “haven’t you read,” which was a severe insult to the scribes, Pharisees, and teachers of the law. Of course, they had read God’s Word, but they did not like what it said. In quoting Moses, Jesus is reminding them of God’s original design for the human family. He then added his own comment, “Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate,” signifying God’s direct and intimate activity in the joining together of every husband and wife.

Heavenly Father, as you have designed and blessed each marriage, let us come to an understanding that our marriages are not a relationship of two people, but three. Teach us to value marriage as the highest form of human relationship, reflective of the love of Christ for his church. Protect our marriages from the many worldly influences that currently strain them. Let our homes be the places of blessing and havens of peace for your Glory and for our joy.

Life Application: Focus on Marriage and Family

Marriage and family is God’s basic design for human society which was enacted before the fall of humanity and carries a divine blessing. Marriage is not only an earthly blessing, but draws us nearer to God. The love of husband and wife is like the love of God for His church. Marriage is the means by which God offers us many blessings, such as love, grace, kindness, and faithfulness. Yet in our culture today, marriages are under attack like never before! Our enemy knows that if he can destroy this divine institution, he can fragment, isolate, and destroy many lives. Our current cultural distress is a direct result of broken marriages and failed families. To counter the enemy’s destructive activity, the church should first recognize the importance of marriage. We should pray that God would strengthen our marriages. We should invest our time and energy to ensure the preservation of marriages and the strengthening of families. There is much for us to do together!

DAY 12 - We are Members of a Fallen Race

“No! You will certainly not die,” the serpent said to the woman. “In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” The woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. (Genesis 3:4-6)

Here is the great lie that started our fall. It is the lie that God’s Word is false and that God is keeping us from achieving its full potential. It is the severing of the human will from seeking God’s purposes to seeking its own. The fall of Eve shows the general pattern of all temptation. First, her mind justifies her disobedience, represented in her reasoning that the tree was good for food. Then her heart embraces a corrupted desire, represented in her consideration that the fruit was delightful to look at. Finally, her will is stimulated by the desire for self-rule, represented in her recognition that the fruit was desirable for obtaining wisdom. These fall like dominoes, but it is the lie that starts the fall.

Lord, you have spoken your truth, but we have believed lies instead. Forgive us for listening to the lies of this world rather than your truthful Word. Forgive us for following our desire for self-rule rather than submitting to your rule. Deliver us from the terrible consequences of our disobedience. Open our ears again to hear your truth. Restore us by speaking your Word. Lead us from a life of willful disobedience to a life of willing obedience.

Life Application: Pursue Truth

All sin begins with a lie, and we are living in a world filled with lies. Because we are fallen creatures and members of a fallen race, the lies of this world are attractive to us. At their root, they appeal to our desire for self-rule. But all of them lead to suffering, sorrow, and separation from God. Consider the sins you struggle with and try to understand their root. For each sin, there is a corresponding truth that comes from God. Jesus said, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free!” (John 8:32). As you find the corresponding truth of God, embrace it fully and joyfully. Only God’s truth will set you free from the lies you have willingly believed. But once you believe God’s Word, a new path will emerge, the pathway of life and blessing.

DAY 13 - Jesus Christ is Our Savior

But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

The message of the cross is simple: Christ died for us. The death of Jesus Christ is an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the entire world. Through the cross, God has justified the world to himself so that now no barrier remains between us and God. Everyone who puts their faith in Jesus Christ can be saved! More than this, the salvation Jesus offers is an act of pure grace. None of us can take any credit or claim any merit. Jesus gave his life while all of us were lost in sin.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for entering this dark world to save us. Thank you for surrendering your life to redeem sinners such as we all are. Remind us that your salvation is an act of grace, offered to all who acknowledge their sin and turn to you. Teach us to rest in the grace you offer and entrust our future into your loving and gracious care.

Life Application: Trust in the Saving Work of Christ

It is a beautiful thing to rest solely in the grace of Christ. It is a comfort to the soul to recognize that we are saved by grace, sinners that we all are. Yet after being saved, some believers secretly hold on to a notion that they have in some way merited their salvation. They forget how lost they were and abandon the humility that brought them to Christ. We can never forget! Each day, we should humble ourselves before God and thank Christ for the salvation he has offered. Pride gets in our way. God will never allow us to take credit for our salvation nor for any blessing he brings. But humility honors God and keeps us receptive to the daily blessings God offers everyone in his household.

DAY 14 - We are Given a New Identity in Christ

But that is not how you came to know Christ, assuming you heard about him and were taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus, to take off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires, to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, the one created according to God's likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth. (Ephesians 4:20-24)

We are given a new identity in Jesus Christ! To embrace this new identity, Saint Paul prescribes three actions: We must take off our former way of life; we must be renewed in our minds; and we must put on the new self. All of these are things we must do, but they are also done through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit at work within us. These are not easy things to do but require our attention and effort. But they are indeed things we can do and will experience great progress as we do them.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for teaching us the ways of God. Enable me, by the power of your Spirit, to follow through with your prescription: to take off my former way of life, to be renewed in the ways that I think, and to put on the new self.

Life Application: Live into Your New Identity

This new life is not achieved through passivity but activity. Each of these prescriptions requires our intentional effort. First, we should allow the Holy Spirit to show us the ways of our living that need adjustment or change. Second, we should spend time thinking about the way that we think. We should ask ourselves why we are behaving this way. To renew our minds, we might find the Scriptures that relate to the circumstances we are facing. The renewal of our mind is at the center of our transformation. Finally, we must find the corresponding actions of the kingdom of God that replace our former actions. The three actions together can be compared to the changing of our clothing. We have been clothed with the world's ways of living and have become contaminated. We must take off these ways, clean ourselves, and put on new ways. And this should be done daily. So set in place a time and place each day where you can reflect, rethink, and relearn.

DAY 15 - We can Stand Against the Powers of Evil

Ephesians 6:10-18 Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength. Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens. For this reason take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand. Stand, therefore, with truth like a belt around your waist, righteousness like armor on your chest, and your feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace. In every situation take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit—which is the word of God. Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints.

Even while we struggle to follow after Jesus and seek to reorient ourselves to the kingdom of God, we have an enemy that works against us. Our enemy has schemes, but we can stand against him. God is good and provides us with everything we need: truth, righteousness, readiness, faith, salvation, and the Word of God. And the Lord himself is with us to strengthen us.

Almighty God, thank you for the strength you provide. Thank you for equipping me to take my stand against the devil's many schemes. Keep me alert and make me wise so that I can withstand the onslaught of his attacks. Uphold me with your mighty hand. Teach me to fight against my enemy and bestow upon me the victory that is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Life Application: Stand Against Evil

Throughout the course of our lives, we should take the attitude of a soldier. This world is not our home; it is a battlefield. There are many challenges to our soul, but we can overcome them all. Jesus Christ himself will equip us and train us. The enemy stands against our spiritual progress. He stands between us and the goal of God's heavenly call. So we must fight against him.

We should note that all of the equipment mentioned in Paul's list are defensive armor save one, which is the Word of God. God's Word is the sword by which we can attack and defeat the enemy. Jesus demonstrated the use of this sword in his temptation in the wilderness. With every temptation, Jesus quoted the Scriptures. He not only quoted them but was living by them. So we also must seek to live by the powerful Word of God. In doing so, we will overcome the enemy and obtain the victory God has in store for us.

DAY 16 - We Will Dwell in the House of the Lord Forever

“Don’t let your heart be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also. (John 14:1-3)

In the upper room, Jesus began to tell his disciples that he was about to leave them. They were distressed, but Jesus spoke words of comfort to them, telling them of their eternal home. This world is not our home; we are just passing through. Our final destination is the place Jesus is preparing for us. With this knowledge, we can lift our eyes from the troubles of this world and set them on our eternal home.

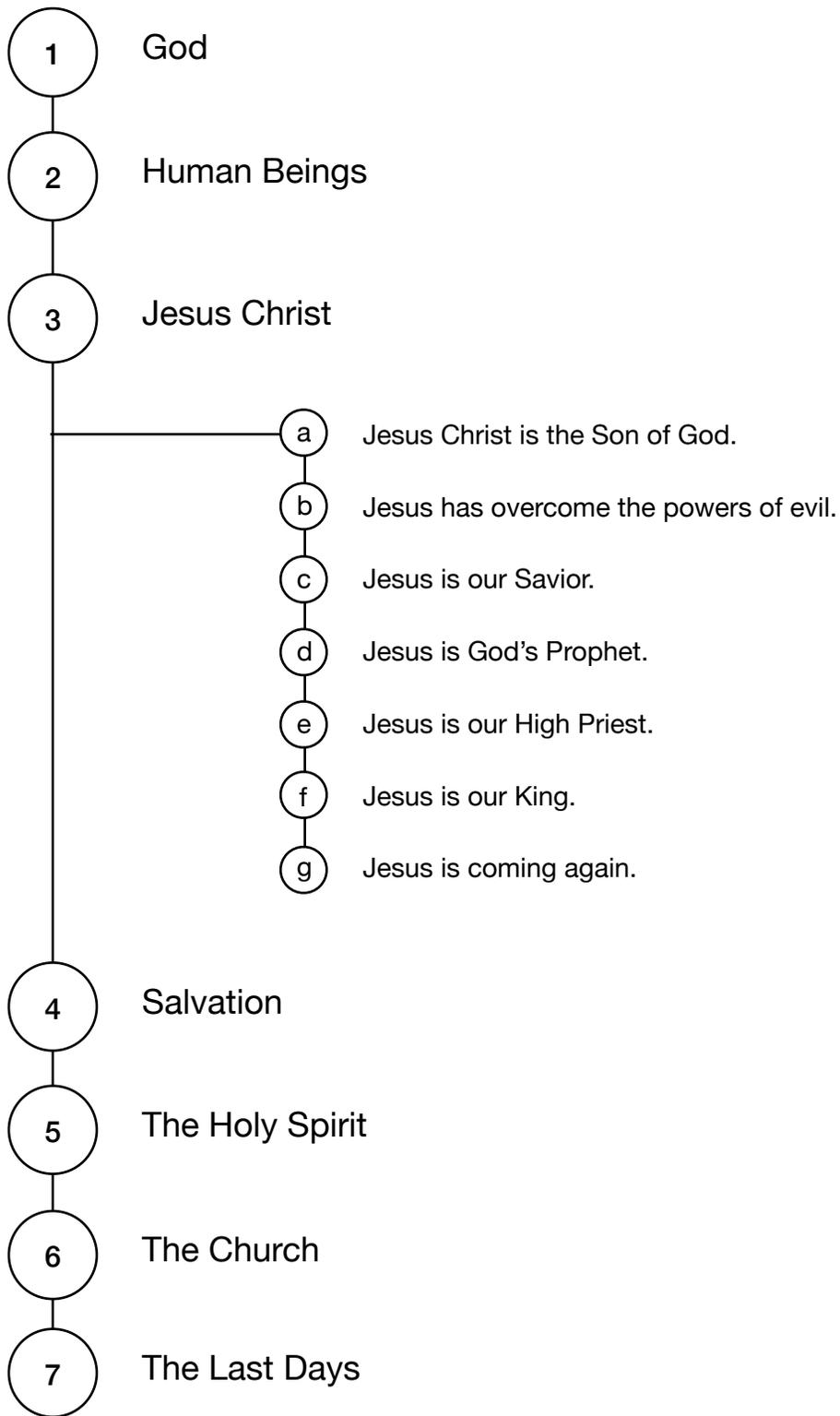
Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for the home you are preparing for me. Help me to see beyond the troubles of this world and show me how to prepare myself for my eternal home.

Life Application: Prepare for Your Future Home

If Jesus is preparing a place for us, then we should also be preparing ourselves. Our focus should not be so much on the material things of this world but on spiritual things the kingdom of God. We should refocus our energies from things that are passing away to things that are eternal and permanent. We should allow the Holy Spirit, which is the Spirit of Christ, to do his work within us. Time is of the essence, for our days here are quickly passing. The work we do now within our soul will have a lasting impact on our eternal life with God. So do the work! God has put you in authority over your own soul. Divest your energy from the troublesome things of this earthly life, things that may or may not ever be resolved. Invest your energy in the eternal things of God’s kingdom, where treasures last eternally.

Jesus Christ

(Christology)



DAY 17 - Jesus is the Son of God

Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, the Son is not able to do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son likewise does these things. For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he is doing, and he will show him greater works than these so that you will be amazed. And just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son also gives life to whom he wants. The Father, in fact, judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, so that all people may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. (John 5:19-23)

Jesus Christ is the Son of God, which means that God has entrusted all authority to him. In the ancient world, a son would inherit his father’s possessions and take authority over his household. So it is with Jesus Christ. In his teachings, Jesus demonstrated that he understands the mind of God. Through his miracles, he displayed the power God has given him over all creation. In his suffering and death, he expressed the love of God in full measure. And in his resurrection, he proved that God has given him the power of eternal life. God has also entrusted the final judgment of all humanity to his Son, who, at the end of this age, will determine our eternal destiny. So all of us must honor the Son, even as we honor the Father. The Two are One.

Lord Jesus Christ, we celebrate the authority the Father has given you and happily acknowledge you as the Lord of heaven and earth. We offer ourselves as individuals to serve you in whatever way you choose. We offer our church to serve as a center for the expansion of your kingdom. We ask that you would take your rightful place as the head of our church and ask for your direction and guidance in all that we do. Be glorified among us as our Teacher, Savior, Friend, and King.

Life Application: Give Your Allegiance to Christ

Give Jesus Christ your allegiance for he is the Son of God. God sent Jesus into the world to establish the kingdom of God. Jesus holds all power and authority so that every human being will ultimately kneel before him. We must do so now and begin to serve his kingdom.

DAY 18 - Jesus has Overcome the Powers of Evil

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. Then the tempter approached him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." He answered, "It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. Then the devil took him to the holy city, had him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will give his angels orders concerning you, and they will support you with their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." Jesus told him, "It is also written: Do not test the Lord your God." Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. And he said to him, "I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me. Then Jesus told him, "Go away, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him." Then the devil left him, and angels came and began to serve him. (Matthew 4:1-11)

This is one of those rare moments in history when the entire future of the human race rested on the decisions of a single person. God made Jesus Christ the second Adam, the second representative of the entire human race. He did this at Jesus' baptism when the Holy Spirit descended upon him. Overcoming the temptations of the Devil was the first and necessary step. Like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the future of humanity was now in Jesus' hands. If he fell into sin, there would be no hope for us. But if he overcame, all things would be possible! And Jesus overcame! Now he is our Champion who is able to overcome all the powers of evil. After this, the angelic host began to serve him. And the demons trembled in fear when he appeared.

Lord Jesus Christ, you are our Champion, the one who fights for us and with us. As you overcame all the powers of evil, teach us to do the same.

Life Application: Pray in the Name of Jesus

When we pray, "in the name of Jesus," we are recognizing his authority and claiming to be acting as his representatives. Our prayers should focus not only on things we need but against the powers of evil. We should certainly pray for our family and friends, for wisdom, strength, and all things necessary for our spiritual growth. But we should also pray against the enemy, against the evil powers of this world, against temptation and the schemes of the Devil. In doing so, we must learn to use the name of Jesus, for even the powers of evil must acknowledge his authority and obey.

DAY 19 - Jesus is our Savior

But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:20-21)

The very name of Jesus expresses the reason God sent him into the world. His name literally means “Yahweh saves!” “Yahweh” is the Old Testament name for God which means “I Am.” It is the name God gave himself when Moses spoke to God at the burning bush and asked, “Who shall I say is sending me.” God replied, “I Am that I Am; So you will say the people, ‘I Am’ has sent me to you.” Jesus is the Son of God, so he is the “I Am” in the flesh. His purpose is to save us from our sins. Jesus accomplished this work on the cross, where he gave his life for our redemption and in payment for our sins. He completes this work by the outpouring of his Holy Spirit into our lives. The Holy Spirit helps to repair the damage caused by our sin and shows us how to live new lives for God.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for the salvation you offer through the cross. You have saved us by your atoning death and you have shown us the new ways of God by your Holy Spirit. Empower us now to live as redeemed people so that sin will no longer have any dominion over us.

Life Application: Trust in the Salvation of Christ

First, we must trust in the salvation that Jesus Christ offers to us. His death on the cross is a full, complete, and perfect atonement for the sins of the entire world. If Jesus forgives us, we need no further redemption. But more than this, Jesus has saved us so that we can live a new and holy life, one in alignment with the purposes of God. Therefore, we must trust in the leading of his Holy Spirit. Each day that we live, we must pay attention to the promptings of his Spirit at work within us. If there is a sinful thought pattern or habit, the Holy Spirit will show us what needs to be changed. Also, the Spirit will reveal the new patterns we must pursue. Salvation is more than an event, it is a life God calls us to live.

DAY 20 - Jesus is God's Prophet - Matthew 7:28-29

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, because he was teaching them like one who had authority, and not like their scribes. (Matthew 7:28-29)

At the conclusion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, the people recognized that he spoke with God's authority. The people confessed they had never heard anyone speak this way. In the Old Testament, God created three separate offices of leadership to govern his people: the prophet, the priest, and the King. Yet the prophets foretold the coming of a time when a single individual would hold all three offices: the Messiah, God's anointed one. The prophet's role was to speak God's living word to the people. Occasionally they would foretell the future, but most of the time they would interpret current events from God's perspective. They would call the people to repent and would teach them the ways of God. Jesus Christ came into the world to do exactly this, and the people who heard him were astonished by his wisdom.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for serving as our prophet to reveal the ways of God. Help me to understand your teachings and show me how to put them into practice.

Life Application: Listen to His Teachings

Every follower of Jesus Christ should read his teachings on a daily basis. In the same way that we feed our bodies with food, we should also feed our souls with spiritual truth. Jesus is ready to offer this truth to us, and if we open ourselves to his teachings, Jesus himself will lead us forward step-by-step. Everything he offers us has immediate application and will enable us to progress into the life of blessing God offers.

DAY 21 - Jesus is our High Priest

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens— Jesus the Son of God—let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need. (Hebrews 4:14-16)

Jesus Christ made payment on the cross for the sins of the entire world. Having risen from the dead, Jesus now serves as our great high priest who intercedes for us. Because of his faithfulness in fulfilling the Father's purposes, God has given to Jesus the authority to forgive sins. Jesus is not only ready to forgive all those who turn to him, but he is also able to help break the power sin has had over us and lead us into a life of righteousness.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for your faithfulness to the Father's purpose. Thank you for enduring the cross for my redemption. Please forgive me of my sin and liberate me from the power sin has had over me. Lead me into a life of righteousness and joy.

Life Application: Come to Jesus for Forgiveness

The first application is that we must come before Jesus to obtain the forgiveness of our sins. God has entrusted this authority to his Son so that everyone would honor the Son even as they honor the Father. The forgiveness of sin is not an impersonal process but one that requires us to engage with Christ on a deeply personal level. We must humble ourselves before the One who gave his life for us! Likewise, when we ask for forgiveness, we should not do so lightly or flippantly, but with great sincerity, recognizing the price Jesus paid for our redemption.

The second application is that having been forgiven, we should work to lead a new life. Jesus does not forgive us so that we can return to a life dominated by the power of sin, but Jesus intends to set us free. For some believers, liberation from sin can happen immediately upon conversion. They come to Christ, and he sets them free. For others, liberation from sin is a long process marked by great conflict and struggle. Either pathway leads to new life. The point is that Jesus intends not only to forgive us but to liberate us. We must desire both forgiveness and liberation.

DAY 22 - Jesus is Our King

“I continued watching in the night visions, and suddenly one like a son of man was coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was escorted before him. He was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, so that those of every people, nation, and language should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:13-14)

The Prophet Daniel was given a vision of Jesus Christ upon his ascension into heaven. Jesus often used the phrase "Son of Man " when referring to himself in reference to this passage. In doing so, he was claiming to be the Messiah and Son of God to whom the Father had entrusted his eternal kingdom. Incidentally, when the disciples were gathered on the Mount of Ascension and saw Jesus go into heaven, they were viewing the event Daniel had prophesied from an earthly perspective. Daniel's vision and Jesus' Ascension are the same event seen from two different perspectives. What we learn from this passage is that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus Christ, and his kingdom is one that will never pass away.

Lord Jesus Christ, you alone are worthy to govern all Humanity. I celebrate the authority the Father has given to you to reign over Heaven and Earth. In joy, I commit myself to serve you as my king and to work for the expansion of your kingdom according to your good purposes and plans for my life.

Life Application: Serve His Kingdom

As Jesus Christ has become king, so we must serve his kingdom! To do so requires us to surrender all other allegiances we may be holding onto, whether to human governments or human ideologies. We must then undergo a process of reorientation to the values and principles of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. This process is called "discipleship." As we grow in our walk as disciples of Jesus Christ, he will give us the authority to serve as his representatives in the world and invest in us various responsibilities over his kingdom. These responsibilities are a profound privilege and can only be fulfilled by the empowerment of his Holy Spirit. Yet if we pledge ourselves to his kingdom, he will surely and graciously accept us as his servants!

DAY 23 - Jesus is Coming Again!

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” (Matthew 25:31-32)

Jesus Christ is returning; thanks be to God! When Jesus returns, it will be the end of human history as we know it. Every human being will be gathered before him, and he will separate us one from another, as he explained in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. Those who have acted in love towards others will inherit the kingdom of God. And those who have acted only in self-interest will be cast out into outer darkness eternally. Our actions on earth determine the eternal destiny of our souls. Jesus gave this parable both to teach us and to warn us of his inevitable return and the very terms by which he will judge all humanity.

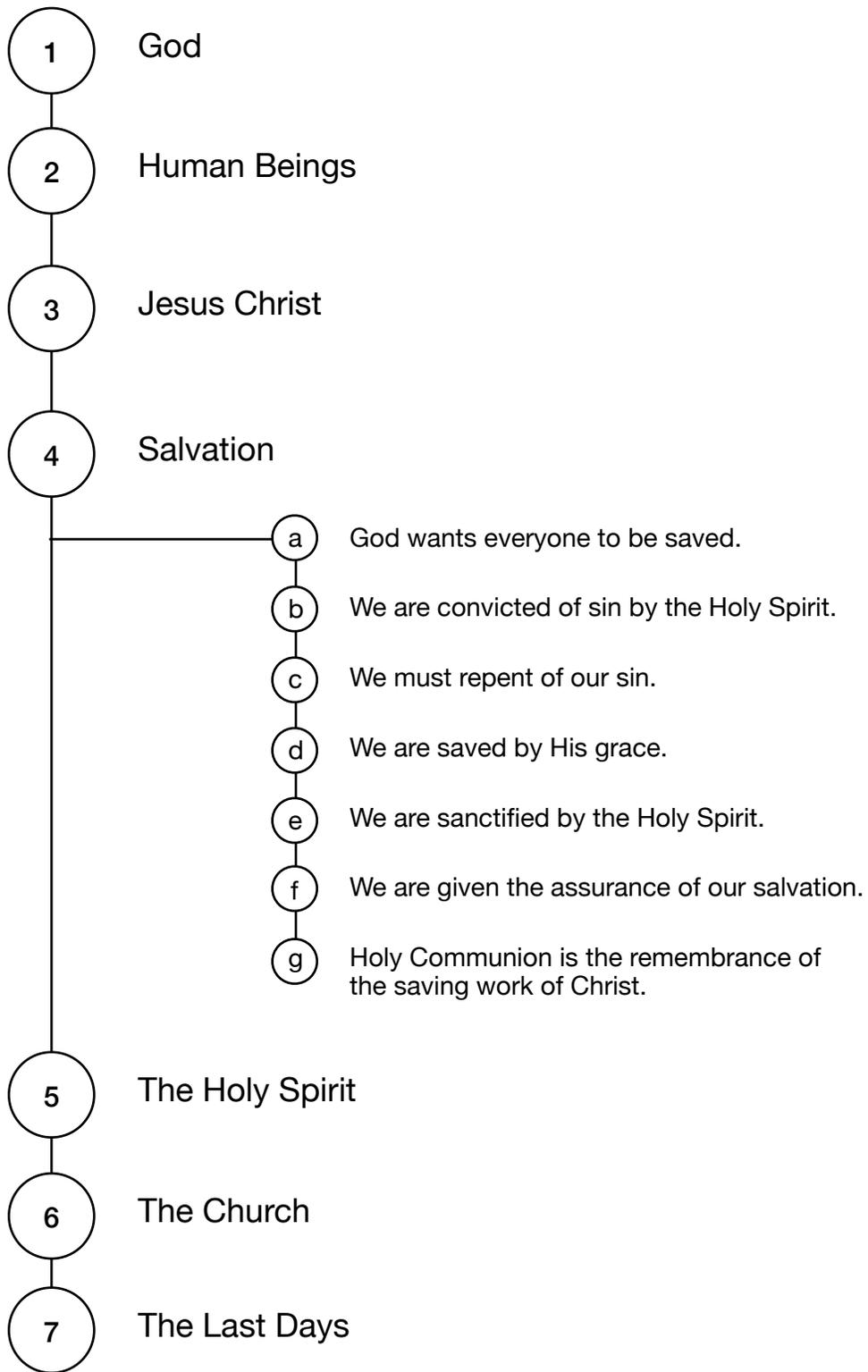
Lord Jesus Christ, I welcome your return! Let your Holy Spirit work within my soul to prepare me for the eternal kingdom. Show me the things that I must do as well as the things I must lay aside. Let my time on Earth be a time of preparation for your glorious return and the establishment of the eternal kingdom of God.

Life Application: Prepare for His Return!

If Jesus is returning, and he certainly is, then we should use the time we are given to prepare ourselves. Jesus has hidden nothing from us but has taught us everything we need to do. We must repent of our sin. We must learn to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. And we must learn to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. In the three Preparation Parables of Matthew 25, there are consistent themes. In each of them, there are those who by their faithfulness are fully prepared for the Master's return. Likewise in each of them, there are those who are negligent and fail in their responsibility. When Jesus returns, no one will be able to claim they have not been sufficiently warned. Take stock of your life right now! The return of Jesus Christ will take everyone by surprise, religious people included, but this does not mean that we cannot be fully prepared.

Salvation

(Soteriology)



DAY 24 - God Desires Everyone to be Saved

First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all those who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good, and it pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:1-4)

God is already disposed favorably toward every human being and desires that everyone would be saved. All that remains is for us to receive God's gracious offer. Once we receive God's offer of salvation, God will reveal to us his truth and will enable us to understand our lives and our world from his perspective. He will show us the way things truly are. And when we understand God's truth, our new awareness will lead us to the beautiful life of blessing and peace that God intends for all of his children. Salvation is therefore more than hope for the future; it is a life for us to live every day.

Heavenly Father, thank you that you are already favorably disposed toward every person. Thank you for the love that you have shown to me personally. Teach me to abide in your love each and every day. Also teach me to show love toward every person I encounter, even as you have loved them.

Life Application: Look Upon Everyone as One Whom God Wants to Save.

The first application is for us to set aside every false notion of God that has hindered our forward progress. Many people, even many Christians, think that God is against them, when in truth, God is always for us. With the knowledge of God's love, we can approach God with confidence knowing that God will not only receive us, but lead us forward into the life he has planned for us.

The second application is for us to view other people favorably the same way that God does, even the people who irritate us or whom we consider our enemies. When we embrace the fact that Jesus Christ gave his life for the sins of the entire world, our attitude toward others will change dramatically. We will learn to show grace and kindness in the same way God does. And in doing so, we will become useful to God as ambassadors of his grace.

DAY 25 - We are Convicted of Sin by the Holy Spirit

Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth. It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don't go away the Counselor will not come to you. If I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment: About sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will no longer see me; and about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. (John 16:7-11)

Our Salvation is in two parts. First, Jesus Christ offered his life on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins. When we believe in him, we are justified before God and saved from sin. But second, Jesus intends to lead us into a new way of living. He does this by sending His Holy Spirit to reside within us. The Spirit convicts us of sin and of righteousness. When the Spirit convicts us, if we are not careful, we may misinterpret the Spirit's conviction as condemnation and begin to think that God is against us. In truth, the very fact that the Holy Spirit is showing us what needs to be changed is evidence of God's great love for us. As we follow in the ways of the Spirit, we move step-by-step, according to the Spirit's plan, into the new life God has prepared.

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus Christ into the world to be our Savior. Thank you also for sending your Holy Spirit to reside within us, enabling us to live a new life. Teach me to follow the leading of your Holy Spirit step-by-step into the new life you have prepared.

Life Application: Cooperate with the Holy Spirit's Conviction.

Everything the Holy Spirit does is for our good and according to God's purposes. When the Spirit convicts us of sin, he is showing us the next step we are to take in our spiritual journey. But the Spirit does more than merely show us our sin; he also shows us the new ways of righteousness. For every sinful pattern, there is a corresponding pattern of holiness. If we embrace the Spirit's conviction, then we will see the new way of holiness.

Likewise, we should learn to relegate other people's opinions to a secondary role. While it is true that God will often use other people to speak truth to us, we should always consult with the Holy Spirit to discern the validity of what we hear. Regardless of what others might say, God alone knows what he wants to do, and every believer can learn to follow the Spirit's leading for him or herself.

DAY 26 - We Must Repent of our Sin

From then on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near.” (Matthew 4:17)

Here is Jesus' very first message and in it, there is great meaning! First, Jesus is revealing the first activity of a life centered in God, which is repentance. Repentance is our acknowledgment of sin coupled with the intention to lead a new life. Repentance is our first step into the wonderful new life God offers. But second, Jesus is revealing a new motive for our repentance, which is the celebration that the kingdom of God has now come. The kingdom of God is God's global initiative to restore humanity to himself through the person and work of his Son, Jesus the Messiah. Our entrance into the kingdom begins when we acknowledge the authority of Jesus Christ, repent of our sin, and begin to follow him.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for entering this world to establish the kingdom of God. Open my eyes to see the kingdom's glory and power. Grant me not only the joy of repenting of my sin, but enable me by the power of your Holy Spirit to learn the new values, principles, and practices of your kingdom.

Life Application: Repent of Your Sin.

Repentance is more than simply saying we are sorry for our sin. Repentance involves a redirection of our entire life. It means that we are abandoning worldly goals to embrace heavenly goals. If we do not embrace the new goals of God's Kingdom, then try as we might, we will continue to fall back into worldly patterns; while we may certainly come to God for forgiveness, once forgiven, we will return again to our worldly inclinations. We will do this because we are holding onto worldly goals as our root motive. In this passage, Jesus is calling us to make a change in our motive. We must surrender our allegiance to the kingdom of this world, and give our allegiance fully to the kingdom of God.

DAY 27 - We Are Saved by Grace

For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift – not from works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

We are saved by the grace of God alone and not by any action we perform or any noble characteristic we possess. All of us are sinners and fall short of what God requires. Yet God has demonstrated his great love for us by sending Jesus Christ to be our Savior even while the entire world was lost in sin. God even sets the conditions that make faith possible and gives us the gift of faith so that we can respond. Salvation is an act of God, and God, alone, gets all of the credit.

Heavenly Father, thank you for your amazing grace that has saved me. I claim no credit but acknowledge that my salvation is entirely your work. Teach me to rest in the assurance that you will finish the good work you began within me. Enable me to trust daily in your grace, not only for my salvation but for every need both material and spiritual.

Life Application: Trust in His Grace

Most people think that God will save us because of our good works. Even many Christians continue to hold this idea as a secret belief, even while they confess their sins. But there is a difference between confessing our sins (the actions we perform) and confessing our sin (our natural, fallen condition that disqualifies us). All of us would like to think that God has saved us because he saw something good within us that was worthy of redeeming. We hold on to this falsehood because it is a hard thing to admit the truth: that sin has corrupted our entire being and thoroughly disqualified us. But if we can come to believe this truth, hard as it is, then we will begin to see the beauty of God's unconditional love and grace. We will be set free from the fear and anxiety that we are not yet good enough for God. We will enter into a life of joy and peace, fully grounded in God's unconditional love and grace. We will recognize that if God has saved us while we were lost in sin, then our salvation rests secure. We will then trust that God will certainly finish the good work he began within us.

DAY 28 - We are Sanctified by the Holy Spirit

If you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (Romans 8:13)

The important phrase here is "by the Spirit." Many believers happily embrace the call to holiness but soon find that they continue to fall back into sin. We fall back into sin when we attempt to mend our sinful condition by our own power or cleverness. Saint Paul makes it clear that we can put to death the misdeeds of the body only by the power of the Holy Spirit at work within us.

Lord, I confess that I have been trying to live a holy life by my own power and have failed miserably. Teach me how to live by the power of your spirit at work within me.

Life Application: Pursue Holiness

Many people, even many Christians, have come to believe that holiness is unattainable. Yet nothing could be further from the truth! God would not have called us to a holy life if it were not possible. The reason we fail is that we are attempting to deal with sin by our own power. Perhaps you also have experienced the same powerlessness: that after being convicted of your sin by the Holy Spirit, you attempt to deal with your sin by your own strength. You think that if you just try a little harder or come up with some clever method, then you will overpower the sin in your life and become victorious in your own strength. But then you fail miserably, again, and again, and again. The problem is not that God's call to holiness is impossible; the problem is that sin has corrupted our entire being. Employing more willpower will not work, because our will is corrupted. We would simply be feeding energy into the very thing that is broken. Getting all emotional won't help because sin has corrupted our heart. More thinking about sin won't work either, because sin has corrupted our minds. Instead, we must learn to abide in Christ.

To overcome sin, we must learn to live in perpetual communion with Christ, which is what he desires and has made possible by the gift of his Holy Spirit. When we are in union with Christ, we will share in his holiness. So the tactic is not to give more attention to our sin, but to disempower our sin by living in union with Christ. Only then can sin effectively be put to death.

DAY 29 - We Can Have Assurance of Our Salvation

Therefore, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose. (Philippians 2:12-13)

Salvation is not an event but it is a life to be led. The life of salvation requires our ongoing participation with God who is at work within us. This is what Saint Paul means when he calls us to “work out our own salvation.” But note carefully that we do not do this on our own power; we do this in concert with God who is working within us. Here, Saint Paul also reveals the goal of our Salvation, which is that we would learn to both will and work according to God's purposes.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the salvation you have offered to me in Jesus Christ. Help me to see that my conversion was not an ending point, but the beginning of a new life. Teach me to cooperate with you as you reorient me to your will and purposes. Let your continuing work within me be the source of my assurance.

Life Application: Rest in the Assurance of Your Salvation

Although many of us can point to a moment when we were converted, we should never rest in that event alone. Our conversion was simply a starting point. Jesus calls us to enter into a new life, and it is only when we are living that new life that we have the assurance of our salvation. Our assurance grows when we see God working within us on a daily basis. We can rest in that assurance when we are responding to God each and every day.

DAY 30 - Holy Communion is the remembrance of the Saving Work of Christ

As they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take and eat it; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks, he gave it to them and said, "Drink from it, all of you. For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. But I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." (Matthew 26:26-29)

Jesus Christ has given us a sign by which we can continually re-center ourselves in his saving work. This sign is called "Holy Communion" or "The Lord's Supper." Jesus gave this sign to us because he knows our inclination to forget. The celebration of the Lord's Supper is not merely a historic remembrance, it is a spiritual embracing of the grace and salvation He offers. Whenever we partake of the Lord's Supper, we grow in our love and appreciation for what he has done for us.

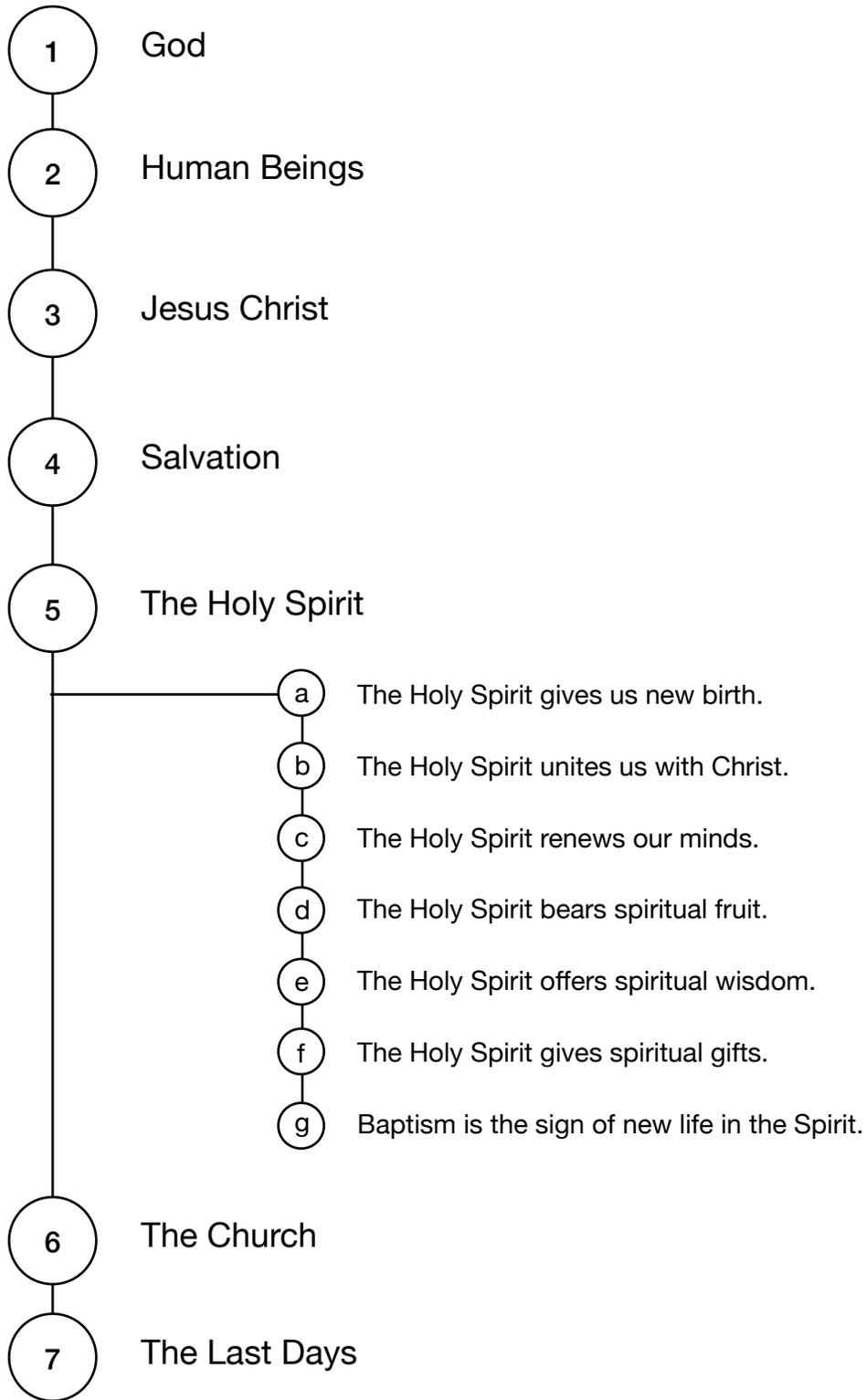
Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for the salvation you offer. Thank you also for drawing us into sweet spiritual communion with you. Grant that we might walk in union with you, not only when we celebrate your supper, but each day and every day.

Life Application: Remember His Saving Work

Every day we should remind ourselves that we are a redeemed people and that Jesus Christ gave his life for us. This remembrance keeps us humble and draws us into spiritual unity with Christ. This unity is something that Jesus deeply desires and what we should desire as well, for it is the source of our joy. Wherever you are right now, pause for a moment and remember the cross of Jesus Christ by which you are saved. Give thanks to Jesus for his unfailing love. And let your soul rest in him.

The Holy Spirit

(Pneumatology)



DAY 31 - Spiritual Birth - John 3:5-8

Jesus answered, “Truly I tell you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again. The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” (John 3:5-8)

Just as we have had a physical birth, so we must now have a spiritual birth. Our physical body is the instrument by which we relate to the material world. So also, the spirit of a human being is the faculty that enables us to relate directly to God. The problem is that our spirit lies dormant or dead until it is awakened. In order for us to become complete human beings, the Holy Spirit must awaken our spirit. This is what Jesus meant when he said that we must be born again. Once this happens, we are able to relate directly to God for ourselves and without any human intermediary.

Heavenly Father, as you have given me a physical birth, now give me a spiritual birth. Awaken my spirit to yours! Let your Holy Spirit reside within me and lead me into the new life you have prepared.

Life Application: Become Born Again

Being born again is a cooperative effort between us and the Holy Spirit. The spirit will work to awaken us to God, but God will not impose himself upon us. So we must recognize that it is indeed God who is drawing us to himself and respond to God willingly and favorably. The moment that we welcome Jesus Christ as Savior, he will give us the gift of his Spirit. So if you are sensing that the Spirit of God is drawing you to himself, then welcome him! If you have been resisting the movement of the Holy Spirit then resist no more! If you have never received Christ as Savior, receive him now! God is always seeking us. When we begin seeking God the two “seekings” will meet, and we will enter into the joyful new life God has prepared for us.

DAY 32 - Unity With Christ

“I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live too. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, you are in me, and I am in you. The one who has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. And the one who loves me will be loved by my Father. I also will love him and will reveal myself to him.” (John 14:18-25)

This is perhaps one of the most important verses in the Bible, for here Jesus is revealing the ultimate goal of spiritual unity God desires to share with us. The Holy Spirit is the very Spirit of God that resided within Jesus Christ and can also reside within each one of us. The Holy Spirit enables us to experience a deep, inner unity with God and with Jesus Christ, his Son. Jesus deeply desires us to share in this unity with him, for this is the very reason he gave his life on the cross for our redemption. When we experience unity with Christ, we find our true selves and are made complete in him.

Lord, I welcome and embrace this new goal of spiritual unity with you. Let your Holy Spirit reside within me. Teach me to walk with you each day of my life, and draw me ever closer to you!

Life Application: Pursue Unity with Christ

As Jesus Christ desires spiritual unity with us, so we should pursue the same with him. This unity with Christ, accomplished by his Holy Spirit at work within us, is the centerpiece and ultimate goal of our lives. When we are "in Christ," we have access to everything that Jesus is. We can share in his knowledge, wisdom, power, and love. Our soul will find the peace we desire, and we will be able to rest in God. Unity with Christ is not a hard thing, for Jesus has paved the way. All we need to do is be intentional and look to him throughout the day. Soon, our unity with Christ will not be something that comes and goes, but a continual presence we enjoy each and every moment.

DAY 33 - Spiritual Truth

“I still have many things to tell you, but you can’t bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. For he will not speak on his own, but he will speak whatever he hears. He will also declare to you what is to come. He will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:12-14)

Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit would come, the Spirit would guide us in the way of all truth. God withholds nothing from those who turn to Him through Jesus but makes all truth available to us. We can spend the rest of our lives on earth, and even into eternity, learning more about the wonderful God who loves us and gave His Son for us. But because we are fallen creatures, the process of learning takes time, effort, and patience. As we cooperate with the Spirit’s guidance, Jesus himself will guide us step-by-step into a full and comprehensive understanding.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for sending your Holy Spirit to be our teacher. Show me the new things that I must learn. Show me also what former beliefs I must discard. Lead me forward into a deeper understanding of all truth.

Life Application: Learn Spiritual Truth

The first step in our spiritual learning is to recognize our complete ignorance. Everything we have known up to this point must be set on the table for evaluation. Many of our cherished concepts of what life is all about will need to go. Then we must fully yield to the Spirit’s teaching. The second step is to learn to listen on a daily basis. Trying to cram spiritual learning into an “all-nighter” doesn’t work well. Instead, we must strive to absorb new spiritual truth each day. If we are responsive to the Spirit each day, then our progress will be meaningful and substantial.

DAY 34 - The Fruit of the Spirit

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

The Holy Spirit not only carries the knowledge of God but the character of God as well. When the Holy Spirit begins to reside within us, we will begin to grow into God's likeness. The attributes of God are called "the fruit of the Spirit," and they are available to everyone who has opened him or herself to Jesus Christ. These virtues will grow over time until the fullness of God's character becomes our own.

Heavenly Father, teach me to grow into your likeness, that I might truly live as a child of God. Help me to see life's many challenges as opportunities for the fruit of the Spirit to grow within me.

Life Application: Grow in the Spiritual Virtues

Every challenge we face is an opportunity for us to grow in the fruit of the Spirit. The greater the challenge, the greater our growth. Rather than shrinking back from the many challenges of life, we should take advantage of them. Remember, God will not infuse his attributes into our soul, for God will never violate our free will. Instead, God will allow us to pass through many challenges so that we can grow in his character. The next time you face a difficult situation, pray that God will show you the corresponding fruit that needs to grow. Exercise that spiritual virtue and return praise to God for your victory. Should you fail, don't be discouraged. Pick yourself up and prepare for the next opportunity. God will never condemn you but will encourage you as your helper, guide, and friend.

DAY 35 - Spiritual Wisdom

Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who comes from God, so that we may understand what has been freely given to us by God. We also speak these things, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people. But the person without the Spirit does not receive what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to understand it since it is evaluated spiritually. The spiritual person, however, can evaluate everything, and yet he himself cannot be evaluated by anyone. (1 Corinthians 2:12-15)

Wisdom is the ability to see things from God's perspective. True wisdom comes as a gift from the Holy Spirit which enables us to live according to God's purposes and plans. It also liberates us from the confusing ideologies of this world. This is why Saint Paul contrasts human wisdom with God's wisdom. Those who are living by worldly wisdom simply cannot understand the wisdom that comes from God. But those who are receptive to the wisdom of the Spirit are able to accurately understand the circumstances of their lives with a simple clarity that brings peace.

Lord God, thank you for the wisdom that you offer by your Holy Spirit, enabling me to understand things accurately. Teach me to surrender my worldly ways of thinking and embrace your Spiritual wisdom.

Life Application: Seek Spiritual Wisdom

God desires each of us to understand the world from God's own perspective. By receiving God's wisdom we are able to make wise choices that lead us into a life of blessing. In contrast, if we continue to live by the values and principles of this world we will miss out on the blessings God offers. So we must surrender our worldly ways and pursue the wisdom of the Spirit. This also explains why many people we love seem unable to understand God's truth and make better choices for themselves. Spiritual wisdom is indeed readily available, but only to those who want it. It is not until a person opens him or herself to God that they are able to receive the wisdom God offers.

DAY 36 - Spiritual Gifts

Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different ministries, but the same Lord. And there are different activities, but the same God works all of them in each person. A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good: to one is given a message of wisdom through the Spirit, to another, a message of knowledge by the same Spirit, to another, faith by the same Spirit, to another, gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another, the performing of miracles, to another, prophecy, to another, distinguishing between spirits, to another, different kinds of tongues, to another, interpretation of tongues. One and the same Spirit is active in all these, distributing to each person as he wills. (1 Corinthians 12:4-11)

God wants every follower of Jesus Christ to work in his kingdom, so God has given spiritual gifts to each one. Each of these gifts is called "a manifestation of the Spirit" so that we can understand the source and give God thanks. Each gift is given for the blessing of others. When each member of the body of Christ is faithful to use their gift, the church is fully-resourced to do God's work. Also, there is great personal joy in using our spiritual gifts for God. As we demonstrate responsibly with each gift that God gives, God will commend us and entrust us with greater responsibility.

Lord God, thank you for the spiritual gifts you have given to each of us. Help me to understand what my gifts are and how they can be used for the work of your kingdom. Help me also to use my gift well, so that I can grow in faithfulness and responsibility.

Life Application: Use Your Spiritual Gifts

Spiritual gifts are often revealed as we serve one another. Note that "a manifestation of the spirit is given to each person for the common good." None of the gifts listed here are to be used in isolation, so the first step in using your spiritual gifts is to get out of isolation. Become active in the life of the Christian community. Interact with one another as members of the same body. Then begin to look for places that need attention. Express your willingness to help! Don't wait for someone to say, "we have a need," and then approach you with a personal invitation. Jump in and help!

DAY 37 - Baptism is the Sign of New Spiritual Life

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” (Acts 2:38-39)

There were many baptismal pools around the temple of Jerusalem that were used for ritual cleansing as people went into the temple to serve or worship. The people to whom Peter was speaking knew all about baptism and what it signified. What is significant here is the act of being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and with the intention of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. Christian baptism, therefore, symbolizes the way God saves us through his Son. By receiving Jesus Christ as our Savior, we have the forgiveness of our sins. When we repent and are baptized, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit which draws us into the new life God has planned for us.

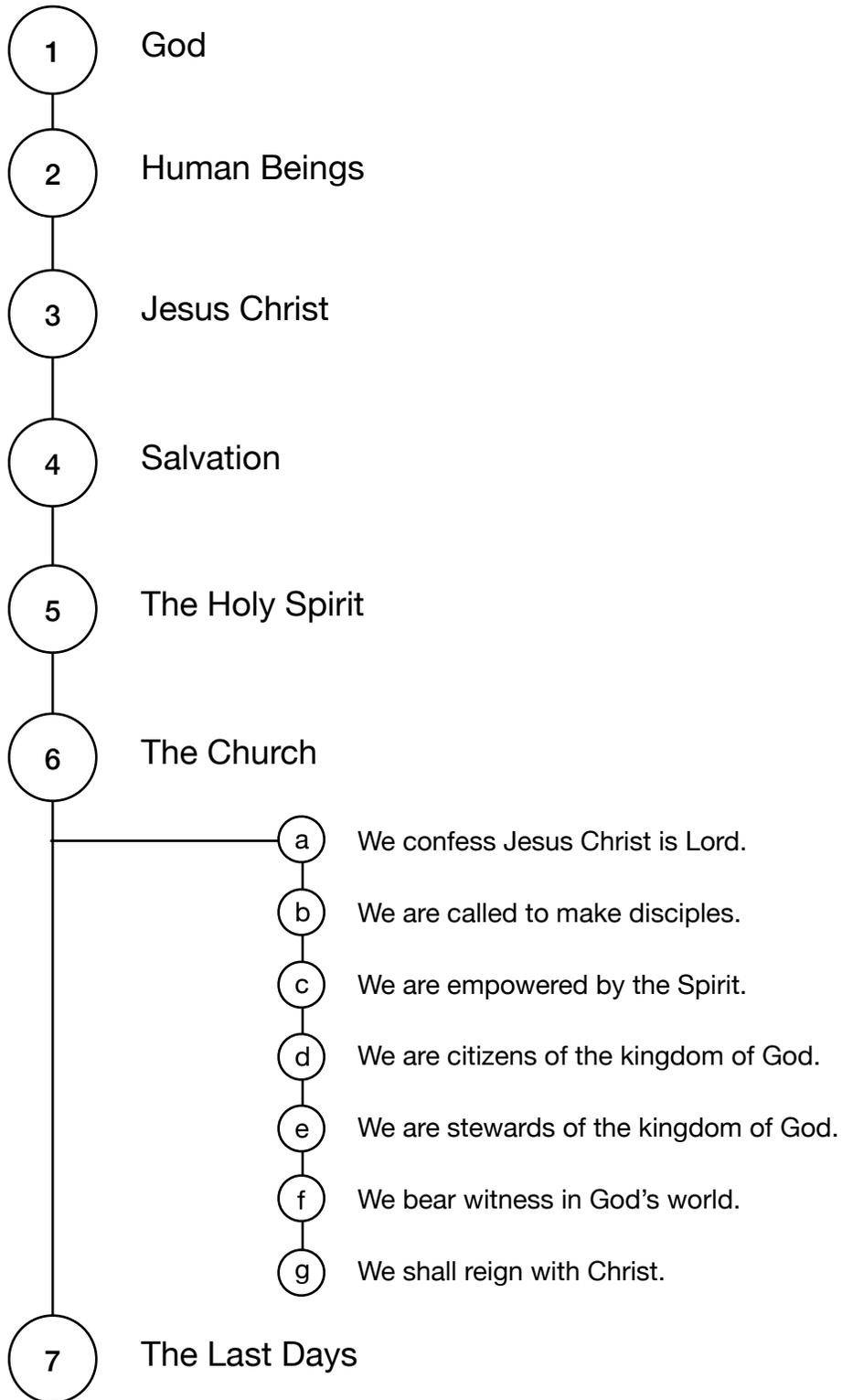
Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for choosing the sign of baptism as a symbol of our new life. Thank you that baptism is available to all who repent and seek the new life you offer. Help me to remember that I am baptized into a new life by forsaking the ways of this world and embracing the ways of the kingdom of God.

Life Application: Receive Baptism and then Remember You Are Baptized

If you have never been baptized, then we welcome you to share in this important sign of your new life in Christ. To be baptized, you must repent of your sins and welcome Jesus Christ as your Savior. You must desire the new life that Jesus offers by the power and presence of his holy spirit at work in your life. Speak to your pastor about receiving the sacrament of baptism in profession of your faith. If you are baptized, then celebrate the new life that your baptism symbolizes. Celebrate the love that God has for you as your Heavenly Father. Rejoice that Jesus Christ has given his life on the cross for your redemption. And cooperate with the Holy Spirit's leading day-by-day, as God moves you by his Spirit into the new and beautiful life he has prepared for you!

The Church

(Eschatology)



DAY 38 - We Confess Jesus is Lord

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But you,” he asked them, “who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus responded, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven.” Then he gave the disciples orders to tell no one that he was the Messiah. (Matthew 16:13-20)

The church is built upon our profession of faith that Jesus Christ is Lord. This profession is not merely something that we believe in our heart but confess with our mouths. Romans 10:9 says, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” We should never be ashamed of our faith in Jesus Christ even though the world might oppose us. Instead, as Peter did, we should be bold in our profession. Great blessings will follow.

Lord Jesus Christ, you were not ashamed of me when you died on the cross for my sins. Never let me be ashamed to call you my Savior nor hesitant to claim you as Lord. Let my bold confession of faith give glory to you and be a witness to those around me.

Life Application: Confess Your Faith Boldly

Jesus said, “Anyone who acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God, but whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God. (Luke 12:8-9) Our confession of faith is there as an essential part of our spiritual life. So we should prepare ourselves for a time of testing that may suddenly come upon us. Sometimes, we will be asked to confess our faith in the context of other believers, and this is easily done. But then there are times when we will be pressed to confess our faith in a hostile context where there will be a price to pay. Our goal should be to confess our faith as readily in the one as in the other.

DAY 39 - We Are Called to Make Disciples

Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

The Church of Jesus Christ is on a mission--better said, we have been commissioned. Jesus Christ has a specific work he wants us to do, which is to make disciples. Jesus has also laid out for us the basic pattern of discipleship. First, we are to baptize in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This means that we must first proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in such a way that people can hear the good news and respond favorably. Baptism is the sign of our incorporation into the body of Christ. Secondly, we are to teach people to observe everything Jesus commanded us. Our teaching is not to be merely intellectual, but practical. Also, it is not to be selective, but comprehensive. In this simple statement, we can see the great magnitude of the work Jesus calls us to do, and it would be easy for us to be overwhelmed. But in his last statement, Jesus shows how he himself will be with us to empower us.

Lord Jesus Christ, as you have commissioned us to make disciples, so empower us to do this work well. Help all of us to be fully engaged to fulfill this calling.

Life Application: Focus on Discipleship

Many churches in America strayed from this original command. Some churches have become private clubs where only a certain few are welcome. Some have wrapped themselves around the personality of the pastor, who behaves like a celebrity. Some have become centers for the advancement of political ideology, whether conservative or liberal. Even more have simply lost their way and forgotten the reason for their existence. With so much distraction in the world, it is easy to go astray, but the Great Commission remains unchanged. Any church that realigns itself with the purposes of Jesus Christ will find the power of Christ. We should never allow the values of the world to define our success, but should seek to fulfill the purposes of Jesus Christ alone. If we are successful in making mature disciples of Jesus Christ, we can rest assured that we are on the right track.

DAY 40 - We are Empowered by the Spirit

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” With many other words he testified and strongly urged them, saying, “Be saved from this corrupt generation!” (Acts 2:38-40)

Peter is speaking on the day of Pentecost, the Jewish festival of firstfruits. People had come from all over the world to worship God in Jerusalem. They were witnesses to Jesus' crucifixion and heard rumors of his resurrection. When they went into the temple to worship, they heard the good news of Jesus Christ being proclaimed in the languages of their hometowns. The Holy Spirit had come upon the disciples enabling them to speak in this way. When Peter preached a message about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, those who heard him were cut to the heart and cried out, "Brothers, what shall we do?" This was his reply: that they should repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus so that they also might receive the gift of God's Holy Spirit.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit, who opens my mind to God. Enable me, by the Spirit's leading, to enter into the new life that you have prepared for me.

Life Application: Live by the Power of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit enables the church to live according to God's will and purposes. The Spirit opens our minds to God's truth and empowers us to make choices that are pleasing to God. This gift is available to us as we acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior and welcome his lordship. The Holy Spirit will lead us day-by-day as we yield ourselves to his direction. Yet the Holy Spirit will never impose his will upon us; we must be receptive to it. This means that we must pay attention to the Spirit's direction in everything that we do. All of our gatherings are to be centered in the Spirit's presence and purpose. There is great unity and joy in a Spirit-centered church.

DAY 41 - We are Citizens of the Kingdom of God

Colossians 1:13 He has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.

Members of the church are citizens of the kingdom of God. Our citizenship has been transferred to another realm while we remain in the world. Jesus Christ has been made the Lord of Heaven and Earth, so we must no longer serve the kingdoms of this world but must fully give our allegiance to the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Lord Jesus Christ, we celebrate you as our King and give thanks for the authority the Father has given to you. Enable us, by the power of your Holy Spirit, to live as citizens of your kingdom.

Life Application: Learn the Values and Principles of the Kingdom

The values and principles of God's kingdom stand in direct opposition to the values and principles of the world. As God has transferred us into a new kingdom, so all of us must engage in a process of reorientation. This process is called "discipleship." Jesus invites us to become his disciples so that he can teach us the ways of the kingdom and prepare us for a lifetime of service. Each day, there is something new for us to learn.

DAY 42 - We are Stewards of the Kingdom

Bring the full tenth into the storehouse so that there may be food in my house. Test me in this way," says the Lord of Armies. "See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure. (Malachi 3:10)

As citizens of the Kingdom, we consider everything we possess as having been entrusted to us by God. The tithe represents a tenth of all that God has given us, which God then requires us to return to him in worship. The practice of tithing goes all the way back to Abraham, who gave God a tenth of all of his possessions. Since that time, the Israelites used the tithe as a means for everyone to equally share in stewardship responsibilities. Regardless of whether a person is rich or poor, they can participate equally. The amount does not matter; the portion is what is important. The community of faith then uses the tithe to equip itself to fulfill its mission. God promises that those who tithe will be blessed with more than they need. Incidentally, this is the only place in Scripture where God asks us to test him!

Heavenly Father, thank you for providing me with more than I need. Teach me to trust in your promise that if I am faithful in tithing, you will be faithful to bless.

Life Application: Offer the Tithe

Tithing begins when we consider ourselves as stewards rather than owners of God's possessions. When we begin to tithe, God quickly fulfills his promises. In all of my ministry, I have never met anyone who began tithing and then went back. Instead, people who begin to tithe are set free from worldly worries and fears. They quickly see how God fulfills his promise to provide all that they need. They have wonderful testimonies of God's amazing provision. If you are not tithing, then take the plunge and begin right away! God will certainly bless you, and you will be set free from great anxiety.

DAY 43 - We Bear Witness in God's World

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The church is tasked with carrying the message of the Gospel into the world. This task began after Jesus gave his life on the cross and gave the promise of his Holy Spirit. The believers were to begin in Jerusalem and then carry the good news into all of the world. You and I are living in the midst of this great project. Jesus then promised that when the gospel was proclaimed in all of the nations, the end would come! He would return to inaugurate the eternal kingdom of God. As his followers, we should be fully committed to the proclamation of the gospel, and invest the best of our time, energy, and resources to its fulfillment.

Lord Jesus Christ, as you have brought good news to the world, enable us to carry the message of the gospel to all of the nations. Empower us by your Spirit to understand how we can work together to fulfill this calling.

Life Application: Speak to Others About Your Faith

Our generation has come to faith in Jesus Christ because of the work of previous generations. Now that we have received Christ as Savior, it falls to us to continue this essential work. God's call to evangelize, that is, to proclaim the good news so that others might hear and be saved, does not rest solely on the shoulders of ordained clergy. Everyone has a part to play. Each of us must boldly profess our faith in Jesus Christ whenever an opportunity comes our way. If we remain silent, we are withholding from others the blessings that we ourselves have received. If we open our mouths to speak, we become the very means by which God expresses his love! There is no higher purpose than this! And all of us can participate! So prepare yourself to share your faith and begin to look for opportunities God will bring your way. God does not expect you to do this perfectly or with great eloquence. Sometimes, the best testimonies are the simplest.

DAY 44 - We Shall Reign with Christ

Revelation 7:13-17. Then one of the elders asked me, “Who are these people in white robes, and where did they come from?” I said to him, “Sir, you know.” Then he told me: These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God, and they serve him day and night in his temple. The one seated on the throne will shelter them: They will no longer hunger; they will no longer thirst; the sun will no longer strike them, nor will any scorching heat. For the Lamb who is at the center of the throne will shepherd them; he will guide them to springs of the waters of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

At the return of Jesus Christ, the current age of human history will draw to a close and the new age of the eternal kingdom of God will be opened. All creation will be entirely renovated. Even death itself will have no place! Our feeble minds can barely comprehend how beautiful this coming glory will be. But God gave this vision to the Apostle John to encourage us. In the midst of all our challenges, we can rest assured that the reward for remaining faithful to Jesus Christ is beyond measure!

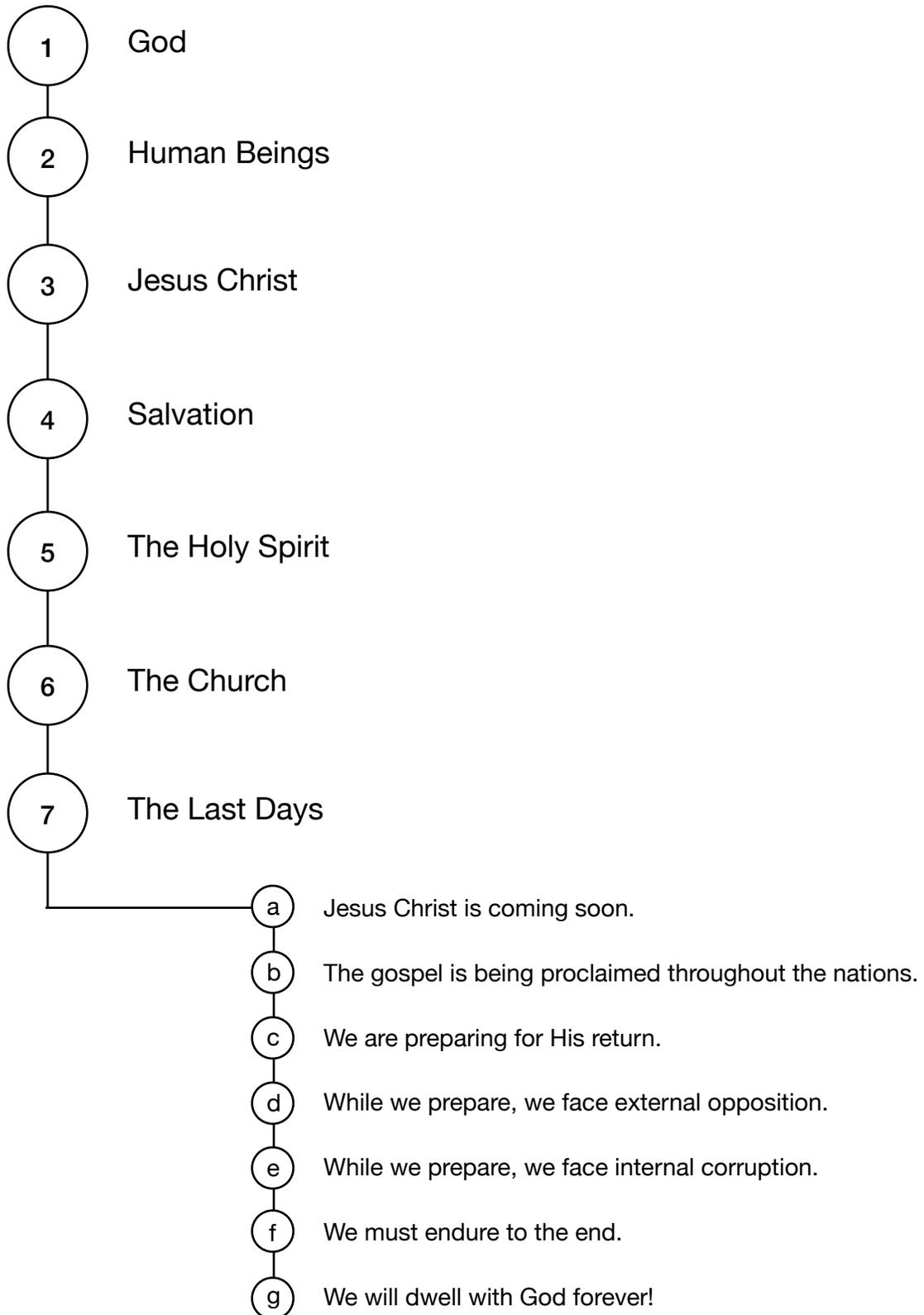
Dear Lord, thank you for the hope of eternal life and for the promise of the coming Kingdom. Thank you for revealing this vision to the Apostle John for our encouragement. Help us to look beyond the trials of this present age to see the great reward in store for everyone who faithfully follows after you.

Life Application: Keep an Eternal Perspective

So much of our time and energy is given to things that are temporal and passing away. We are typically over-focused on the things of Earth and under-focused on the things of Heaven. John's vision can help us gain a better perspective. Yes, we will indeed face many trials and tribulations while we journey on this Earth, but we are just passing through! Our home is not here but in heaven. Soon, the distress of this age will come to an end and God will bring about the new and eternal Kingdom he has promised. So let us keep our eyes focused on what is ahead. Let us not be discouraged but encouraged by God's wonderful promise! For those who trust in Jesus Christ, the best is yet to be!

The Last

(Eschatology)



DAY 45 - Jesus Christ is Coming Soon! - Revelation 22:12

“Behold, I am coming soon, and my reward is with me to repay each person according to his work.” (Revelation 22:12)

Time passes quickly. The word “soon” shows how Jesus perceives his return and the joy he will have at his return. He looks forward to bestowing the reward of eternal life to those who have remained faithful. We should look forward to this reward as well. There are also many rewards in store for us for the good work that we do. Jesus is making this declaration to encourage us that the time of our suffering and trial will soon be over. He is also helping us set our sights on the immeasurable reward we will receive at his return.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you that you are coming soon! Help me to lift my eyes and see beyond the trials of this life to the joy and reward of the eternal life you will bring.

Life Application: Put Your Hope in His Reward

When Jesus returns, he will bring a great reward to his people: the gift of eternal life. He will also reward his servants with many great gifts for their faithful work for his kingdom. So if Jesus is coming soon, we need to get busy. There is work to be done within our souls and there is work to be done for the salvation of others. The measure of our reward relates to the faithfulness of our work. With this in heart, we must spur ourselves on and serve the Lord each day with great joy and hopeful expectation.

DAY 46 - The Gospel is Being Proclaimed Throughout the Nations

This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14)

This verse comes as part of The Olivet Discourse, a conversation Jesus had with his disciples in the last week of his life. He had given to them a synopsis of the last days and then ended with this verse. The proclamation of the Gospel in all of the nations is the last sign that heralds his return. The work of the church is to proclaim the gospel for all the nations to hear. We are living in a very exciting time in which we are able to communicate across the globe within a matter of seconds. Therefore, it is reasonable for us to expect that the return of Jesus Christ is imminent!

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for your imminent return. Teach us to be faithful to communicate the gospel to all the world in response to your command and in anticipation of your return.

Life Application: Bear Witness to Your Faith

Jesus Christ wants every human being to have an opportunity of hearing and responding to the message of the Gospel. All of us have a role in this great work. Each one of us should commit ourselves to bear witness to our faith whenever the opportunity presents itself. We should also take advantage of the many opportunities we have to communicate the good news through every venue available to us, including social media. Yet nothing can take the place of a person-to-person encounter. Jesus called people to follow him and become his disciple in person, so we should extend the same invitation to those around us. No one will come to Christ unless they are invited.

So think about the people you know. Is there someone you might invite? Pray for them and then be bold to invite them to have a conversation with you. In that conversation ask if they wish to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. Be willing to meet with them on a regular basis or invite them to be part of your small group. We know that Jesus is coming soon, so we should be diligent to share the gospel with everyone!

DAY 47 - We Must Prepare for His Return

"Therefore be alert, because you don't know either the day or the hour." (Matthew 25:13)

Jesus Christ is returning at an unknown time, and his return will catch everyone off guard, including Christian believers. Out of his love for us, Jesus calls us to a state of perpetual readiness. We make ourselves ready by keeping in close fellowship with the Lord each and every day. We should live in expectation of his return and see to it that our house is always in order. We must repent of our sins and embrace whatever work Christ is calling us to do. When he returns, let him find all of us faithfully living a Christian life and busy about the work of his kingdom.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for the promise of your return. Help me to stay alert, to keep my house in order, and to live in joyful expectation of your coming kingdom.

Life Application: Always Be Ready

Christian readiness is not a burden but a joy. We are not preparing for a tragedy, but for something wonderful beyond measure. We make ourselves ready by keeping our devotional life the most important activity of the day. We should be reading the Scripture daily, praying frequently, and spending time alone with the Lord. We should keep a good perspective and focus our time and energy on things that matter. We should not worry so much about how to please other people but should concern ourselves with how to please the Lord. So if you are backsliding, catch yourself! Find a way to be mindful each day of the Lord's return.

DAY 48 - External Opposition

He (The Man of Sin) opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he sits in God's temple, proclaiming that he himself is God. (2 Thessalonians 2:4)

The "Man of Sin" referred to in Paul's writing is Nero, the son of Caesar's wife, who was about to take the throne. Nero was an egomaniac and was responsible for the first wave of Roman persecution of the church. Paul is writing without naming Nero specifically, but everyone knew about whom he was speaking. Since that time and throughout the ages, the church has faced external opposition. Sometimes, this opposition came from a single leader that was hostile to the church. Other times, entire governments sought to exterminate the church. Today, there are nations across the globe that are seeking to destroy Christianity. Even in our own country, an increasing number of people are hostile toward the church. But Jesus Christ has always been with us. He himself is the head of the church and never abandons his people. He strengthens us and comforts us in times of persecution. He blesses us for our faithfulness and provides every resource we need to endure.

Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen your church, especially those who are enduring opposition and persecution. Walk with us in these times of challenge. Equip us with every spiritual resource we need to remain faithful and even to thrive in the midst of opposition.

Life Application: Strive to Please God Alone

Do not be surprised when the world opposes the church. This has always been the case. Remember, we serve the one whom this world crucified. Do not be shocked when people mistreat you because of your faith. Jesus made it clear that if people hated him, they will hate us also. Christian believers should never strive to be people-pleasers but instead should strive to remain faithful to God. To bear witness in a hostile world, we should be ready to speak the truth in love, even when it costs us heavily to do so. Jesus made it clear that there is a great reward for those who are slandered and persecuted for their faith, yet remain faithful to God.

DAY 49 - Internal Corruption

Children, it is the last hour. And as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. By this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. However, they went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us. (1 John 2:18-19)

When John wrote, “As you have heard that antichrist is coming,” he was referring to Jesus’ teaching in The Olivet Discourse where Jesus said to his disciples, “Many will come in my name saying ‘I am the Messiah’ and will deceive many,” (Matthew 24:5). Jesus was preparing his followers to identify the false teaching that would be rampant in the last days. John’s further instruction about the antichrist is often confused with Paul’s teaching of the “Man of Sin” in Thessalonians. The “Man of Sin” is a single individual who persecutes the church externally, in this case, the Roman Emperor Nero. John’s writing about the antichrist represents false teachers within the church who were leading people astray for their own purposes. Notice that this was happening even at the time of John’s writing. Therefore, throughout these last days, the church should remain alert not only to external persecution but also to internal corruption.

Lord Jesus Christ, you have given us the gift of spiritual discernment so that we can correctly identify false teaching. Keep us alert to the false teachers in our midst and the spirit of the antichrist that would lead us away from you.

Life Application: Beware of False Teachers

As there were false teachers in the days of the early church, so there are false teachers even today. We should remain alert! Not everyone who claims to be speaking on God’s behalf is doing so authentically. To counter false teaching, God has given the church the gift of spiritual discernment. This discernment begins with a general feeling that something is wrong. We sense that something is out of tune, like an instrument in an orchestra that is playing in another key. Sometimes the problem is obvious, such as televangelists that ask for large donations from their elderly viewers. But other times, the problem is subtle and it takes time and thought to identify. Common to all false teaching is a hidden motive in the heart of the teacher. Whether it is for money, power, fame, or politics, false teachers use the gospel for hidden purposes. Moderate skepticism is a healthy characteristic for every Christian community. Our willingness to call out false teaching is a necessary part of our work to keep the church on track to fulfill its mission. A good foundation of sound doctrine provides the platform from which false teaching and false teachers can be clearly identified. Hence, this project!

DAY 50 - We Must Endure - Matthew 24:13

But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Matthew 24:13)

The kingdom of God has come to earth through the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Yet the kingdom of this world remains until Christ's return. We are in an in-between time, and this is why we face external opposition and internal corruption. But the struggle will not be eternal. An end is coming at the return of Jesus Christ. He promises that if we endure to the end, we will be saved. And God has promised to supply all of our needs as we struggle toward this end. We do not endure by our own power but by the power God supplies.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for your promise of salvation to all who endure. Enable us, by the power supplied by your Holy Spirit, to pass through every trial and emerge victoriously.

Life Application: Endure to the End

There is a great reward for those who endure to the end, so do not lose heart! Take each day's challenge as an opportunity for spiritual growth. God will not allow you to be tested beyond your ability. When you are tested, turn to God for strength and wisdom, and God will be faithful to supply all you need. Set your sights on the reward of salvation and eternal life God holds in store. Soon the trials of this world will pass and we will enjoy eternal life with God and one another. What a glory that will be!

DAY 51 - We Will Dwell With God

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I also saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look, God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away. (Revelation 21:1-4)

The visions of John in Revelation carry amazing and wonderful truths. At the close of his book, John saw a vision of humanity's final state in which God will renovate all creation. Even death will have no place. The phrase "the sea was no more" relates to a previous vision where the dragon, which refers to Satan, came up out of the sea. The vision that the sea was no more means that the new creation will no longer be threatened evil. Our minds cannot begin to conceive of how beautiful and holy the new world will be. God offers us these visions so that we might have hope.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the promise of the new creation given to us in the Book of Revelation. Instill your great hope within us, that even as we journey through this troubled world, we might look forward with great anticipation to the glory yet to come.

Life Application: Rejoice in Your Future

Throughout the course of your life, your soul can rest in peace, knowing that God is preparing a glorious and eternal home for us. Whatever troubles you might face, the remembrance of our future can bring perspective. The beauty of our future home is beyond description, and our minds cannot begin to imagine its glory. But we can certainly hope for it and praise God for its promise. Offer your thanks to God for his gift of eternal life and let your soul rest in his unfulfilling promise.

DAY 52 - Finally, Offer Worship to God!

All the people gathered together at the square in front of the Water Gate. They asked the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses that the Lord had given Israel. On the first day of the seventh month, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding. While he was facing the square in front of the Water Gate, he read out of it from daybreak until noon before the men, the women, and those who could understand. All the people listened attentively to the book of the law. The scribe Ezra stood on a high wooden platform made for this purpose. Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiiah, Uriah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah stood beside him on his right; to his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hash-baddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam. Ezra opened the book in full view of all the people, since he was elevated above everyone. As he opened it, all the people stood up. Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and with their hands uplifted all the people said, "Amen, Amen!" Then they knelt low and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah, who were Levites, explained the law to the people as they stood in their places. They read out of the book of the law of God, translating and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was read. Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to all of them, "This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law. Then he said to them, "Go and eat what is rich, drink what is sweet, and send portions to those who have nothing prepared, since today is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, because the joy of the Lord is your strength." And the Levites quieted all the people, saying, "Be still, since today is holy. Don't grieve." Then all the people began to eat and drink, send portions, and have a great celebration, because they had understood the words that were explained to them. (Nehemiah 8:1-12)

When the wall was completed, the people gathered for worship and to hear the words of the Law. When they heard God's Word read aloud, they wept. But Ezra instructed them to rejoice. So should we!

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, we give thanks for the truth of Your Word. We rejoice that you have given us such holy doctrines so that we might live in accordance with your will and purpose. Teach us to rejoice always in your Word. Let us never again fall away. And let us faithfully teach each succeeding generation until Jesus Christ returns and brings the eternal kingdom of God.

Life Application: Be Joyful in the Truth

We are to be a joyful people! Although the world around us is filled with trouble, yet God has revealed his Word to us and our joy is a fitting response. We should not be anxious or worried, but trust that as God has given us his truth, so God will also empower us to live by it. And the truth of God brings great blessing. Each day that we live is a reason to rejoice. With each step we take, we should offer praise. Our joyful response to God is a powerful testimony to the people around us that the truths of God endure! So take your joy in God's Word and in the love of our Heavenly Father who has given it.